Like ASEAN, SAARC as well was launched amidst deep-seated mistrust and numerous interrelated domestic and inter-state conflicts among the member-states rooted in the colonial past as well as the dynamics of post-colonial socio-economic and politico-cultural developments of the region. Specific factors that bedevilled inter-state relations between or among SAARC member-states are as well almost the same: historical antagonism, irredentism, unresolved land and maritime boundaries, cross-border affiliation of ethnic and religious groups, conflict of economic interests, sharing of common natural resources and a turbulent process of nation building accompanied by numerous intra-state conflicts and their cross-border implications. However, the intensity of these factors, their interaction, and more important, their contribution to the emergence and sustenance of specific conflicts in SAARC region remain considerably different from those in ASEAN region.

Numerous intra-group conflicts in SAARC also could be divided into three categories. In this regard, some differences are worth mentioning. While ASEAN countries are beset with a host of conflicts over the delimitation of maritime boundaries, maritime disputes among SAARC countries are still dormant. A more important factor, disputes over the sharing of the waters of common rivers are highly intensive in SAARC, while such disputes are virtually non-existent in ASEAN. It is in this backdrop and also for the convenience of comparative analysis that the intra-group conflicts in SAARC are divided into following three categories:

i. Divergent politico-security perceptions and priorities;

ii. Territorial disputes, and disputes over the sharing of the waters of common rivers;
iii. intra-state conflicts involving ethno-religious groups and their cross-border reverberations.

5.1 Divergent Politico-Security Perceptions and Priorities

Traditionally, the security perceptions and priorities of SAARC countries have not only been divergent but also to a great extent diametrically opposite. The role of historical antagonism in shaping a security environment full of suspicion, distrust and hostility in South Asia was much greater than the case with ASEAN. Bitter memories of the past – both immediate and distant – not only influenced, at times even determined, the security perceptions and priorities of South Asian countries. This implies particularly to India and Pakistan, the two principal antagonists in the region. Both the countries, probably Pakistan to a greater extent, persistently addressed to the bitter historical memories while dealing with the problems in bilateral relations. Implicit in this was attempts to keep historical antagonism alive in politically relevant forms. The pattern of behaviour as displayed by them created an impression, and certainly with some justifications, that the two countries continued to remain a captive of historical memories.

South Asian efforts aimed at devising a more orderly structure of inter-state relations and mutually beneficial cooperation are also confronted by a host of contemporary factors of economic, geopolitical and ethno-religious nature. While similar factors also influence the security environment in ASEAN, their ability to contribute to the emergence, persistence and escalation of conflicts in the SAARC region is certainly much stronger than that in the former. First and foremost among them is the huge disparity in physical endowment overwhelmingly favouring India vis-à-vis all the SAARC countries. As a study shows, in most respects, India is many times larger than the rest of SAARC countries taken together. India has 77 percent of the population and 72 percent of the total area of SAARC. It has 84 percent of the arable land and land under permanent crops, 81 percent of forest and 69 percent of irrigated land. 73 In terms of mineral resources also

the picture would not be much different. Technologically and militarily as well India by far surpasses the achievements of other regional countries. While in terms of per capita GNP, India lags behind some of the SAARC countries, its total GNP surpasses that of the rest of SAARC countries taken together.

India's preponderance is compounded by its centrality in the region. And this refers not only to geographical factor which separates India's neighbours from one another. Inter-state relations in South Asia have hitherto been characterised by a congeries of dyadic relationship between India and its neighbours and not so much between India's neighbours.

In the context of ASEAN, while Indonesia's disproportionately greater physical endowment generates apprehensions in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, and that of Malaysia in Singapore and Brunei, Thailand and the Philippines as well as ASEAN's new induction, Vietnam, remain least bothered about the might of Indonesia and Malaysia. In the SAARC region, the phenomenon is all pervasive. India's neighbours continue to view New Delhi's might with apprehension. While part of the reasons lies in the fact that the above mentioned disparity in SAARC is far sharper than that in ASEAN, others are rooted in the regional ambitions long nourished by India and the pattern of behaviour as displayed by the latter in relation to its smaller neighbours.

The transnational communal linkages among SAARC countries resulting from differences as well as commonality in ethnicity and religion are significantly stronger than those among the ASEAN countries. More important, their ability to generate violent conflicts causing enormous damage to human and material resources is too vast to compare them with the ASEAN ones. As it would be elaborated further, cross border affiliation of ethno-religious groups and resultant transformation of intra-state conflicts into inter-state ones remain the single-most important threat to violent conflicts in South Asia.

While the security scenario in the SAARC region is dominated by the big power-small power syndrome, this alone would be insufficient to explain the security concerns of the two principal antagonists in South Asia – India and Pakistan. Indo-Pakistan rivalry has been, still remains and is likely to remain in the foreseeable future the single-most dominant threat to
peace in South Asia and the most severe obstacle to regional co-operation within the framework of SAARC. Therefore, it becomes imperative to pay a particular attention to the divergent security perceptions of India and Pakistan and their conflicting priorities.

It is in this backdrop that an attempt would be made below to encapsulate the divergent security perceptions and priorities of SAARC countries under two themes: India’s regional ambitions and the apprehensions of its smaller neighbours; and Indo-Pakistan rivalry.

