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**SOUTH ASIAN COOPERATION: TOWARDS A HUMANE WORLD**

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### **I. THE DIALECTIC OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION: CONTENDING PARADIGMS OF STATES AND PEOPLE IN SOUTH ASIA**

The gap between the commitment to regional integration by SAARC leaders and its actualization signifies the dialectic between the aspirations of the people of South Asia and the practice of state power. The people seek liberation from mass poverty, deprivation of basic services, extremist violence and their vulnerability to extreme climatic events. By contrast state structures locked in the obsolete paradigms of power, mistrust and suspicion, are constrained from fulfilling the will of the people.

The current framework for the practice of state power conceives of national security in terms of building the military capability for mass annihilation of each other's citizens. The deadly nuclear dimension that since 1998 has been added to the India-Pakistan arms race is seen by the respective governments to reinforce national security through a presumed "deterrence". It is not surprising that South Asia is the poorest and yet the most militarized region in the world<sup>1</sup>. It contained 52 percent of the world's poor population in year 2011<sup>2</sup>. Yet India and Pakistan have the capability even in a limited nuclear exchange to kill more than 100 million people immediately, with many hundreds of millions more dying subsequently from radiation related illnesses<sup>3</sup>. With the stakes of catastrophic destruction as they are in the region, any non-zero probability of nuclear war should be unacceptable. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere

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<sup>1</sup> Mahbub ul Haq, *Human Development in South Asia*, Human Development Centre, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> My estimate based on World Bank data, *World Development Report 2012, Gender, Equity and Development*, The World Bank, Washington DC, 2012, Page 394, Table 2.

<sup>3</sup> John Barry and Michael Hirsh, "Nuclear Letters", *Newsweek* 8 June, 1998.

that given the specific features of the India-Pakistan problematique South Asia has a higher probability of an accidental or intentional nuclear war than any other region in the world<sup>4</sup>. As states in South Asia pursue national security through obsolete paradigms, in the new world that is now taking shape the influence of an emerging power will be determined not by the magnitude of destruction it can wreak on other countries but by its contribution to enhancing life in an inter-dependent world.

The hopes of the people are drawn from the seismic change that has occurred in the centre of gravity of the global economy for the first time in three centuries from the West to Asia. If China returns to its high growth trajectory and South Asia achieves economic integration to fulfill its great potential, then by the middle of this century China and South Asia could become the greatest economic power house in human history. The possibilities of economic transformation are enhanced by the fact that societies in this region have a rich cultural tradition of experiencing unity in diversity through transcending the ego, of creative growth of the self through human solidarity and a harmony with nature. In bringing to bear these aspects of their shared core values, the people of South Asia could bring a new consciousness and new institutions to address the challenges of inequality, mass poverty, violence and environmental degradation that confront the world. In so doing they could contribute to an Asian century that enriches human civilization.

In the subsequent sections of this paper we will first articulate the logic and the constraints to economic integration; then examine the challenge of climate change for economic and social stability in South Asia to explore a new dimension of regional cooperation; and finally indicate the paradigm within which a new and sustainable relationship can be established between humans, nature and economic growth.

## **II. THE LOGIC OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION**

II.1 *Economic Integration to Stimulate Economic Growth.* Economic integration in South Asia could accelerate and help sustain economic growth in the member countries. This is

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<sup>4</sup> (i) Akmal Hussain, A Perspective on Peace and Economic Cooperation in South Asia, chapter 1, in Sadiq Ahmed, Saman Kelegama, Ejaz Ghani (ed.), Promoting Economic Cooperation in South Asia: Beyond SAFTA, The World Bank, SAGE Publications, New Delhi, 2010. Also see:

(ii) Akmal Hussain, The Challenges and Drivers of Regionalism in South Asia: The India Pakistan Peace Process, chapter 7 in, Rafiq Dossani, Daniel C. Sneider, and Vikram Sood (ed.), Does South Asia Exist? Prospects for Regional Integration, The Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Centre, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, 2010.

because of the following factors: (i) gains from trade emanating from comparative advantage, (ii) increased investment due to a large regional market, (iii) lower capital costs of projects due to availability of cheaper capital and intermediate goods through regional trade, (iv) a broader base of innovation, (v) efficiency gains through regional level supply chains for intra industry specialization, and (vi) an environment of greater competition through a free trade regime. It could also help to stabilize food prices and provide cheaper consumer goods to the lower income groups and thereby improve the distribution of real income.

