THE CHALLENGES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND THE QUEST FOR ENGENDERING PEACE: A STUDY OF THE SOUTH ASIAN REGIONAL MATRIX

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ABSTRACT

The region of South Asia has been one of the most strategically relevant, and at the same time, vulnerable, in the realms of International Politics. The most profound factor which has perhaps underlined the entire concept of regionalism in the subcontinent has been India's overarching presence, and the 'fear psychosis 'generated in the minds of her smaller neighbors The simmering tensions in the anvil of the region has also impeded the progress of the regional institution, the SAARC. And, without a doubt, it is India's relations with her neighbors, which has been the catalyst in determining the various contours of the politico-economic-socio-cultural-institutional framework in the subcontinent. The present study seeks to analyze the nature, functioning and the institutional reformulation of the SAARC, and thereby seek to recommend measures that can be utilized for diluting the sources of conflict and ink/sketch a better and durable future course for South Asian regionalism. The paper researches the typical Track-I solutions that have been and can be utilized for conflict resolution and be cementing peace and stability in the region and augment the spirit of regionalism in South Asia. In the last part, the paper analyses the prospects of Track IV/V methods of alternative diplomatic initiatives, especially the possible role of media images and citizen diplomacy etc in engendering durable peace or at least attempt to seek a way out of the perenniality of conflict in the South Asian region.

*The paper enquires into the role of media images in the context of South Asian regionalism, and the inherent anti-Indianism and perenniality of conflict in the region especially harping on the prospective alternative role of media and citizen diplomacy and Track IV/V diplomatic initiatives and their viability in the betterment of the same. The **research question** is whether media images can act as a platform for citizen diplomacy, how it can play a better integrative role than already attempted Track-I/II endeavours and initiate peace initiatives, step-by-step, with the NGOs, Women's Groups etc working in tandem, in order to smoothen political rigidities, reduce trust deficit, breed spirit of cooperation, connect with the people across the borders.*

KEYWORDS: *Regionalism, Indian Subcontinent, Conflict-Cooperation Dichotomy, India's 'Hegemony', Policy toward its Neighbours, SAARC, Media and Citizen Diplomacy, Aman Ki Asha, Romancing the Border, SAFMA*

INTRODUCTION

The Asian resurgence has been one of the most significant developments of our times. It has been reiterated time and again that the 21st century would emerge as the Asian Century, just as the 20th century was the American Century, and the 19th was the European Century. By 2050, China is expected to be the world's largest economy, with India as a close second. By then Asia may be the home to seven of the world's largest economies.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), has projected Asia as a region that will achieve an average growth rate of 7% in 2014-2015 period, as compared to the global economic growth forecast of 3.3%.[i] South **Asia** presents quite a picture in contrast. It has for decades, languished in a position of relative underdevelopment, and the dependence on external powers for aid and succor. The dawn of the new millennium had presented a real opportunity to South Asia, *to build a new century of cooperative security, breaking away from the debilitating past of South Asian competitive security framework.* Essentially, over the past fifty years or so, the region had been held hostage to the vagaries of super-power rivalries and intransigent, inter-state conflicts. *However, recent changes in the international environment, and more precisely, changes in the region, have created the atmosphere of ushering in new peace and security trajectories, which are more in tune with the demands of development politics*. Indubitably, in spite of the apparent lack of development and multi-faceted progress, and South Asia's perceived lack of capability and foresight to deal with the multitude of crises, one cannot deny the fact that the urge to come together, and the fire to *bind themselves in a single cohesive identity*, had indeed been burning strongly in the hearts of the people of the region. This brings us to the focal point of this research paper.