5.1.1 India’s Regional Ambitions and the Apprehensions of its Smaller Neighbours

India’s aspiration to a predominant role in the SAARC region is much more deeply rooted in the historical and psychological factors than the case with Indonesia in the ASEAN region. Since the ancient time, India, particularly the historical Hindustan, has been the centre of power in South Asia which dominated the peripheries. Great Aryan emperors, the Sultans of Delhi, the Mughals and the British, all made persistent efforts to dominate the peripheries with a great deal of success. In this regard, for about more then a millennium, Delhi was the centre of power except for the initial period of the British rule when Calcutta (also in India) was the capital. Indians still remember all these with a great deal of nostalgia. Even an Indian scholar with considerably moderate views recalls with nostalgia, “Through the greater part of history of South Asia it was some power established in what is India today... that held an umbrella over the greater part of the region.”

While the Indians view themselves as the heir to all the great rulers of the land, for practical purposes, specific reference to India is made more as the ‘Successor State’ to the British Empire. Thus, a group of Indian scholars headed by a luminary of Indian academia asserts that “the Indians perceived themselves to be inheritors of the rights and privileges the

British used to enjoy in what is now known as South Asia”.75 What are these rights and privileges? Relevant to our context is the fact that “The British had conceived of the geo-strategic imperatives of Indian defence as embracing the whole subcontinent of South Asia and extending to its environs, such as Tibet and Afghanistan, and involving command of the Indian Ocean”.76 India inherited this body of strategic thinking from the British and, with some modifications due to the changed context of regional and international environment, this remains the corner-stone of Indian security perceptions. Thus, contemporary India conceives of her neighbouring countries as lying within the Indian defence perimeter and being integral to the security interests of India, while India’s neighbours themselves regard India as the source of their own insecurity against whom it is necessary to organise their own security interests, sometimes even on an extra-regional basis.77

Such perceptions in the backdrop of disproportionately greater physical endowment of India coupled with New Delhi’s occasional attempts to transform its natural pre-eminence into imposed predominance serve as a constant source of apprehension, mistrust and fear of smaller South Asian countries in relation to India. This remains the most important factor that motivated some of South Asian countries to explore extra-regional security linkages whenever they found it to be expedient. In the circumstances, during the entire post-colonial period, two diametrically opposite perceptions dominated South Asia’s security thinking as well as practical policy of the regional


states. Smaller South Asian countries, either directly or indirectly, welcomed external great power involvement in the region with a view to counterbalancing the otherwise unchallenged might of India. On the other hand, India's policy was designed to keep the great powers - friends and adversaries alike - out of intra-regional affairs, so that it could exert its power and influence to bear upon the countries of the region. Even when developing closer co-operation with the former Soviet Union with a view to counterbalancing the Pak-US-China axis in South Asia, India employed persistent efforts with a view to keeping all these extra-regional powers (including the Soviet Union) out of the region, though with a mixed success.

During the post-1971 period, India, from a claimant to the regional power status in South Asia, transformed itself into a contender of it. Accordingly, her strategic thinking on the region underwent further modification. Taking into account her historical heritage, geo-strategic position, economic and military potentials as well as international standing, Indian strategists developed a series of well-connected foreign policy and security perceptions with regard to its role in South Asia which are widely known as India Doctrine. To a significant extent, it is the South Asian version of Monroe Doctrine, wherein India views the entire region as a single strategic unit and herself as its sole custodian of security and stability.78

During the late-Indira period, and particularly under Rajiv Gandhi, this doctrine was put into action. Paradoxically, the timing coincided with the formation of SAARC. As judged by Indian policy makers, over the four decades of its independent existence, the country has prepared herself to embark upon such a policy. Economically, politically and geo-strategically, it has emerged as the single-most dominant power in South Asia. It has the world's fourth largest army, sixth largest Navy and eighth largest Air Force. Despite recurrent crises, its political system proved to be more stable than that of any South Asian country. In international arena, it emerged as a factor that should be reckoned with by all the great powers. As judged by

the policy makers in New Delhi, with the withdrawal of competitive involvement of great powers from South Asia due to the ensuing end of the Cold War, a vacuum was created setting the stage for India to fulfil its objectives envisaged in the India Doctrine.

While such a situation has been envisioned by India’s founding fathers, Nehru in particular, in terms of the method of its implementation the policy was an antithesis to Gandhian non-violence and Nehruvian peaceful coexistence. It was highly heavy handed and dependent on the use of or the threat to use force in dealing with the neighbours. Indian policy towards the ethnic violence in Sri Lanka and the stationing of Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in that country under a controversial treaty in 1987, its intervention in the Maldives to suppress an attempted coup in 1988 and a virtual blockade imposed on Nepal following severe disagreements between the two countries over the trade and transit treaty in 1989 are the most illustrated manifestations of this policy.79

India’s role as the self-appointed custodian of peace and stability in South Asia during late-1980s further reinforced the environment of mistrust and suspicion in the region. It was viewed by the smaller South Asian countries as an attempt by India to transform its natural pre-eminence into an imposed predominance. More disconcerting was the fact that the extra-regional great powers – on whom the smaller countries banked so much – have shown a distinct unwillingness to challenge India within the region. In the circumstances, the smaller South Asian countries were deeply concerned that what happened with Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Nepal could be repeated with any other country. As a consequence, India’s relations with its neighbours deteriorated severely. Its authority in the region reached the lowest ebb. The worst victim of such an unhealthy atmosphere in the region became the emerging process of regional co-operation within the framework of SAARC.