The pursuit to improve the material conditions of the people of South Asia will have to give due consideration to conserve the life support systems of the regional and global ecology. In this sense the enterprise of economic growth cannot be done in terms of the aim of reaching the levels of luxury consumption prevailing in the West today, simply because it would be beyond the loading capacity of the life support systems of the planet. So the objective of overcoming poverty through economic growth would need to be conducted within a new relationship between humans, nature and forms of production.

*II.2 Economic Integration for Building Pluralistic Societies and Strengthening Democracy.* Trade and investment across national boundaries in South Asia could create new constituencies of interstate peace that would not only bring material benefits to the people but also enable the interplay of diverse cultures. Through such interaction the syndrome of mutual demonization and the resultant narrowing of the self could be replaced by experiencing the other as a vital fertilizing force in the growth of a broader more humane self. Such a process would make possible the rediscovery of unity in diversity which is part of the perennial wisdom of South Asian societies. These cultural concomitants of economic cooperation could strengthen the attempt by South Asian states to build pluralistic societies and sustainable democracies.

*II.3 Constraints to Economic Integration.* The SAARC countries conduct trade with the rest of the world amounting to about US \$ 25 billion, yet intra SAARC trade (though it has increased in recent years), is still only US \$ 0.7 billion. This is because of inadequate implementation of the SAFTA Agreement due to institutional constraints, pressures located in the power structures of Pakistan and India and the vicissitudes of the politics of the peace process.

The SAFTA Agreement<sup>5</sup> stipulates that member countries remove tariff barriers, non-tariff barriers and minimize the negative list of traded items. The constraints to implementation in terms of the Agreement itself lie in the fact that there is no enforcement mechanism to the stipulated actions to achieve free trade. This lack of an enforcement mechanism indicates the institutional weakness of the Agreement. The following are some of the consequent constraints to implementation:

(i) While there are timelines for the least developed countries of South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal) to achieve trade liberalization by 2016, and the non-LDCs (India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) to achieve full trade liberalization by 2013, there is no enforcement mechanism within the terms of the SAFTA Agreement for achieving these deadlines. This is why the timelines of 2013 have not been achieved so far and the conformity to timelines for 2016 is uncertain.

(ii) A comparative analysis of the tariff structures of Pakistan and India indicates certain asymmetries which place Pakistan at a disadvantage and would have to be addressed when negotiations regarding the MFN status and associated trade liberalization are resumed. These asymmetries were pointed out in a recent study<sup>6</sup>. For example, the number of items in India's sensitive list of imports from Pakistan (1,753) is significantly greater than in Pakistan's sensitive list of imports from India (1,577). The items in India's sensitive list are weighted towards agriculture and textiles even though in some of the sub sectors of this commodity group Pakistan has a comparative advantage. Apart from this the distortions in the relative prices on rice and wheat created by prohibitive import duties placed by India on these imports from Pakistan (70% and 100% respectively) are reinforced by the huge subsidies on agriculture inputs provided by the Indian Central as well as state governments. These stand at 5.2% of GDP compared to 1% in the case of Pakistan<sup>7</sup>.

(iii) It is now well established that non-tariff barriers even in the absence of formal tariffs can be a major constraint to trade liberalization. The SAFTA Agreement has not adequately

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<sup>5</sup> This subsection is drawn from the Author's presentation at the SAARC @ 25 Seminar at the India International Centre, New Delhi, 17 September 2010 and later published as an article: Akmal Hussain, The Political Economy of SAFTA, The Daily Times, October 2, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> The Beaconhouse National University's ongoing study was reported by one of the authors, Shahid Kardar, in his article in the Daily Dawn: Shahid Kardar, MFN Status for India Now, Dawn, 19 February 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

addressed this issue in terms of devising an institutional mechanism for eliminating them within a time bound framework. The Agreement merely stipulates that member countries “inform” the SAARC Secretariat of all non-tariff and para tariff measures which should be reviewed by the SAARC Committee of Experts and recommendations made to reduce such trade restrictions. Yet there is no binding commitment for countries within the terms of SAFTA to eliminate non-tariff barriers within a time frame. Specific measures need to be undertaken to identify the non-tariff barriers of various countries and arrive at binding commitments to eliminate them within the next three years.

