
UNIT 9 INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

Geopolitically, the region of South Asia is identified as that which lies south of the former Soviet Union and China, south of the Himalayas; bordering in the east by Myanmar (Burma) and in the west by Afghanistan. In a sense Myanmar and Afghanistan are border line states of the regions of South East Asia and South West Asia respectively.

The creation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985 represented the recognition of the geopolitical entity of South Asia. The methodologies used for identifying the regional area as consisting of geographically proximate and interacting states sharing some degree of common ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social and historical bonds, became the basis of the formation of the association. The countries included in this regional organisation are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

This unit would discuss India's South Asian policies in the following format. The first section deals with the framework of analysis. This framework is of the concept of the Regional State System. The subsequent section looks at the emergent order in South Asia with a focus on some of the early trends in Indian policies. The next section deals with Pakistan as the major power of the region. The third section looks at India's policies towards the small powers of South Asia. The final section looks at the evolution of SAARC as a regional organisation of South Asia.

9.2 SOUTH ASIAN REGIONAL STATE SYSTEM

The South Asian region consisting of the seven SAARC countries are a homogeneous group in the sense Contori and Spiegel define a subordinate system or a region. Contori and Spiegel describe the interaction of the region in the context of a core sector, periphery sector and an intrusive system. The core sector consists of a shared social, political, economic or organisational background or activity among the group of states which produces a central focus of international politics in that region. The peripheral sector includes all those states which are alienated from the core sector in some degree by economic, organisational, social or political factors. The intrusive sector consists of the extra regional intervention in the international relations of the region. The compactness of South Asia makes the Contori and Spiegel model applicable in a limited sense.

The basic characteristics of the South Asian regional state system are as follows:

- i) India, by virtue of its geographic size and location, economic and industrial base and military strength occupies a pivotal position in the region. The Indian aspirations for leadership, dominance or hegemony are a product of these geopolitical conditions of the region.
- ii) South Asia, minus India, has two kinds of powers. Pakistan is one major power that can limit Indian hegemonic aspirations. Pakistan's own limitations come from its geographic location and economic and military potentials. Unlike the pre 1971 Pakistan, the present Pakistan without its eastern linkage lies on the border of South Asia. It shares close ideological affinity with the Islamic West Asian State system. Pakistan may be described as a major power of the region and classified as a 'bargainer' or a 'partner' in the South Asian state system. Pakistan does not have the ability to substitute India as a leader of the region, yet it can bargain with India for partnership in the decision-making of the region.
- iii) The other type of countries would include the smaller countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives. They can pose problems to the core power through extra regional intervention, or their own internal stability. They can also legitimise the dominance of the core power by acceptance of the balance of power in the region.
- iv) The major and most active power relationships in South Asia are affected by the intrusive powers. These extra regional powers, like the United States, Russia (formerly USSR), China and others have influenced policies of the region. All the South Asian countries, including India, have sought to use the extra regional powers' ability to influence to their advantage.

9.3 EMERGENT ORDER IN SOUTH ASIA

The initial impulse of the Asian States on attaining independence was to isolate themselves from the Cold War bloc politics. The Indian approach under Nehru focused on the need to develop an independent understanding of world affairs and a peace policy. The application of these principles came in the series of conferences that took place in Asia that sought to establish the framework of peace through regionalism. The Asian Relations Conference (Delhi, 1947) was the first such conference that gathered the leaders of Asian countries that were still in the process of emerging from the colonial fold. It sought to establish an Asian identity and a common approach to such issues like peace and development. The Conference on Indonesia (Delhi, 1949) sought to create an international public opinion against colonialism and support the freedom movement in Indonesia. The Colombo Conference (1954) and the Afro-Asian Bandung Conference (1955) laid the

foundations of regionalism. The former was a conference of South and South East Asian countries and the latter that of Afro-Asian countries. These conferences represented the growth of regionalism in the Third World, especially Asia. The Bandung Conference was to spell out the principles of Peaceful Coexistence (*Panchsheel*) as principles that should govern the relations between states. The movement towards regionalism did not create any institutional arrangements in Asia. It remained as an effort in identifying the common concerns of post colonial states focusing on the problems of development.

Unfortunately, regionalism never became a fundamental concern of the Afro-Asian states. Some of the obstacles to regionalism came from colonial legacies like the presence of large minorities within countries, unsettled borders, clash of elite, etc. The onslaught of Cold War in Asia after the Korean war proved to be the turning point for regionalism in the region. Bandung became the last Afro-Asian conference to be held. Though efforts were made to revive the spirit of regionalism, they remained unsuccessful.

The mid-1950s saw a shift away from regionalism towards the development of non-alignment. At one level, nonalignment became a redefinition of the basic principles of regionalism as stated in the *Panchsheel* formulations, but with a distinct thrust on independence and peace. At another level, it was a redefinition of independent understanding of world affairs within the emergent framework of Cold War rivalry. What is noteworthy is that both, regionalism and non-alignment, made no effort to translate 'movements' into a structure or an organisation.