However, India has been unable to translate its pre-eminence into predominance, while paying a high price for the

advanturist policy. The enormous costs incurred by India in terms of material and human resources to sustain its Sri Lanka adventure, the unhappy experience of deadlock in its relations with Nepal have brought, even during Rajiv Gandhi’s rule, a change in Indian mind. Influential circles in India came to realise that the prevailing situation of mistrust cannot be congenial for the long-standing interests of the country in the region. They became aware that Indian diplomacy has failed to display the wisdom, sophistication and caution as displayed by the previous generation of its leaders. In concrete terms, they have clearly realised that it is necessary to devise more sophisticated methods of exerting influence on the neighbours than employed against Sri Lanka or even Nepal.

During V. P. Singh’s rule, Indian regional posture underwent a process of change. The withdrawal of IPKF from Sri Lanka, a comparatively conciliatory approach towards Nepal and to a lesser extent towards Bangladesh were indicative of the new trend in Indian thinking. The crisis over the Babri Mosque issue and the subsequent developments, have reinvigorated the shift in Indian policy away from foreign adventure to domestic problems. Sharp division of the society along ethnic, linguistic, regional, religious as well as ideological lines and resultant violence painfully reiterated the fact that India is literally at war with itself. Any dramatic improvement in the domestic situation is unlikely and it would serve as a powerful restraint against foreign adventure.

The new trend in India’s regional behaviour was further facilitated by at least two factors. First is a remarkable change in Indian politics which begun with the 1989 elections which, for the first time in India, failed to produce a parliamentary majority. It is an important turning point in Indian history with consequences not only for its domestic politics but also for the country’s regional behaviour. Since the 1989 elections, Indian politics came to be seen as following what might be called an Italian model, or less benignly, an Indian version of the French Fourth Republic – a situation in which no single party commands a parliamentary majority and governments are formed in a pattern of shifting coalition. Such a situation has
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further been strengthened by the outcome of subsequent four elections to the national parliament held in 1991, 1996, 1998 and 1999. In the changed context, power is being shared not only within the ruling political parties and among the coalition partners but also with the opposition parties. Similarly, the influence of regional leaders on the centre is also in the increase. In the process, political and economic power in a highly centralised state is being decentralised gradually but effectively. In the changed political metrics, the emergence of an all-powerful leader capable of mobilising the necessary resources and public opinion at home for foreign adventure became less likely.

Second is the ongoing change in the world economy and its impact on India. Indian economy - a highly autarkic one with large-scale state owned enterprises - is going through an arduous process of economic liberalisation. In the process, the country is making a qualitative shift away from reliance on the state owned enterprises to that on the private sector ones. Thus, opportunities for private investment both domestic and foreign are being created while the activities of the state owned enterprises are being gradually curtailed. The country's longstanding protective trade regime is being liberalised opening its market to the outside world. The essence of the liberalisation program is to transform highly regulated Indian economy into one relying on the interaction of market forces. The process of economic liberalisation is marked by difficult challenges as well as tremendous opportunities. It is compelling India to concentrate much of its resources and energy on the fulfilment of the economic tasks. And this would live little room for abrasive foreign policy.

While these factors as discussed above, have put a considerable restraint on India's regional behaviour, particularly in terms of making attempts to transform its natural pre-eminence in the SAARC region into an imposed predominance, the ambitions remain very much alive and forceful attempts to fulfil them may revive at any juncture of history. It is particularly because of the fact that the current constraints as faced by India are not permanent, nor even long-standing.

Moreover, the success of the ongoing process of democratisation and economic liberalisation may further strengthen Indian polity and economy and, thus, make the country more capable of fulfilling its long-standing regional ambitions. Therefore, recent changes in Indian attitude towards the neighbours remain far from assuaging the deep-seated distrust and suspicion of smaller SAARC countries to their giant neighbour.

5.1.2 Indo-Pakistan Rivalry

While Muslim nationalism served as the *raison d'être* of Pakistan, Indian National Congress made efforts to thwart the partition of British India relying on secular nationalism. Conflict and rivalry between modern India and Pakistan are rooted in the partition of British India along the religious line in 1947, its aftermath and the socio-economic and politico-cultural developments under colonial rule, which led to the partition. Their birth was accompanied by a communal holocaust with some 800,000 casualties. Thus, both the countries inherited deep-seated suspicion, distrust and hostility towards each other which were further strengthened by the communal and/or ideological orientation of these two countries. As Barry Buzan has observed, "The organising principle of Pakistan threatens India with secessionism, while that of India threatens Pakistan with either dismemberment or absorption". Pakistani claim to Kashmir based on the same religious ground and India's attempt to retain that territory on the same ground of secularism coupled with a host of other disputes interpreted almost exclusively in the light of historical antagonism crystallised their adversary relationship to the extent that they came to consider each other as the enemy number one. Despite the persistence of numerous conflicts between ASEAN countries, it does not have, and never had, any parallel to Indo-Pakistan rivalry.