While lack of an enforcement mechanism generates the constraints to implementation within the institutions of SAFTA, it does raise a question: What explains the absence of an enforcement mechanism in terms of the SAFTA Agreement and why do the two largest countries, India and Pakistan drag their heels in implementing SAFTA? The answer lies in the political economy of these states. In both countries the national security paradigm is inimical to free trade and creates an adversarial conception of the neighbouring state which engenders mutual mistrust. The objective material interest of the two states of course lies in free trade as is shown by a century of empirical and theoretical literature in economics. Yet ideology in this case often overrides economic logic.

### **III. CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE IMPERATIVE OF REGIONAL COOPERATION**

III.1 *The Ecological Imperative.* South Asia has a highly integrated ecology with shared mountains, rivers and monsoons. Therefore the policy measures for addressing the socio-economic impact of climate change will have to be undertaken on the basis of cooperation between the nation states of South Asia. Let us briefly examine the vulnerability to and impact of climate change on the economy and society of this region.

The evidence is unmistakable: climate change is already occurring. South Asia with its delicately balanced ecology, its heavy reliance on monsoons, its critical dependence on agriculture and persistent mass poverty, make it one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to climate change. Increased variability in the magnitude and timing of rain fall during the monsoons could increase the instability of agriculture production and add to the burden of the poor. The long and densely populated coastline with low lying islands, such as the Maldives, make the region vulnerable to sea level rise associated with global warming. The

rising sea levels along the low elevation coastal regions of mainland South Asia are expected to salinize agriculture plains in these regions resulting in the loss of livelihoods of 125 million people.

The Himalayas containing the region's glaciers, source of its rivers, and the key to the region's climate and economy, are highly sensitive to temperature increases. Srivastava provides evidence to show that some Himalayan glaciers are melting faster than the global average<sup>8</sup>. This could have a critical impact on the stability of water supplies and thereby on the economy and society of the region. Dr. Pachauri estimates that shortages of fresh water supplies will affect 500 million people in South Asia. At the same time the IPCC Report estimates that the effect of 2.5° C increase in average temperatures is likely to reduce yield per acre of grain crops by upto 30 percent in South Asia by the middle of this century<sup>9</sup>. Higher temperatures are also expected to increase year to year variability of monsoons<sup>10</sup>.

Climate change is also likely to have a significant impact on health. The increased frequency and intensity of heat waves could increase the incidence of heat stroke, cardiovascular, cerebrovascular and respiratory diseases<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore the increased frequency of floods could lead to increases in the incidence of diarrhea, dysentery, cholera, typhoid and rodent borne diseases.

Managing population dislocation, natural disasters, instability of water supply, food shortages and epidemics resulting from climate change, will require a high degree of inter-state cooperation in South Asia. The integrated ecology of South Asia, its mountains, rivers, forests and top soils constitute the basis of sustaining its economy and social life. The nation states of this region share this integrated life support system. They also share the risks posed

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<sup>8</sup> Leena Srivastava, *The Environmental Challenges in South Asia: Regional Cooperation for Adaptation Strategies* in, Akmal Hussain and Muchkund Dubey (ed.), *Democracy, Sustainable Development and Peace, New Perspectives on South Asia*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Inter Governmental Panel for Climatic Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2007, Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007, Page 471. This figure is also quoted in R.K. Pachauri, *op.cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Giorgi F, Bi X. (2005), *Regional Changes in Surface Climate Inter-annual Variability for the 21st Century from Ensembles of Global Model Simulations*. *Geophys Res Lett* 32:L13701. doi: 10.1029/2005GL023002. Cited in Leena Srivastava, *op.cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Hales, S., S. Edwards, and R. S. Kovats, *Impacts on Health of Climate Extremes*. In *Climate Change and Human Health: Risks and Responses*, 2003. Cited in Leena Srivastava, *op.cit.*

to it by climate change. Therefore cooperation amongst the people and states of South Asia is an imperative not just of greater material welfare but of their very survival. This cooperation would involve bringing to bear new institutions for undertaking adaptation and mitigation measures. It will also involve bringing to bear their shared humanity and innovativeness to face the challenge of climate change.