At the South Asian level, one can identify two 'models' for order in the regional state system. The first was based on the realities of the geopolitical situation of 1947. This model was based more on the potentials of India to be a major power in South Asia, rather than actual power realities. This model appeared to go unquestioned until the 1962 debacle at the hands of the Chinese. The India-China war put into question the Indian claims for a great power status in the region of South Asia. The second model was a product of the 1971 conflict with Pakistan. The creation of Bangladesh and the Simla Agreement (1972) became the basis of this new model. The 1971-72 model was based on the recognition of India's power status in South Asia. Pakistan's acceptance of this status was implicit in the signing of the Simla agreement. Both the United States and the Soviet Union appeared to grant legitimacy to the new Indian position in South Asia. New Delhi's success in opening up a dialogue with China indicated a similar legitimacy from China.

9.4 INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

Certain important historical and geographic compulsions that surfaced at the time of the partition of India in 1947 have had significant bearing on the thinking of both the countries. Islam was considered as a rallying point for national unity of a people who claimed to hold a different national identity. It became a separatist force that was not in line with the national mainstream of anti-colonial struggle. This has been accepted as a root of the creation of Pakistan.

There are three important issues these countries face in their bilateral relations: (i) the difference in worldviews, (ii) the dispute over Kashmir and (iii) the problem of nuclear confrontation.

9.4.1 World Views

India and Pakistan, as two core countries of South Asia had different worldviews that determined

their foreign policies. During the early years after independence, the Indian worldview had been dominated by concerns about building a regional identity of the post-colonial nations of Asia. One of the important aspects of this policy was opposition to the extra regional intervention in South Asia. India sought to keep the South Asian issues within the ambit of South Asian countries. Opposition to the entry of Cold War alliances in Asia and eventual path of non-alignment is part of this worldview. The period from 1947 to 1971 saw two trends in India's approach towards South Asia. One was the trend that was initiated by Nehru. It focused on regionalism as the dominant theme. The second emerged during the Lal Bahadur Shastri years. This came in the aftermath of the 1962 war and the need for resetting the Indian worldview keeping in mind its capabilities. Shastri was to stress on bilateralism as the key to foreign policy, especially in relation to South Asian countries. It is in the post-1971 period that India developed a coherent South Asia policy that was to determine India's approach towards its South Asian neighbours. The base of this policy lay in India's power status in South Asia. The architecture of the policy rested on a combination of two approaches: regionalism that was now restricted to South Asia and the consequent perception of South Asia as a regional state system; and bilateralism, which was the basis of the Simla Agreement of 1972.

Pakistan's perception of its role emerged from the realisation of two simultaneous forces—the geopolitics of the country that was divided between East and West Pakistan and the Islamic worldview. The former placed Pakistan firmly in the South Asian regional state system while the latter brought it close to the Islamic world of West Asia. Pakistan thus saw itself as a nation with two distinct identities and roles, that of a South Asian power and that of an Islamic West Asian power that was to eventually emerge as an important country of the Organisation of Islamic Conference. One of the dominant security concerns that Pakistan sought to address right from its inception is that of fear of India. The problem of Pakistan's foreign and defence policy revolved around this central theme of Indian domination and safeguards that were to be instituted to counter this threat. Pakistan's attempts to establish linkages with the Islamic world, with China and participate in the military alliances of the United States can be understood within this security concern of Pakistan. These links provided an opportunity for Pakistan to counteract India's desire to dominate in what India considered its sphere of influence.

9.4.2 Manifestation of Conflict: Kashmir

This fundamental diversity in the views of India and Pakistan manifests on the issue of Kashmir, an issue that has come to be identified by Pakistan as the core of the bilateral divide. Kashmir, like Junagadh and Hyderabad, opted to decide its future as to whether to join India or to merge with Pakistan. In case of Hyderabad and Junagadh, the Indian government took steps to ensure that the wishes of the overwhelming local Hindu populace were respected and hastened the process of merger of these two states in the Indian Union. Kashmir had a peculiar problem. It had distinct distribution patterns of its population, with the Ladakh area being predominantly Buddhist, the Jammu region Hindu and the Kashmir valley Muslim. Pakistan sought to force the pace of the decision making on Kashmir by permitting the 'irregular army' to enter Kashmir. Maharaja Hari Singh, realising the potential problems, signed the Instrument of Accession with India, thus merging the state of Jammu and Kashmir with the Indian Union.

The first Indo-Pakistan war that followed the merger of Kashmir into India left the state partitioned. India took the matter to the United Nations and agreed to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir to ascertain

the wishes of the Kashmiris. According to the cease-fire resolution adopted by the UN Security Council, the plebiscite was conditional upon the withdrawal of Pakistani troops from Kashmir and the restoration of the situation to the pre 1947 position. This condition was never met by Pakistan and the plebiscite also never came to be conducted.

Kashmir has seen a tumultuous history since the first war of 1948. The new government formed by Sheikh Abdullah, a Kashmiri leader of long standing, came to be dismissed in 1953. Sheikh Abdullah was relieved of his post as his party the National Conference refused to accept the accession to India as final and vaguely talked of the final settlement of the state of Kashmir in the future. Sheikh Abdullah was brought back to head the government in Kashmir in 1975 after he and Indira Gandhi signed an agreement. Now Sheikh Abdullah had given up the earlier separatist demand and had accepted Kashmir to be legitimately a part of India. In 1965, India and Pakistan fought a war over Kashmir. This war, as the Pakistani Air Marshal Asghar Khan put it, was a war to solve the problem once and for all. The Tashkent Conference (1966) also failed to provide any results. Though, the 1971 war was more a war about the future of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, it had a definite aspect of Kashmir about it.