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Indo-Pakistan rivalry and the issues involved can not be explained by only referring to the rational aspects of relationship between the two countries. Their relations are considerably, at times even decisively, influenced by emotions deeply rooted in the bitter memories of the past. Thus, one of the main characteristic features of Indo-Pakistan rivalry is that historical antagonism revived in a politically relevant form has bred mutual contempt, but also fear and loathing, particularly in the Pakistani mind, eventuating in differences with India being made to fit the Hindu-Muslim social interaction paradigm. Probably this has prompted a distinguished Indian General to describe wars in South Asia as "communal riots with tanks". This may be an overstatement, however, all the three full-scale wars that the two countries have fought have had a religious undertone, particularly as seen through the eyes of Pakistan. It is despite the fact that the War of 1971 was certainly a secular venture, and as such it was viewed by the people of Bangladesh and, at least officially, also by India.

The corner stone of Pakistan's strategic thinking with regard to its rivalry with India was its desire to achieve parity in terms of military might vis-à-vis India. Its all endeavours were centred around this objective. Thus, since the early days of its existence, Pakistan made persistent and, at times, forceful attempts to achieve parity with India in terms of military might. Constrained by its comparatively small size and modest resources, Pakistan sought to achieve this objective through the cultivation of extra-regional linkages. It allied with the US in the Cold War by forging bilateral security linkages with the later as well as by joining US-sponsored military alliances, Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO). The US contribution to Pakistan's armament programme was, however, limited and very cautious. Being a potentially significant ally of the former Soviet Union in South Asia, India was deemed by the US too important to alienate and push deeper into Moscow's embrace. While China has been more liberal in arms and military technology transfer, its ability to change the correlation of forces in South Asia was limited. As a consequence, notwithstanding Pakistan's alliance relationship with the US and China, its objective of achieving

parity with India in terms of military might remained far from being fulfilled.

Meanwhile, the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 has decisively changed the correlation of forces in the region in favour of India increasing Pakistan's traditional sense of insecurity. Pakistan could have no hope of counterbalancing India's conventional military might. The test of a nuclear device by India in 1974 further reinforced Pakistan's sense of insecurity vis-à-vis New Delhi. More than that, Indian superiority in terms of conventional military might generated a siege mentality in Pakistan. India's conventional military superiority, as expressed by the former Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Agha Shahi, hangs over Pakistan like a permanent 'Sword of Damocles'. Thus, in search of an alternative to counterbalance India's unchallenged conventional military might and its growing nuclear programme, Pakistani strategic elite - principally upper echelons of the military and civil services - finally came to see the nuclear weapons as the only credible means to deter India and to rely on oneself for security.

The *raison d'être* behind India's nuclear programme is rather complicated. Because of its overwhelming preponderance in South Asia, India wants to see itself as the custodian of peace and security in the region. While it is an important factor and so is India's rivalry with Pakistan, the regional security scenario is not the central consideration that boosted India's nuclear programme. Even the formal argument that it faces security challenges or threats from nuclear China may be a crucial factor but not the only one. India also aspires to play a role in the big club and that is vividly manifested in her efforts aimed at securing a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

However, New Delhi remains, far from being an economic power capable of extending long-standing and meaningful influence over the regional countries, not to speak about the international system. It is also likely to remain the same


during the decades to come. It is in this backdrop that India had to rely significantly on military might as a means of achieving its strategic objective vis-à-vis the region as well as the world at large. And its nuclear programme remains a crucial component of its defence build-up. Indian analysts, Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik, however, consider the hardening of India’s nuclear posture as a result of changing self-perceptions. Implicit in this has been the idea that such a self-image has not been based on the realistic calculation of India’s strength. They have also asserted that India’s motives for going nuclear have been similar to those of France and Britain who went nuclear “for reasons much more strongly connected to considerations of nationalist grandeur and delusionary self-importance”. 86

Whether India’s self-image is real or delusionary is a matter of opinion. But the fact remains that India set the pace of the development of nuclear programmes in South Asia and a nuclear arms race gradually took shape in the region. One specific characteristic of this race has been the fact that while both the countries acquired the status of de facto nuclear powers by the 1980s, none of them formally made such a claim until May 11 and 13, 1998 when India tested the nuclear weapons again in Pokhran and Pakistan followed the suit on the 28th and 30th of the same month in Chagai.

While there has not been any full-scale war between them since 1971, there have been numerous border skirmishes, and not once, they appeared to be on the verge of war. The most important factor, their perceptions of each other as enemy number one remains basically the same. While nuclearisation has added a more dangerous dimension to Indo-Pakistan rivalry that the two countries will have to deal with, it has not changed the traditional security relationship for the better. In other words, even in the environment of nuclearisation, the threat of conventional war between India and Pakistan continues to persist as ever. This has been painfully revealed by the Kargil Crisis.87

86. See, Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik, "Is Nuclear Disarmament Still a Mirage?", development dialogue (Sweden), (No. 1, 1998), pp.29-30.
5.2 Territorial Disputes and Disputes over the Sharing of the Water of Common Rivers

The territorial disputes in the SAARC region like those in the ASEAN were mostly inherited from the colonial past. While the number of such disputes between SAARC countries is rather smaller than that between ASEAN countries, their impact on the inter-state relations, particularly on the ongoing process of regional co-operation in South Asia remains much greater. Because, bilateral mechanism for conflict management has never been effective which resulted in two major wars between India and Pakistan over contending territorial claims. And the danger of war is still persistent. Unlike in ASEAN region, maritime disputes among SAARC countries are still basically dormant, while disputes over the sharing of the waters of common rivers are highly intensive in SAARC. Therefore, along with the territorial disputes, disputes over the sharing of the waters of common rivers would also be discussed.