The main objective of this paper is —to study and interpret how the various schools of thought have conceptualized the notion of regional cooperation, how the SAARC fits into the paradigm, and what, if any, has been the fallout of India's relations with her neighbours in determining the pace of the regionalism in South Asia. The main **hypothesis** of the paper is that South Asian regionalism is stunted in a region mired in *perennial conflict* (inter as well as intra-state disputes) with *Indo-centricity* being a geopolitical feature of the region getting translated into congenital *anti-Indianism*, trust-deficit that arrests the spirit of regionalism from fostering. **The Study Area** would seek to focus on how the SAARC has been held hostage to the intractable relations among the members, and whether a true way out can be envisaged from the impasse. For **academic and scholarly interest,** this study would like to contribute and prescribe certain ways and means for achieving the desires and aspirations lying nascent in the SAARC. These ways and means might be able to solve the "real" problems which have hampered the progress of regional integration in South Asia. Hence, **a theory-building approach along with policy prescriptions**, are the significant endeavors of the present study. The present study seeks to analyze the nature, functioning and the institutional reformulation of the SAARC, and thereby seek to recommend measures that can be utilized for diluting the sources of conflict and ink/sketch a better and durable future course for South Asian regionalism. The paper researches the typical Track-I solutions that has been and can be utilized for conflict resolution and be cementing peace and stability in the region and augment the spirit of regionalism in South Asia. In the last part, the paper analyses the prospects of Track IV/V methods of alternative diplomatic initiatives, especially the possible role of media images and citizen diplomacy etc in engendering durable peace or at least attempt to seek a way out of the perenniality of conflict in the South Asian region.

The paper inquires into the role of media images in the context of South Asian regionalism, and the inherent anti-Indianism and perenniality of conflict in the region especially harping on the prospective alternative role of media and citizen diplomacy and Track IV/V diplomatic initiatives and their viability in the betterment of the same. The research **question** is whether media images can act as a platform for citizen diplomacy, how it can play a better integrative role than already attempted Track-I/II endeavours and initiate peace initiatives, step-by-step, with the NGOs, Women's Groups etc working in tandem, in order to smoothen political rigidities, reduce trust deficit, breed spirit of cooperation, connect with the people across the borders.

Research Method: The Project Research Paper is based on aggregate data analysis(both qualitative and quantitative data) acquired from both primary and secondary sources and also follows the historical method as well as the case study method

Theoretical Perspectives Utilized: The paper uses theoretical underpinnings of Political Realism in explaining the perenniality of conflict in the South Asian region. It utilizes theories of regional integration like Functionalism, Neo-Functionalism to explain the dynamics of regional integration. It also utilizes insights from John Galtung's concept of 'Peace Journalism' and also the Constructivist ideas of identity , norms, values, human ideas and their potential in weaving connectivity, people-to-people contact, utilizing the potential for human agency, human interface , human interaction, exchange of ideas, citizen diplomacy and thereby sketching possible alternative paths to peace in the region.

The South Asian Paradox-A REGION WITHOUT REGIONALISM?

In this context, we must concentrate on the gradual emergence of the modern region of South Asia, which is traditionally known as the Indian subcontinent. The Indian subcontinent, or the region of South Asia has existed as a regional space, since pre-modern history. Since ancient times, and until the British period, the small principalities and the big empires of the region had a history of interdependence. Thus, the Indian subcontinent had developed as a regional complex, even before the colonial period. The British rule consolidated much of its divergent localities and postulated the concept of the British Empire. *The current political map of South Asia began to evolve in the early 20th century* and South Asia gradually evolved into the insular post-colonial state system. **At this juncture, it would be prudent to examine the geographical, demographic and financial contours of modern-day South Asia.** With an area of 5.1 million sq.km., the region has a population of approximately 1.8 billion (2014 estimates), with the highest density of 305 people / sq. km. South Asia's population, constituting more than 30% of the world's population, offers a formidable demographic challenge*, it has more than 40% of the population living below the poverty line*, with barely 55% adult literacy rate. Shockingly, enough, South Asia covers 3.8% of land area in the world, but its total GDP is only 2% of the world's total output. Similarly, the average per capita income of South Asia in 2014 has been considerably lower than even that of sub -Saharan Africa, and by a clear margin.

The main features of South Asian Region may be summarized

Indo-centricity and its transcendence to the levels of a perceived imaging of India as a hegemonic power generating a 'fear psychosis' among the smaller neighbors and catalyzing a strong sentiment of anti-Indianism.