The Simla Agreement of 1972 formalised the emergent situation on Kashmir. The agreement sought to establish some basic principles of Indo-Pakistan interaction. The Agreement specifically refers to bilateralism and acceptance of durable peace as the framework of resolving future India-Pakistan problems. On the very vital issue of Kashmir the agreement states: 'In Jammu and Kashmir the line of actual control resulting from the cease fire of 17 December 1971, shall be respected by both sides without prejudice to the recognised position of either side. Neither side shall seek to alter it unilaterally irrespective of mutual differences and legal interpretations. Both sides further undertake to refrain from the threat or the use of force in violation of this line'.

The Simla Agreement sought to create a new framework of interaction for India and Pakistan and freeze the issue of Kashmir along the Line of Control indefinitely. One understands from the writings of Indian leaders involved in the making of this agreement that there was an implicit understanding of converting the LOC into a boundary in the eventual future. It is in this context that the return of Sheikh Abdullah became significant. Now India had a Kashmiri leader, heading a Kashmiri party the National Conference, taking the position that Kashmir is part of India. This was tantamount to a plebiscite. This was the test of the right to self-determination that the Kashmiris had been promised by the plebiscite. India could now talk of political legitimacy for the accession of Kashmir to India.

Several developments appear to complicate the problem in Kashmir in the 1980s. Global Islamic resurgence came to be a force to reckon with. The growth of fundamentalist Islamic groups and the spread in their activity had become a matter of concern even for the United States. Pakistan was in a unique position in those days. Given its relatively liberal Islamic posture and the possibility of emergent democratic governments in Pakistan led it to retain a relatively close relationship with United States. On the other hand, it had excellent relations with the core Islamic world. It had an excellent access to the new Afghan government of Taliban and also to other radical Islamic organisations. Pakistan thus appears to have benefited from the then international situation. The post-1975 developments on Kashmir constitute the beginning of an entirely new chapter in its history. Adverse reactions to Sheikh Abdullah rule started in the late 1970s. Partly it was a product of the growing divide between the ruling class in Kashmir and the common populace that

remained deprived of the fruits of development that the state sought to create. Partly, it was the product of resultant frustration that came to be created in the minds of the Kashmiri about the utility of Indian rule. One of the significant popular level movements came in the form of the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). As an organisation that had strong Pakistani connections, the JKLF demanded the right to self-determination for the Kashmiris to join Pakistan.

The 1980s saw two significant developments that had their impact on the developments in Kashmir. One was the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan that led to the massive arms supply by the United States to the Afghan rebels (Mujahideen) situated in Pakistan. Second was the change in Pakistani strategy regarding Kashmir. The American arms supply to the Afghans had a spillover effect in Kashmir. This was linked to the change in Pakistani tactics in terms of shifting from direct conflict to insurgency.

Infiltration and insurgency has been a long pattern in Pakistani strategy on Kashmir. Prior to the 1965 war Pakistan had used this approach with little success. The failure to solve the problem through the use of force in 1965 and 1971 had led to a change in strategy. Now infiltration took the shape of low intensity conflict. Efforts to paralyse the local law and order situation and create uncertainty in the region came to be the tactics of the day. The large scale exit of the Kashmiri *pundits* from the valley was part of this protracted strategy.

This Pakistani strategy was buttressed with a new clarion call of human rights violation. In the early 1990s, concern about violation of human rights had suddenly acquired newly found acceptance. In Bosnia, Chechnya and elsewhere, the world appeared to have suddenly become sensitive to human rights. In Kashmir too, the old paradigm of self-determination was fast replaced by the new paradigm of human rights violation. Suddenly the situation in Kashmir came to be analysed almost entirely along the human dimension. Demands came to be made by the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), followed by the European powers for an on-the-spot survey of violation of human rights by the Indian forces. The Indian government was persuaded enough to create a National Human Rights Commission of its own to monitor the problem. It took several years for the international community to acknowledge that terrorist outfits also violate human rights and that the responsibility of violation cannot be that of the Government alone.

In 1999 India and Pakistan came into conflict over an intrusion by Pakistan into Kargil. Was the crossing of the LOC by the *Mujahideens*, and the Pakistani troops a logical culmination of the ongoing approach taken on Kashmir? Did it represent an assessment by Pakistan that time was ripe to exert direct force by crossing the LOC and force India to resolve the Kashmir problem? Several explanations may be given for this Pakistani adventurism. One, that Pakistan must have assessed the time as being ripe for such an action to achieve its goal about accession of Kashmir. The political uncertainty in India and the obvious lack of consensus across the political spectrum in India would have also been one of the considerations. Two, this assessment must have been a military and intelligence assessment based on the active participation of the militant outfits. It was quite likely that the civil government was pulled into this decision after it was in place. If this be true it confirms the pattern of Pakistani politics that is dominated by competing interests of the army, the civilian representative elite, the intelligence units and the Islamic groups. The Pakistani premier's constant disclaim about the involvement of Government in the Kargil action may not be entirely true. Such actions cannot take place without the knowledge and participation of the

government (and that includes the army). But his statement may also indicate the truth that he has very little control over the Pakistan army and militant groups in Kargil. History shows that the creators of such groups eventually cease to control them as they tend to have a momentum of their own.