The Inter-Governmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) had predicted that global warming would increase the frequency and intensity of extreme climatic events<sup>12</sup>. The study by Cruz et.al. provides data to show that this is indeed happening in South Asia<sup>13</sup>. For example, the frequency of intense rainfall events has increased, causing floods and landslides in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Northeast India and Sri Lanka, during the last decade. Consecutive droughts in 1999 and 2000, in Pakistan and Northwest India adversely affected agriculture growth and the drought of 2002 in Orissa (India), caused crop failures which affected 11 million people.

According to the IPCC the increase in temperatures in South Asia in the decades ahead are likely to be above the global average. The adverse effect of temperature on heat sensitive varieties of food grains could have a critical impact on agriculture production and accentuate the problem of food insecurity in South Asia.

Managing population dislocation, natural disasters, instability of water supply and food shortages resulting from climate change, will require a high degree of inter-state cooperation in South Asia. The integrated ecology of South Asia, its mountains, rivers, forests and top soils constitute the basis of sustaining its economy and social life. The nation states of this region share this integrated life support system. They also share the risks posed to it by climate change. Therefore, we the peoples of South Asia and our respective states must cooperate and bring to bear our shared humanity and innovativeness to face the challenge of

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<sup>12</sup> Inter Governmental Panel for Climatic Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2007, Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Cruz RV, Harasawa H, Lal M, Wu S, Anokhin Y, Punsalmaa B, Honda Y, Jafari M, Li C, Huu N. 2007, Asia. *Climate Change, 2007, Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, in: Parry ML, Canziani OF, Palutikof JP et al (ed), *Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.  
Cited in: Leena Srivastava, *The Environmental Challenges in South Asia: Regional Cooperation for Adaptation Strategies*, chapter in, Akmal Hussain and Muchkund Dubey (ed.), *Democracy, Sustainable Development and Peace: New Perspectives in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014.

climate change. Cooperation not conflict is the key to building a better future for the people of South Asia.

III.2 *Water Scarcity: The Dangers of Conflict and the Need for Cooperation.* The emerging water crisis currently in the Indus Basin River System and in the decades ahead in the Ganges- Brahmaputra- Meghna Basin, unless collectively addressed could have major implications for the economies and societies of the region. It also has the potential of unnecessarily exacerbating inter-state tensions between India and Pakistan.

The problem of water scarcity in the Indus basin is predicated partly on the inherent limitations of water supply in the Indus River System, and partly on the growing water demand associated with inefficient water use in the process of growth in the economy and the population. Unsustainable development practices have exacerbated the problem with intrusion of salinity into the ground water, contamination of aquifers with harmful chemicals such as fluoride and arsenic and pollution of surface water due to lack of an institutional framework for environmentally safe disposal of urban and industrial waste.

Declining river flows and increased water demand associated with growing population and production have reduced water availability in the Indus Basin to only 1329 cubic meters per capita per year. This is substantially below the generally accepted minimum per capita requirement of 1700 cubic meters per person per year. In such a situation instead of using scarce water more efficiently the evidence suggests that water use efficiency in the Indus Basin is very low by international standards. GDP per capita of water use in the Indus Basin area is only USD 3.34 while that of the five top food producers in the world (Brazil, China, France, Mexico and USA) is USD 23.8 per cubic meter.

The rational response to water scarcity by upper and lower riparian states is to cooperate in managing the water resources of the region for improved conservation measures and increased efficiency of water use. Failure to do so has the potential of increasing inter-state tensions in the region.

III.3 *New Institutions for Cooperation to Manage Water Scarcity.* Management of water scarcity requires sharing of information of water flows and best practices in achieving greater irrigation and water use efficiencies between the upper and lower riparian states of India and Pakistan. Recently the Stimson Centre Washington in collaboration with the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan and the Observer Research Foundation, India, set up

the International Working Group on the Indus Waters (IWG). Some of the suggestions made by the IWG for sharing information on water flows and best practices for managing the water scarcity include<sup>14</sup>:

(i) Explore ways to strengthen Article VI of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) on “Exchange of Data”. In this context the IWG pointed out that Article VI could be made more meaningful through new technologies such as satellite based remote sensing and GIS mapping that could be used to develop joint environmental monitoring and measuring capabilities together with real time data collection and exchange on river flows and water quality.