Post Colonial Nature of the Region

- The nation-building process remains incomplete whereas the state-formation process has been a colonial/western construct-suitability of western institutions and processes remain questionable, competing/conflicting forces of nationalism remain active, ethnic-nationalistic forces unleashed

- It represents an ethnic mosaic with several ethnic groups in mutual contestation in order to preserve their ethnic identities

- Lack of the potential to build an effective security community due to the lack of common security perceptions.

- Prevalence of Inter-state and intra-state disputes.

- Lack of a regional identity or failure to evolve a regional identity.

- Failure to institute regional economic cooperation/ economic interdependence.

The forces of regionalism have been arrested due to the prevalence of politics. The SAARC has been a victim of these acute realities facing the South Asian Region.

In such a backdrop, the paper seeks to analyze the geopolitical dynamics of South Asia and enquires into why regionalism has a chequered history in the same context. The Indo-centric nature of South Asian Region-how Indo-centricity has virtually translated into congenital anti-Indians(smaller-neighbor syndrome-perception of India as hegemonic power).

There has been a failure to evolve a regional identity-trust-deficit-lack of a vision of South Asian Union-prevalence of inter-state disputes. SAARC has been a victim of South Asian political realities-inability to function as a conflict-resolution mechanism -SAARC Summits rebuked as a mere a 'talking shop'. Because of Charter limitations, there is a noted inability to deliberate and decide on important regional issues.

Despite the SAPTA and SAFTA regional trade remained below 5%.no concrete plan for cooperation for establishing a regional energy grid. Lack of common security perception-inability to build a security community. SAARC level initiatives lack proper and viable implementation mechanisms. An economic or communitarian vision of regionalism in South Asia is being held hostage to the salience of power politics. The asymmetric power relations in the sub-continent evoke a fractured perception of security which, in the absence of a common external threat, impedes the growth 0f a security community.

Lack of consensual idea of security-SAARC unable to transcend the competitive security dynamics through a cooperative framework that could encourage peaceful modes of conflict resolution.

SAARC forum has been used by smaller neighbors as an institutionalized platform –a buffer against perceived India's hegemonism. For India, it has been the forum to prevent - powers influence. SAARC experienced only limited growth in terms of institutional development and programmed implementation. SAARC has been unable to forge a comprehensive, viable and realistic South Asian cooperative space. South Asia is unable to transcend its self-identity or rather, it fails to evolve a regional-level identity. South Asian states employ distinctive nation-building projects based on territorialized state-centric identities, and despite the onset of globalization and unleashing of market-based economic liberalization policies in South Asia, territorialized and statist identities have not lost out to new forms of transcendent /fragmented identities.

Hence, the region of South Asia, for all practical purposes, emerged as a developing region facing the challenges that have stemmed not only from the demographic explosion but also from the compulsions of economic development. *The one concrete step necessary for mitigating such divergences has to be the evolution of an integrated regional framework.* Geographical contiguity of the member-countries is the cornerstone for the formation of regional blocs, consequently people in a region have a sense of belonging and nostalgia for their respective regional frame works . E.U is for the Europeans, ASEAN for the South East Asians, so is the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), for South Asians. South Asia is also marked by the presence of cross-border similarities on traditions, customs, and languages in South Asia; and hence the countries of the region have ostensibly come closer to each other, in terms of

culture, ethnicity and religion.[ii] [5] In the context of South Asia being perceived as a 'geo-strategic, geo-economic unit', what matters much more the relative efforts at cooperation. *When globalization has set forth both opportunities and challenges, there is a need for the revival of commonality among people of South Asia, as has emerged in both Europe and South East Asia.*