Having committed itself in Kargil, Pakistan appeared to have taken on more than it could digest. The international public opinion has shifted away from Pakistan. Its old and trusted ally China took a neutral position and advised restraint and dialogue. The Pakistani premier was not able to move the United States either. The US visit of premier Sharif proved counter productive. The Americans asked Pakistan to withdraw its troops to the LOC and begin a dialogue with India. Eventually, India did manage to push back the Pakistani infiltration.

9.4.3 Nuclear Equation

The nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan in 1998 had generated a great deal of debate on the rationale and implications of these actions taken by both the governments. Much of the debate focused on the security considerations of this action, the regional threat dimensions and internal political compulsions. The Indian articulation focused on the threats from Pakistan and China, while Pakistan targeted India. The central questions raised about the Indian tests had been in the ‘why’ and ‘why now’ category. The debates used two distinct paradigms for analysis, the first using the security rationale and the second, the developmental rationale. The debates based on the first focused on the perceived threats from the regional order as manifested by Pakistan and China. The positions about the exact nature of threats and the methods of tackling these threats would vary from party to party at a political level. In case of the Pakistani tests, the answers would be more specific, in that they would point to India as the central culprit. Further, in both cases there would be very strong internal political compulsions. Now that the tests have confirmed the nuclear weapon capability (or actual weapon status) it may be safe to presume that the nations have achieved whatever minimal nuclear ambitions they had cherished.

The Indian nuclear tests of May 1998 represented a demonstration of capabilities—technological and political. Technological capabilities were in the context of the denial of access to advanced technologies that India experienced over the years. The political capability represented the demonstration of political will of the elite to take on the G-7 regime. It is this reassertion of the ability to take independent decisions in face of anticipated sanctions that makes the nuclear test a symbol of a resurgent Third World. It is at that level that both, the Indian and Pakistani tests, demonstrate a commonality of approaches.

The Draft outline of Indian Nuclear Doctrine released on 17 August 1999 argued for autonomy in decision making about security for India. It takes the long established Indian line that security is an integral part of India’s developmental process. It expresses concerns about the possible disruption of peace and stability and the consequent need to create a deterrence capability to ensure the pursuit of development. It argued that in the absence of a global nuclear disarmament policy, India’s strategic interests required an effective credible deterrence and adequate retaliatory capability should deterrence fail. It continues to hold on the ‘no first use doctrine’ and the civilian control of nuclear decision-making.

The utility of nuclear deterrence (at whatever level) between India and Pakistan may be still

unclear. But the Kargil conflict presented a threshold (a 'glass ceiling', to borrow from feminist terminology) beyond which the two powers may not be able to escalate their conflict. This threshold, in the form of the Line of Control was adhered to by India and was also imposed by the United States and China on Pakistan. In the short run, one may have to make a distinction between conventional security considerations which include border conflicts and internal security problems on the one hand, and nuclear strategies on the other. Therefore, there is the need to re-initiate the nuclear dialogue of 1985 that sought to create an agreement on not attacking each others' nuclear installations. This can now be supplemented by a declaration on 'no-first-use' policy.

Both India and Pakistan would have to stress on the need to develop their peaceful-uses programme for its economic and industrial growth. This may require the two countries to bargain with the developed world for the transfer of advance technology. The threat of sanctions on dual use technologies and the limited room for negotiations make it necessary for India and Pakistan to pool their resources for bargaining with the developed countries.

9.4.4 Dialogue

One must make a specific reference to the various attempts to establish a dialogue between the two countries and discuss their success and failures.

India and Pakistan have signed two important treaties after they had fought border wars. The Tashkent Agreement (1966) saw a meeting of Indian prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistani president Ayub Khan. The agreement succeeded in freezing the Kashmir dispute but did not resolve the problems. The Simla Agreement (1972) saw an interaction between prime minister Indira Gandhi and foreign minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who eventually went on to become the prime minister of Pakistan.

There have been other occasions when the leaders of these two countries have had an opportunity to exchange views. One of these has been on the occasion of SAARC or Non-aligned Movement summit meetings. Such meetings were usually carried on the sidelines of the summits.

Perhaps the more well-known recent meetings have been those between prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Pakistan premier Nawaz Shariff at Lahore (1999) and Vajpayee's meeting with General Pervez Musharraf at Agra (2001). The former saw the inauguration of the Delhi-Lahore Bus service and the signing of Lahore Declaration which reiterated the principle of bilateral approach to Indo-Pak problems, while the latter ended without any significant gains. In 2003 prime minister Vajpayee once again called for a comprehensive dialogue with Pakistan. This initiative saw some forward movement with the exchange of parliamentary delegations and some informal talks that began between the two countries.

Both, India and Pakistan share some common post colonial legacies. Both have attempted to address the problems of pluralistic societies and overcome the resistance of feudal tendencies in their efforts at political and economic modernisation. Both have strained their political institutions to accommodate socio-political upheavals. One may argue that the Indian experiment appears to have survived the test of time and that its political institutions have been able to cope with the demands placed on them. On the other hand Pakistan still continues to experiment with its

institutions in search of stability.