5.2.1 Indo-Pakistan Dispute over Kashmir

The dispute owes its origin to the partition of British India into Pakistan and modern India in 1947 that left the status of the princely states, including Kashmir, open as the rulers were given the option to remain independent or to accede to either India or Pakistan. The geopolitical circumstances virtually excluded the possibility of Kashmir remaining independent. In view of the prevailing communal acrimony in South Asia, India was in a rather advantageous position to court the Hindu Maharaja of Kashmir as he was highly fearful of his Muslim subjects. These coupled with a Pakistan-sponsored rebellion in Kashmir led the Maharaja to accede to India in October 1947 which was challenged by Pakistan on the ground that the act was against the will of the people of Kashmir. Pakistan and India fought a war in 1947-48, which led to the division of Kashmir between the two countries with India retaining the control over approximately two-thirds of the land and Pakistan over about one-third.

While a UN-mediated cease-fire was achieved and a *de facto* border came to exist on the actual Line of Control (LoC), Kashmir came to figure in the United Nations agenda as an unresolved dispute. On April 21, 1948, the UN Security Council with the consent of both the belligerents adopted a resolution, which envisaged that Kashmir's fate was to be decided by a plebiscite. The proposed plebiscite, however, was not held as Pakistan and India could never come to an agreement on how and under what circumstances a free and fair plebiscite could take place.

Subsequently India and Pakistan fought another war in 1965 over Kashmir, which ended in a UN-mediated cease-fire with no territorial gain for either side. Moreover, under the Soviet-mediated Tashkent agreement, both the countries agreed to settle the dispute peacefully. The Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, however, brought a change in the LoC in Kashmir with India occupying 500 square miles of the Pakistani part of Kashmir and Pakistan occupying 52 square miles of the Indian part of Kashmir and that was formalised in the Simla Agreement between the two countries.

Arguments, emotions, and the professed principles of both the sides over the Kashmir issue seem to have become irrevocable and the prospects for accommodation almost impossible. New Delhi considers the accession of Kashmir to India in 1947 as 'final and irrevocable'. It also does not recognise the validity of the UN Security Council resolution with regard to plebiscite any more. Considering the religious basis of partition, Pakistan continues to view the Kashmir issue as


'unfinished' partition'. Thus, it continues to insist that the future of Kashmir issue must be resolved in accordance with UN Security Council resolution calling for plebiscite. The third option, Kashmir to acquire an independent status, is, however, rejected by both the countries.

The resolution of Kashmir problem – the central issue in Indo-Pakistan conflict – is likely to continue to remain as illusive as ever. No possible combination of forces in power in New Delhi could afford to satisfy Pakistani claim on Kashmir. Even a humble Pakistan – defeated in 1971 – did not accept the Indian version of the resolution of the Kashmir issue: final division of the state between India and Pakistan along the LoC. Thus, the Kashmir problem is certain to persist for long time to come. Notwithstanding the humiliation suffered by Pakistan as a consequence of its Kargil misadventure, the situation is likely to remain the same. The elite in Pakistan is quite candid about this. Even in the wake of Kargil debacle, Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz asserted without any hesitation that, “if Kashmir is not resolved, there will be many more Kargils”.

Thus, Kashmir still remains the single-most vibrant source of large-scale war between India and Pakistan and the greatest threat to peace in the region. The issue has also, by implications, thwarted the progress of SAARC as Islamabad has repeatedly stated that it wants the Kashmir issue to be settled first before it allows a more naturally intimate relationship to develop with India.

5.2.2 Bangladesh-India Dispute over the Sharing of the Water of Common Rivers.


Bangladesh and India share two international river basins viz. the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. Both the basins exhibit a two-fold natural problem: too little water during the dry season and too much flood water during the monsoon. The average discharge of the Ganges is in excess of a million cusecs, which rises to two million cusecs in monsoons often creating severe flood problem for Bangladesh. In crucial dry season, i.e., January to May, particularly during mid-March to mid-May, the flow reduces to even 55,000 cusecs creating a severe shortage of water. In the circumstances, India constructed the Farakka Barrage with a view to diverting 40,000 cusecs of water from the Ganges to the Bhagirathi-Hoogli river through a feeder canal during leanest period leaving Bangladesh with only 15,000 cusecs of water. Thus, the dispute over the sharing of Ganges water was created which in course of time turned to be the most stumbling block in the way of co-operation between the two countries. Besides, Bangladesh and India shares 53 other common rivers in both the basins.

During the initial period of the emergence of Bangladesh, both the countries displayed a degree of sincerity as well as sensitivity to each other's interests. Both the sides agreed that any withdrawal of water has to be subject to an agreement. Pursuant to this decision, before the test-run of the feeder canal, the two sides reached in April 1975 a limited agreement on water sharing during the lean season under which India agreed to limit its withdrawal from 11,000 to 16,000 cusecs. This left Bangladesh with 38,000 to 44,000 cusecs of water.