(ii) Put into effect Article VII of the Indus Waters Treaty on “Future Cooperation” between India and Pakistan in the management of Indus Waters. This could be done on the basis of generating joint water resources data and models for the temporal behavior of rivers which could help India and Pakistan to take more efficient common decisions about “siting, construction and operation of facilities for storage, hydroelectric power, flood control, habitat maintenance and environmental flows as well as the tradeoffs between these objectives”<sup>15</sup>. Water quality data could also be built into the water resources models for digitized rivers to actually see on computer screens in both countries, not only changes in the volume of river flows in real time but also its chemical composition with respect to nutrients and pollutants respectively. Such data could lay the basis for cooperation between India and Pakistan to develop institutional mechanisms for cooperation in reducing water degradation and preventing toxic chemicals from entering both surface water and ground water irrigation and thence into the tissues of food crops and the life cycle. Toxic chemicals in irrigation water such as arsenic, mercury and lead can seriously damage human health and hence adversely affect productivity and economic growth. The proposed data generation and modeling technologies could give new meaning to Articles VI and VII of the Indus Waters Treaty and “lay the foundations for joint monitoring stations and telemetry platforms integrated to form an India-Pakistan collective Indus Basin Earth Observation System”<sup>16</sup>. This could play an

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<sup>14</sup> Report of the Indus Basin Working Group, Connecting the Drops, An Indus Basin Roadmap for Cross Border Water Research, Data Sharing and Policy Coordination, Observer Research Foundation, Stimson and Sustainable Development Policy Institute, (Mimeo), 2013, ISBN: 978-1-939240-02-6.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, Page 50.

<sup>16</sup> Report of the Indus Basin Working Group, Connecting the Drops, An Indus Basin Roadmap for Cross Border Water Research, Data Sharing and Policy Coordination, op.cit., page 50.

important role in removing misunderstandings between the two countries about the volume of river flows at different times of the year and enable more efficient management of the Indus Basin resources.

(iii) Promote possibilities for knowledge building and exchange for policy collaboration between India and Pakistan and also city to city, local and civil society levels. The Report argues that city governments in India and Pakistan face similar problems in managing the provision of municipal water and sanitation. Therefore institutional mechanisms could be put into place to share best practices and policy lessons.

#### IV. A SOUTH ASIAN SENSIBILITY FOR A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

Today the market is being apotheosized as the mythical space in which the individual can be free and yet provided with plenty by the hidden hand of the market. Yet, inherent to the capitalist accumulation process is the systematic inculcation of an insatiable desire to possess goods<sup>17</sup>. As Marx writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century pointed out, “the capitalist system not only produces goods that satisfy needs, but also the needs that these goods satisfy.” The subliminal language of advertisement does not *represent* goods, but rather *re-presents* them such that they appear to us in a *fantasized* form not in terms of their material attributes, but as magical receptacles of such qualities as beauty, efficacy and power. Thus, qualities, which we actually possess as human beings are transposed into goods, and the individual gets locked into an endless pursuit of acquisition<sup>18</sup>.

The culture of consumerism, which the market systematically inculcates, is inconsistent with conserving the environment. The life support systems of our planet cannot be sustained beyond a certain limit in the levels of global output growth inspite of any foreseeable development and adoption of green technologies. As Mahatama Gandhi said, “There is enough in the world for everybody’s need but not for everybody’s greed”.

In South Asia the interaction of diverse civilizations across millennia has brought to the surface certain fundamental features of each civilization, which while being rooted in its specific linguistic, religious and cultural *form* are essentially of a universal nature. Underlying the diversity of religious beliefs is a universal spiritualism of love, beauty and

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<sup>17</sup> See: Akmal Hussain: Commodities and the Displacement of Desire, Daily Times, November 28, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Akmal Hussain, op.cit.

truth. Associated with this sensibility is a set of values of caring and sharing; of knowing goods to be merely useful rather than a means of enhancing a person's status; of experiencing nature not as a resource to be endlessly exploited but as part of a sacred unity that sustains physical life: at the same time its beauty enables a transcendent experience of truth. Thus the peoples of South Asia over the millennia and across diverse religious beliefs have experienced the splendour of living simultaneously in the ephemeral and the eternal.

It can be argued that amidst its diversity South Asia has shared civilizational propensities of transcending the ego as a means of fulfilment, of locating the need for goods in the context of human responsibility and of harmonizing economic and social life with nature. It is this South Asian sensibility and the associated human values that could be brought to bear in building a new relationship between humans, nature and production to sustain life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

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