9.5 INDIA AND OTHER NATIONS OF SOUTH ASIA

9.5.1 Framework

British colonial policies have influenced India's approach towards the small powers of South Asia. Two important legacies have been carried over in Indian thinking: One, it is the Indian 'responsibility' to look after the security needs of the small powers. This 'responsibility', in terms of security, is understood in the context of an 'extended frontier' or a 'defence perimeter' approach. This meant that care would have to be taken to ensure that these countries do not become open to outside intervention. Two, India sought to avoid interference in the internal affairs of these countries except in exceptional circumstances. These circumstances were security considerations as interpreted by India. For example, following the creation of Bangladesh the Indian position has always been that the security and integrity of these states would be of vital national interest to India.

9.5.2 Nepal

Indian policy towards Nepal is determined by the following considerations: (i) the geopolitics of Nepal makes it a landlocked country sandwiched between India and China. Access to Nepal is easier from the Indian side; (ii) historically, both countries have shared a common security perception; (iii) there exists a great deal of cultural affinity between the two countries; Nepal is not only the birth place of Gautam Buddha but is also the only Hindu kingdom in the world.

The parameters of bilateral relations came to be defined in the context of two treaties that India and Nepal signed in 1950: The Treaty of Peace and Friendship and the Treaty of Trade and Commerce. The former was a security arrangement that took into account the possible threat of the Chinese from across the border. It provided for a close cooperation between India and Nepal on matters relating to Nepal's security, thus ensuring that Nepal does not come under the Chinese sphere of influence. The second treaty provided for trade and transit arrangements with Nepal. The terminology of this treaty was subject to several discussions over the years. Since this was a ten year treaty that was to be renewed regularly, the discussions became important. One major change came in the phraseology of the treaty in 1971. The term 'freedom of transit' was replaced by 'right of transit'. Another important change that took place during the Janata Government was the splitting up of this treaty into separate treaties, one for trade and dealing with transit.

In 1970s Nepal came forward with a fundamentally new approach to its foreign policy. In a formal announcement in 1975 Nepal proposed the establishment of a Zone of Peace for the region of Nepal. The proposal sought to adhere to the policy of peace, non-alignment and peaceful coexistence. The central purpose of this policy appeared to be the reassertion of Nepal's sovereignty and its identity that it feared was being submerged by Indian domination. While this proposal still stands as an objective of Nepal's foreign policy today, India did not accept it. Instead, India favours the entire South Asia as zone of peace.

The movement towards restoration of democracy in Nepal began in 1980s. The creation of the new constitution providing for a constitutional monarchy in 1990 was a welcome step in the

restoration of democracy. Since 1990 Nepal, like the UK, is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy.

The Indian attitude towards Nepal is linked to several factors. One concerns Nepal's attitude towards China. Nepal has awarded building contracts to Chinese companies close to the borders. Nepal also purchased some armaments from the Chinese. In fact what was of critical concern to India was the reported agreement between China and Nepal for sharing of intelligence. India is also concerned about the open access that Pakistani militant organisations are suspect of getting in Nepal. The hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane from Nepal is just one example of the I.S.I. using Nepal's territory for terrorism against India. On the part of Nepal, it views India as a dominant neighbour that it would like to balance by making some overtures with China. Nepal has broadly accepted the 'special relationship' with India. The strong historical and socio-cultural links ensure that this relationship will continue. However, Nepal is looking for greater economic flexibility from India in its economic/trade related issues.

9.5.3 Bhutan

Bhutan is a small Himalayan Kingdom. It is a sovereign country, though by mutual consent, India is concerned with the security of its small neighbour. Bhutan and India regulate their extremely friendly relations in accordance with the bilateral treaty of 1949. India provides such guidance to Bhutan as the latter may seek in matters of external relations. Both India and Bhutan are the founder members of the SAARC, and seek to promote more meaningful bilateral and multi-lateral trade relations. The two countries are also closely linked with each other through the policy of non-alignment. Bhutan has been very careful in not taking sides either in the Sino-Indian conflict or in regard to Nepal or Bangladesh. Bhutan had recognised Bangladesh in 1971 even before India did that.

9.5.4 Bangladesh

India had actively participated in the freedom struggle of Bangladesh in the wake of the Pakistani repression of the people of erstwhile East Pakistan in 1971. India also had an interest in ending a 'two frontier threat' that East and West Pakistan had posed to it since its independence. The 1972 Indo-Bangladesh Friendship Treaty was an attempt to assert India's interest in the security and integrity of the new nation. The Treaty stipulated that the two countries would not enter into or participate in military alliances directed against one another. However, the goodwill in Indo-Bangladesh relations did not stay for long.

Between 1972 and 1975, India had a fairly good relationship with Bangladesh. Bangladesh was the largest recipient of the Indian aid. India also concluded various border demarcations that had been pending for long with Pakistan. The agreements involved the incorporation of various Bengali Muslim enclaves into Bangladesh without compensation. Later, in 1982, India agreed to lease the *Tin Bigha* corridor to Bangladesh 'in perpetuity'. But it did not materialise due to Indian Parliament's refusal to amend the Constitution to lease the *Tin Bigha*. India's relations with Bangladesh deteriorated after the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman in 1975.