98. Iftekharuzzaman, *op. cit.* , p.36.
Subsequently, Bangladesh suggested that the 1975 formula be continued and a joint study of the problem, as stipulated in the April 1975 agreement, be carried out. India was totally non-responsive which compelled Bangladesh to take the issue to the UN and other international forums. In 1977, another limited agreement was reached between the two countries only after nearly doubling India’s withdrawal authority from 11,000 to 16,000 cusecs range to 20,500 to 26,500 cusecs range. It was, however, agreed that in case of exceptionally low level of flows, Bangladesh would be guaranteed a minimum of 80 per cent of the volume earmarked for it in the schedule of allocation. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that was signed in October 1982, dropped the 80 per cent guarantee clause.\(^9\) Since 1986, there is no agreement between the two countries with regard to the sharing of the waters of the Ganges. This left Bangladesh at the mercy of India. At times in the early 1990s, its share dropped to mere 9,000 cusecs.\(^10\)

All these arrangements are of temporary nature. With regard to a permanent solution of the problem two concrete proposals were debated. First one mooted by Bangladesh envisages the building up of reservoirs in Nepal with a view to storing water during the monsoons to meet the need of dry season. India has vehemently opposed the idea and mooted a counter proposal, to build two water reservoirs in Arunachal Pradesh and to make a link canal from Jogighopa of Assam to a point near Farakka. The proposal was rejected by Bangladesh. Subsequently, both the parties persistently repeated their old stereo-typed arguments in the negotiation table with least or no preparedness to compromise with each other’s positions.

5.2.3 The Demarcation of Maritime Boundaries and the South Talpatty Issue

The maritime boundary between Bangladesh and India has not been demarcated. It has already given rise to a number of complex problems in their bilateral relations and the potential

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99. Ibid.

problems are beyond anybody's imagination. First such dispute arose when Bangladesh Government in 1974 entered into agreements with six foreign oil companies granting them oil and natural gas exploration rights in the coastal areas of the Bay of Bengal.\textsuperscript{101} India objected to the venture. Positions of the parties with regard to defining their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) diverge sharply. Bangladesh line moved southward from the edge of its land boundary, while the Indian line took a south-easterly direction, thus, creating an angle within which lie thousands of square miles of the Bay of Bengal claimed by both the countries as their EEZ.\textsuperscript{102} The issue remains unresolved.

Failure to settle the maritime boundary issue gave rise to a number of disputes in their bilateral relations. Foremost among them are the conflicting claims over the ownership of a newborn island in the estuary of the Haribhanga River on the border between the two countries. The island in Bangladesh is known as South Talpatty whereas in India as New Moore/Purbasha. Both the countries are bogged down in a protracted dispute over the ownership of the island since late-1970s. Over times, particularly during 1980-1981, the island came to be the focal point of tension between the two countries.

5.3 Intra-State Conflicts Involving Ethno-Religious Groups and their Cross-Border Reverberations

South Asia is a great melting pot \textit{albeit a queer} amalgam of religion, race, language, caste and ethnicity. Its religious and ethno-racial diversity is one of the most complex in the world. There are six main religions – Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism – subdivided into numerous, often conflicting, sects, hundreds of languages (including local dialects), scores of sub-national groups with distinct ethno-linguistic and cultural identity as well as countless tribal groups. Historically, such diversities served as a

\textsuperscript{101} For details, see, Chandrika J. Gulati, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.172.

\textsuperscript{102} M. Habibur Rahman, "Delimitation of Maritime Boundaries: Some Pertinent Issues for Bangladesh", in M. G. Kabir and Shaukat Hassan (eds.), \textit{op. cit.}, p.114.
fertile ground for multifarious conflicts in the society, on occasions, shattering it to its very foundation.

While in case of intra-state conflicts in South Asia also one should refer to colonial legacy, the magnitude, intensity and impact of contemporary conflicts are more a result of the post-colonial process of socio-economic and politico-cultural development in individual countries as well as the region as a whole. The process of development in the region was far less responsive to the needs of achieving national cohesion out of diverse loyalties. And this refers not only to the process of socio-economic development which exacerbated wide disparities in favour of 'ruling sub-national groups'. The political systems in South Asia also lack built-in mechanism to accommodate adequately the aspirations of the minorities.

One of the most significant aspects of intra-state violence over ethnic, linguistic and religious issues in the SAARC countries is that it often assumes inter-state character with cross-border implications resulting in the trans-border movement of refugees, dissidents and even arms. Main reason behind such a phenomenon is the fact that the ethnic, linguistic and religious bondage transcends national boundaries, and, as a result, such problems in one country create instant repercussions in another. In some cases, such problems have been connived or abetted from across the border with political motives. In others, failure to resolve intra-state conflicts gave rise to the perception of external threat. As a matter of fact, intra-state conflicts and their cross-border implications has been, and still remains, one of the dominant factors contributing to violent inter-state conflicts in South Asia. In comparative perspectives, intra-state conflicts in the SAARC region have much greater spill-over effects across the boundaries than those in the ASEAN region. A brief discussion would follow on some of those intra-state conflicts which have considerable cross-border repercussions.

5.3.1 Communal Tensions and Regional Co-operation

As already discussed, a bitter conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims led to the partition of the British India. The partition, however, did not resolve the Hindu-Muslim issue. The Muslims constitute about 11-12 percent of the population of
contemporary India, which is close to the total population of Pakistan or Bangladesh. While Pakistan's Hindu population is less than one percent, that of Bangladesh is about 10-11 percent. Communal relations in South Asia, Hindu-Muslim relations in particular, have always been difficult. Over the recent years, they have become highly conflict-prone with instances of large-scale violence.

Operating on the difficulties and failures faced by South Asian countries in their nation-building process, certain revivalist forces – both religious and nationalist – are coming to the forefront of political life. Among them, the forces championing religious fundamentalism have already gained considerable influence over the political processes. Religious fundamentalism in any society, particularly in South Asian ones, feeds primarily on chauvinism based on religious identity. Thus, in practice, the militancy of the fundamentalists is directed less against the sins of mankind than the people belonging to rival religious communities or political streams.

As a consequence, South Asia is witnessing communal violence with large-scale loss of life. During early-1990 and mid-1992, 2000 people were killed in Hindu-Muslim riots in India. The destruction of the Babri Mosque by the Hindu nationalists on December 6, 1992 and the subsequent orgy of violence have claimed 2,000-3,000 casualties. It is worth mentioning that close to 4000 people were killed in the communal riots during the 1980s, that is almost four times the figure for the preceding decade. In other words, the number of people killed in the Hindu-Muslim riots during the first two and half years of 1990s is more than that during the preceding two decades. All these are not without repercussions in the neighbouring countries. For instance, the destruction of Babri Mosque and subsequent orgy of violence have had instant repercussions in Pakistan and to a much lesser extent in

103. *Dawn*, January 26, 1992


Bangladesh. While such issues only rarely figure in official statements or bilateral talks, they considerably influence attitude, both at the popular as well as official levels, and more importantly, the environment of bilateral relations.

5.3.2 Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and Indian Involvement

As the South Asian experience shows, it is the intra-state conflicts involving territorially based minorities with cross-border affiliation that transform into inter-state ones easily and with far-reaching consequences. In this regard, a highly violent conflict between the Sinhalese dominated central authority in Sri Lanka and the country’s Tamil minority led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) stands the most prominent. The conflict itself was a product of the post-colonial process of the development of Sri Lankan economy, polity and society.\(^{106}\)

By the early 1980s, the conflict turned highly violent and both the parties were ruthless to each other. Because of cross-border affiliation the conflict have had sever repercussions in the Indian state of Tamilnadu. In the period between July 1983 to April 1984 about 50,000 refugees sought asylum in Tamilnadu. By July 1987, the number increased to about 150,000. Due to high degree of sympathy for the Sri Lankan Tamils in Tamilnadu, in Southern India, and for that matter, in New Delhi, Tamil militants also found in India safe sanctuary, training, money and arms.\(^{107}\)

Thus, from the very beginning of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, India became involved in it, which intensified along with the intensification of the conflict. Apart from India’s predicaments as faced due to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka,

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India has also viewed the developments in and around Sri Lanka through the prism of the India Doctrine. Even in 1983, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi asserted that, “India could not be regarded as just another country as every development in Sri Lanka affect India also”. Under Rajiv Gandhi, India began to involve itself in the conflict more and more directly, particularly with the intensification of the conflict as Colombo was rapidly moving towards a military solution.

Thus in June 1987, India began to send 'relief materials' to the Tamils in Sri Lanka, initially by sea and then by air, without the consent of Colombo. This policy reached its peak when on 29 July 1987, India compelled President Jayewardene to sign an accord wherein he invited an Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to help resolve the ethnic conflict. This, however, instead of resolving, further complicated the conflict and significantly increased the stakes of the parties involved, particularly that of India. Soon, India became bogged down in bloody encounters with LTTE. As the conflict scenario in Sri Lanka became more complicated, Indian policy became an object of intense criticism at home. It also caused considerable embarrassment to India abroad, when SAARC failed to hold its Fifth Summit in 1989 due to Indo-Sri Lankan dispute over the Tamil issue and the presence of IPKF in Sri Lanka. All these led V. P. Singh, who assumed office as the Prime Minister of India in December 1989, to withdraw the IPKF from Sri Lanka by March 1990. India left not only the Sinhalese, but also the Sri Lankan Tamils, severely aggrieved which ultimately led to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by LTTE in May 1991.

5.3.3 Ethnic Problems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Role of India

In terms of ethnic composition, Bangladesh is the most homogenous of the states of South Asia. Almost 99 per cent of the population are made up of Bengalis. Nonetheless, since its independence in 1971, the country has been facing


considerable problems in integrating its ethnic minorities to the national mainstream. These minority communities (about thirteen ethnic groups), constitute less than 1 per cent of the total population and are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) - a hilly, sylvan territory covering about 9 per cent of the total area of Bangladesh. For centuries, these tribal people were living in isolation in the CHT area.