There have been three important points of dispute between India and Bangladesh. One concerns the problem over the Farakka Barrage; two is the issue of the New Moore or the *Purbasha*

Island and third is the question of the Bangladeshi infiltration from across the borders, especially the Chakma refugees.

The construction of the Farakka barrage had started in 1962. The aim of the project was to divert the water from the Ganges to the Hoogly so as to flush out and desilt the Calcutta port. The then government of Pakistan had objected to this as it would have created water scarcity for the area in East Pakistan. In 1972 India and Bangladesh agreed to create a Joint Rivers Commission; however, the talks on the Farakka barrage continued to fail. It was only in 1978 that an agreement was signed between the two countries on the sharing of waters. But it lapsed after five years. Eventually in 1996 a treaty on sharing of *Ganga* waters was concluded, between India and Bangladesh, for 30 years. It takes care of the needs of water for both the countries during the 'lean period'.

In 1981, the Indian Navy laid claim to the island of New Moore that had been emerging in the mouth of the *Ganga* delta. This became a bone of contention between the two countries. The island called *Talpatty* by Bangladesh and *Purbasha*, by West Bengal is not inhabited. It can be resolved on the basis of the principle of mean line. Bangladesh has also objected to India's attempts to fence the border to prevent infiltration of Bangladeshis into the North Eastern territories of India. This, besides the flow of the Chakma refugees into India, has created border tensions between the two countries.

9.5.6 Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has both advantages and disadvantages of its geopolitical location. It has the advantage of being an island with a location in an ocean that is of considerable strategic importance. It has also the disadvantage of being a small power in a region that has been facing great power rivalry, added to the fact that there is a dominant neighbour, India. The Indian case is further complicated by the existence of a fairly large Tamil minority in the North and North Eastern region of Sri Lanka that has close links to the Tamil population in India. India has been a supporter of the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace concept that Sri Lanka has sponsored. To India this concept helps to keep this region outside the scope of great power rivalry. Both the countries are members of the Commonwealth, the SAARC and the NAM.

Both India and Sri Lanka have had common approaches on such issues as Indonesian independence (1949), Suez crisis (1956) disarmament etc. They have both supported the Zone of Peace proposal and also the attempts to create an Indian Ocean Community in the form of the Indian Ocean Rim land Organisation. At a bilateral level the two countries were able to solve two important issues. In 1964, an agreement was signed about the question of citizenship of Tamil migrants and in 1974, the maritime boundary agreement came into effect.

However, it was the Tamil question that continued to create problems on the bilateral relations. In 1981 riots started in the Jaffna province which has a Tamil majority. The initial response from Indians was that of restraint. While India did look at the Tamil agitation with sympathy, it refused to support any demand for a separate statehood of Tamil *Eelam*. In 1987 India and Sri Lanka signed an agreement of far reaching consequences. India had brokered peace between the Tamils and the Sri Lankan Government and had agreed to send in Peace Keeping forces (IPKF) to implement the agreement. The agreement had provided for autonomy to the Tamil dominated

regions of North and North East Sri Lanka. However, the internal politics of Sri Lanka and the divisions within the Tamil groups made it impossible to implement the agreement. India was at the receiving end of criticism from both sides. The IPKF also suffered significant casualties. Eventually India withdrew the IPKF in 1990. Today, the Norwegians are playing the role of 'facilitators' in the dialogue between the Tamil groups, especially the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government. By 2003, the Tamils in Sri Lanka appeared to be willing to accept broad autonomy, and give up the demand of Eelam, in the interest of peace in the Island.

9.5.6 Maldives

Maldives is a small republic in the Indian Ocean. Being geographically close to India and Sri Lanka, Maldives is recognised as a South Asian country. It is, like India, a founder member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). It has taken keen interest in promoting regional economic cooperation, has held two highly successful SAARC Summits in its Capital Male, and has taken steps to establish South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA). When an attempt was made in 1988, by a group of young military officers, to overthrow the democratically elected government of president Abdul Gayoom in a coup, India immediately rushed its assistance to the Maldives president, and helped defeat the coup attempt. President Gayoom's civilian government was restored and the Indo-Maldives relations have since been further consolidated.

To conclude, the Indian policy towards the smaller powers of South Asia has been more explicitly seen since the Indira Gandhi days. India supports and encourages regional democracies and has sought to tie up its regional primacy through series of regional, and bilateral arrangements, covering a wide range of agreements in the areas of defence, trade and science and technology. Yet difficulties continue to remain in coming to an understanding with India. Divisions and mistrust continues to dominate the region. The commonality of the region leads the small powers to continue to assert their differences so as to regain a sense of identity and independence.

9.6 THE FORMATION OF SAARC

President Zia ur Rehman of Bangladesh visited all the South Asian countries in the late 1970s to advocate the setting up of a regional economic organisation. In November 1980 he sent a 'Working Paper on Regional Co-operation in South Asia' to various South Asian countries. Further clarification of the working paper came in a letter from the Bangladesh foreign ministry to the Indian and other South Asian governments. The Bangladesh proposal was clear about the objectives of the forum to be evolved in South Asia. The institutional framework was in conformity to the participating states' commitment to non-alignment. The proposal exhibited an awareness of the pressing bilateral problems in the region. It therefore sought to take the incrementalist course of action. The areas identified for co-operation were non-political and non-security in nature; they were to include such issues like telecommunications, tourism, agriculture, transport, meteorology, etc.