However, a complex web of reasons, like, relative exposure of the tribal people to education and modernisation, and political turmoil during the last years of Pakistani rule, their failure to support the Liberation War *en masse* and its aftermath, disturbance in the traditional mode of agricultural production, and the fear of the loss of identity generated an upsurge in their political consciousness and the sense of deprivation. Lack of mutual understanding, sensitivity to each other's interests and moderation between the tribal people and the central government coupled with intransigence on the part of both the sides transformed a usual problem of nation building into an ethnic conflict. Since late-1970s, sporadic armed clashes with varied degree of intensity are taking place between government troops and the members of *Shanti Bahini* (Peace Corps) - the armed wing of the *Parbatra Chatragram Jana Sanghaty Samity* (PCJSS). The problem is very much similar to most other ethnic conflicts in South Asian countries emanating from the assertion of ethnic identity by the tribal people. It has, however, never been as serious as those suffered by India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

While it is true that the mechanism of conflict management and conflict resolution has not been very much effective and serious miscalculations were made and gross mistakes were committed by both the parties involved in the conflict, it is also equally true that Bangladesh's quest for finding out a solution to its ethnic problem has been seriously complicated by overt and covert involvement of India in the problem. Indian involvement in the ethnic turmoil in CHT has largely been clandestine. Ethnic people who fled to India found shelter in the officially sponsored refugee camps. While providing the Shanti Bahini insurgents with sanctuary, training and military assistance, India did it covertly. As a consequence, ethnic problem in the CHT area, right from its violent manifestation, has been a serious bone of contention in Bangladesh-India
relations. The issue has been raised in almost every meeting between the two countries at various levels where contentious bilateral issues were included in the agenda. The opportunity of candid discussion on the problem and a sincere quest for its resolution has always been restrained due to the clandestine nature of Indian involvement.

5.3.4 Bangladesh-Pakistan Dispute over the Repatriation of Stranded Pakistanis

A recent survey conducted by Pakistan has found that at least 238,000 stranded Pakistanis live in Bangladesh. Each time, following the meeting between the leaders or officials of the two countries, hopes were raised for a solution to the problem. Such hopes, however, never came true and the issue was left to uncertainty. More importantly, the pattern of behaviour as displayed by Pakistan suggests that it is trying to develop relations with Bangladesh without resolving the outstanding issues.

Meanwhile, the stranded Pakistanis are living in Bangladesh, primarily in the cities, creating a host of additional problems with regard to employment, housing, law and order situation, and the like. More importantly, despite their allegiance to Pakistan as citizens of that country, they are living in Bangladesh for decades. In the absence of any effective diplomatic measures, they are likely to live in Bangladesh in the foreseeable future. This makes them a potentially destabilising factor. The problem was further complicated with Pakistan's continuous attempts to push Pakistani citizens of Bengali origin back to Bangladesh. More ominous, the pattern of behaviour as displayed by Pakistan suggests that it is trying to link the issue with the repatriation of stranded Pakistanis from Bangladesh.

Besides, some other intra-state conflicts in the SAARC region are also conceived with spill-over effects across the border. India, for instance, continuously alleges that Pakistan is supporting the Sikh separatist movement. In turn, Pakistan


111. See, Ibid.
conflict claims that India is supporting the Sindhi separatist movement.\textsuperscript{112}

A potentially explosive conflict is being broiled-up between Nepal and Bhutan over the large-scale influx of Nepalese to Bhutan and the treatment of the minorities of Nepalese origin by the authorities in that country. As some reports suggest, being panicked by the results of the 1988 census which showed that immigrants from neighbouring countries threatened to outnumber the indigenous Bhutanese, the government in Thimphu launched a policy known as \textit{Driglam Namzha}. The policy is designed to 'Bhutanise' the non-Bhutanese ethnic groups through, among others, the imposition of the Bhutanese national language Dzongkha and the traditional Bhutanese dress on them.\textsuperscript{113} Moreover, between 10,000 to 100,000 people were classified as non-nationals.\textsuperscript{114} All these have led to the cross-border movement of political dissidents, refugees and arms.\textsuperscript{115} The issue has already transformed into a source of considerable tension in relations between Nepal and Bhutan.

In comparative perspective, intra-state conflicts involving ethno-religious groups with cross-border affiliation in the SAARC region are much more numerous and intransigent, and also involve much higher degree of violence than those in the ASEAN region. As a matter of fact, such conflicts in the ASEAN region remains, by and large, in the stage of de-escalation, while those in the SAARC region are mostly either stagnated or in the stage of escalation. Moreover, in the SAARC region, potential intra-state conflicts involving diverse ethno-religious groups with prospects for cross-border spill-over effects are much more numerous than in the ASEAN region.

One of the main characteristic features of bilateral disputes in South Asia is the fact that virtually all of them are Indo-centric. Each of them involves India, on the one hand, and


\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Asiaweek}, December 13, 1996, p.41.

any other country, on the other. The only remarkable exceptions are the disputes between Bangladesh and Pakistan over the sharing of common assets and the repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis and the dispute between Nepal and Bhutan over the treatment of the minorities of Nepalese origin in Bhutan. The only commonly acceptable explanation for this may be the fact that all South Asian countries share a common border with India but with no other regional country.

Inter-state relations in South Asia have been shaped under the influence of a host of historical, geographical, ecological, socio-economic and politico-cultural factors of highly contradictory nature. While some of them warranted close ties, others dictated a distant approach. In addition, some factors, while creating high degree of interdependence between or among nations, also generate almost irreconcilable conflict of interests. The emergence of disputes in inter-state relations in the region, therefore, can be viewed as natural or even inevitable. Nonetheless, the persistence of all these disputes creating such a crisis of confidence in regional politics for so many years and with no solution in sight looks bizarre.