The core issue was the political implications of the proposal. The existing asymmetry of power had to be addressed. There was the need to avoid the possibility of institutionalisation of hegemony by one great power; there was a corresponding need to ensure that the smaller powers did not gang up against the bigger power. It was in fact a historic effort to build a relationship amongst equals. The proposal also did not aim at regionalising bilateral issues. It sought to identify areas of

cooperation that were truly regional in character. The key word governing the process was to be mutual benefit. While no rigid time frame was proposed, it was hoped that this proposal would be the nucleus for the beginning of a dialogue on the matter. The decision would obviously be based on consensus. Bangladesh believed that once the climate for trust and cooperation was created, it would be easier to resolve bilateral problems bilaterally, as demonstrated by the ASEAN.

The proposal was followed by a series of meetings of the foreign secretaries of the South Asian countries. After an initial reluctance on part of both India and Pakistan, the talks gained progress. Eventually, in 1983, the first meeting of foreign ministers of the South Asian countries was convened at New Delhi. This meeting presented the declaration on South Asian Regional Co-operation (SARC), the signatories being Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The Declaration adequately reflected the concerns expressed during the various meetings of the Foreign Secretaries. The Declaration ignored all issues of bilateral contention between South Asian States as well as problems faced by South Asia as a region. In a sense the Declaration followed the spirit of the Bangladesh Proposal. The objectives kept the boundaries of co-operation to the non-political and non-security field. The declaration accepted the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs and mutual benefit. It specified that all decisions would be taken on the basis of unanimity and that bilateral and contentious issues were to be excluded from deliberations.

The SARC declaration followed the Nordic example of co-operation. The basis of co-operation amongst the Nordic countries was threefold: (i) violence of the 'constitutional' approach; (ii) understand that the national structure would remain the unalterable political basis for co-operation which would be directed to areas of relatively 'low' political content; and (iii) exclusion of areas of 'high' political content, such as, national security, from regional co-operation.

The SARC declaration was followed up by a continuing dialogue at the level of Foreign Ministers. Finally in 1985, at the first Summit meeting at Dhaka, the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) was created. The SAARC Charter retained all the crucial elements of the SARC Declaration. It kept the new organisation within the non-political and non-security field and retained the incrementalist approach to co-operation.

The objectives in the SAARC Charter include: promotion of welfare of people of South Asia and improving their quality of life; accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development; promote and strengthen collective self-reliance; contribute to mutual trust and understanding; promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields and strengthen mutual cooperation. The Charter also sets out the following principles: respect for principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, noninterference in internal affairs and mutual benefit. Such cooperation was not to substitute, but to supplement bilateral and multilateral cooperation and was not to be inconsistent with bilateral and multilateral obligations. The Charter has two important General Provisions that are of significance. One, decisions are to be taken on the basis of unanimity and bilateral and contentious issues are to be excluded from deliberations.

The first SAARC Summit was held at Dhaka in 1985. Despite the brief references to some bilateral issues, the Summit kept clear of controversies. There appeared a deliberate effort made

to ensure that the formation of the SAARC does not come into controversy at its inauguration. The second summit at Bangalore in 1986 sought to continue the efforts at broad based co-operation. Some of the mutual bickering surfaced again. The bilateral issues between India and Pakistan surfaced in indirect references. Indo-Nepal issues also became a matter of debate. On the positive side, the Bangalore Summit decided to establish the permanent secretariat at Kathmandu. The Kathmandu Summit of 1987 took the bold initiative of signing a Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism in South Asia. It was for the first time that a 'political' issue had been made the part of SAARC deliberations. These nations pledged to refrain from organising, instigating, and participating in civil strife or terrorist acts in member countries. However, the Convention did not provide for extradition facilities. SAARC also established the South Asian Food Security Reserve and the SAARC Audio Visual Exchange Programme. The Kathmandu Summit also saw the discussion on the possibility of including such issues like money, finance, banking and trade in SAARC deliberations. The fourth summit at Islamabad in 1988 is of particular significance to India as it afforded the opportunity for a direct dialogue between the Indian and the Pakistani Prime Ministers on Pakistani soil. Islamabad Summit suggested the preparation of a regional plan called 'SAARC 2000' to provide for basic needs of shelter, education and literacy. The summit took up environmental issues of the 'green house effect' for study. It also called for a war against narcotics. Islamabad is known for its action oriented programmes and also because it saw a spread of democratic order in South Asia.

The period 1989-90 saw some uncertainty in the process of co-operation in SAARC. The all round interest and enthusiasm that SAARC had been able to generate in the early years was marred by the uncertainty over holding of the fifth summit. Sri Lankan reluctance to hold the summit on account of Indo-Sri Lankan bilateral issues put serious obstacles in the progress of SAARC. Sri Lanka raised the issue of the presence of Indian Peace Keeping Forces as reason for its inability to hold the annual summit. The IPKF, despite having been sent on the invitation of the Sri Lankan government, became a bone of contention. Eventually, the 1989 summit never took place and the fifth summit was then convened at Male in 1990. The Sri Lankan episode appears to have set a kind of a precedent. The subsequent years have seen the cancellation or postponement of annual summits for relatively minor reasons.

The Male summit of 1990 took place at the backdrop of an attempted coup in Maldives. India had assisted Maldives in its return to democracy. The major outcome of the Male summit was the signing of the convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. SAARC leaders also decided to initiate a dialogue with the European Union and the ASEAN.

The sixth summit was held in Colombo in 1991. The preparations for the summit had witnessed some political bickering. Sri Lanka itself was facing internal political turmoil in the Tamil regions of the north. The uncertainties were further complicated by the lack of consensus on the dates. Eventually the summit came to be held in December 1991. Colombo started the talk on the liberalisation of intra regional trade. The Sri Lankan president, in an interview, stated that his proposal for developing a preferential trading system in South Asia had been accepted. The period from 1991 to 1993 was to eventually see the emergence of trade as the central concern of SAARC.

The Seventh SAARC Summit meeting at Dhaka in 1993 reaffirmed the need to liberalise trade as early as possible through a step by step approach. The agreement on SAARC Preferential

Trade (SAPTA) was the first step in this direction. A preferential trading arrangement is the first, and perhaps, the mildest form of regional economic integration. The agreement aimed at promoting and sustaining mutual trade and economic cooperation among the states of SAARC through the exchange of various concessions. The New Delhi Summit (tenth, 1995) took this discussion further.

The Ninth Summit at Male held in 1997 was concerned about acceleration of economic cooperation in all areas. The leaders noted with satisfaction the progress of SAPTA but stressed upon the need to achieve the goal of free trade by the year 2001. The Indian prime minister Vajpayee announced some major trade concessions at the Tenth SAARC Summit at Colombo in 1998. As a special gesture to SAARC nations, India announced the lifting of import curbs on over 2000 products on a preferential basis. India was also willing to consider bilateral free trade agreements with those countries which were interested in moving faster. In the wake of military coup in Pakistan in October 1999, India refused to attend the next summit. Thus, no summit meeting was held during 1999-2001. Trade relations continued to be addressed at the eleventh summit meeting held at Kathmandu in 2002. But, then again the next Summit meeting proposed for January 2003 at Islamabad could not take place due to India's reluctance to attend it. Meanwhile, progress was made in the direction of achieving/enhancing free trade (SAFTA) in the SAARC Summit Meeting at Islamabad in early 2004.

9.7 SUMMARY

South Asia appears to be confronted with several issues that dominate the debate on the emergent order in the region. In a sense these issues run as parallel arguments, yet there is an urgent need to accommodate these issues in the understanding of South Asia.

- a) The question of hegemony and the legitimacy of the use of force: South Asia has traditionally been analysed within the framework of the regional state system. This approach considered India as a regional hegemony, Pakistan as a bargainer or a partner state, small powers of the region as peripheral dependents and extra regional interests as a fourth constituent. There was an implicit recognition to hegemony and also the use of force to preserve national interest. The Indian actions in Sri Lanka in 1987 and Maldives in 1989 symbolised this legitimacy. The question that is raised today is whether this old model of hegemony is outdated? Or, what is the degree to which hegemony would be acceptable and what form, if any, would it take?
- b) The issue of bilateralism: The key to the problem of order in South Asia lies in the nature of the relationship that India and Pakistan develop. As two critical powers of the region, they can create or destroy the order and stability in the region. The relationship between these two powers had been dominated by two differing worldviews: India had opposed extra-regional intervention and has advocated bilateralism as an approach. Pakistan has, on the other hand, used extra-regional interests to exert pressure on India as a counter to the Indian hegemony and thus has promoted extra-regional participation in the debate on South Asian issues.
- c) The third dimension is the question of order from the perspective of civil society. This debate revolves around three considerations: One is the breakdown of state centrality through economic considerations; two, is the issue of the evolution of a 'participatory state' and three, the question of a common civilisational tie. Civil society is based on the recognition of difference and diversity. Civil Society is not the same thing as liberalism or democracy; modern capitalist economy is also not a guarantee for civil society. But Civil Society makes liberalism and democracy desirable. The argument is in favour of developing a 'Participatory State' where segments of society excluded under more hierarchical systems are permitted greater involvement. Public policy is thus to be a product of a dialogue, consultation and negotiation. One consideration also centres around the role of religion, culture, history, etc., on the perceptions of the South Asian elite. Does South Asia have a common civilisational tie? Can we talk of a common social morality of South Asia if ideological/political impediments are lowered and there is free flow of people, information and ideas?

9.8 EXERCISES

- 1) What are the features of South Asian Regional State System?
- 2) Discuss the key issues of disputes between India and Pakistan.
- 3) Highlight the important features of India's nuclear policy.
- 4) Write a note on Indo-Nepalese relations.

- 5) What are the irritants in India-Bangladesh relations?
- 6) Discuss India-Sri Lanka relations with special reference to the people of Tamil origin in the Island Republic.
- 7) Describe the main features of SAARC and comment on its prospects.