Building Bridges: Attempts at Reconciliation

The success of any regional enterprise is primarily based on **the twin pillars of**—coordination among the concerned member-states; and their determination to make a success of their organization, come what may. One must make a concerted attempt to analyze the success-failure ratio of the SAARC—the regional organization of SOUT Asia in the light of these parameters. Without a doubt, compared to the E.U. The ASEAN, The APEC, the OPEC-OAPEC, all of which have tasted supreme success and some vestiges of failure in varying degrees, the SAARC has virtually failed to take off.[iii] A definite reason for this moribund state can be attributed to the prevailing discordant nature of inter member-countries' relations in the region. *The gradual losing sight of the combined, unified goal of regional prosperity and development has been largely responsible too.* In order to succeed, harmonious, cordial relations among the components are a must. **And this is where the focus should be absolutely on fostering sustained and ever-expanding ties between the members.** Given the tenuous circumstances in South Asia, in order to ensure regional cooperation in this area, both the major incumbents—India and Pakistan—have to show their complete commitment for resolving their protracted disputes, and unite into a cohesive whole. *The Islamabad Declaration, following the 12th SAARC Summit of 2004, is a truly remarkable landmark in the field of ensuring economic cooperation in the region. This Declaration gave a tremendous fillip to the necessity of creating a SAPTA (South Asian Preferential Trading Agreement) and the SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Area), thereby reiterating the absolute inevitability of giving precedence to economic considerations.*

This actually laid the foundation stone for **building a bridge** to tide over the shortcomings in the anvil of the relations among the members of the SAARC.

As usual, the onus is on India, to bring the divergent elements together and work towards realizing the dream of creation of a unified, collaborative enterprise—the SAARC. India has to dispel all doubts regarding her true intentions and instill a sense of profound confidence in the minds and hearts of her compatriot nations in the SAARC. The basic argument postulated by several academicians is that regionalism in South Asia remains hostage to 'protecting the national identity' and 'defending the national interests' 'preserving the sanctity of national borders' and 'safeguarding the national security'. *It must be the avowed principle of each and every state in the region to break the shackles of recalcitrance and come together for the success of the regional enterprise.*

The paper attempts to envision a viable and realistic future for South Asian regionalism. It suggests a few typically recommended steps

- Recognising The Importance of India's leadership

- Finding a potential solution to the Kashmir dispute

- Exploring the Possibilities of establishing a South Asian Regional Forum

- Promoting Regional Identity

- Initiating realistic and incremental goals to forge cooperation and then attempt integrative efforts

- Increasing connectivity and boosting intra-regional trade.

- Energy cooperation

- Inclusion of Observers

- Charter revision

- Building 'engines' of regional cooperation like the SADF, joint projects, energy grids, transportation corridors, monetary cooperation

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Neighborhood First' Diplomatic Initiative and South Asian Regionalism

The question remains whether the inception of Narendra Modi as the Indian Prime Minister in 2014 has brought any effective, real and positive changes in India's policy towards her South Asian neighbors. In the context of an Indo-centric South Asian region, India may be conceptualized as a pre-eminent yet 'reluctant' power, strong in the capability quotient but lacking the attitude and aspiration and the Endeavor to stamp assertively its dominance in the region. India's immediate neighborhood policy seems to reflect such a lack of an attitude identifiable with an emerging power in the contemporary world order. In the interplay between Realism and Idealism in the realm of Indian foreign policy, pragmatism and hard-core realism have often been arrested by an adherence to the inherent idealistic culture of peace, non-violence, open diplomacy and adherence to moral norms, and reluctance to project hard power in the astute military sense of the term.

The paper analyzes the contemporary directions of the so-called 'proactive' initiatives of PM Modi and whether that can signal a turnaround in the context of India's relations with South Asian neighbours, in a pervasive spirit of pragmatic Realism. Modi's 'neighborhood first' policy of actively engaging the south asian neighbors as the first step towards working to engage an extended neighborhood also included initial positive overtures towards Pakistan. It can be asserted that the *progress of South Asian regionalism has often been deterred due to the volatility of relations between two of the frontline states-India and Pakistan.* Modi's early initiatives generated a euphoria that the situation may improve. But as the 'march towards a composite and comprehensive dialogue' were slowly progressing, they were cut short due to the Pathankot attacks, followed by attacks on army bases in Uri and Nagrota. Modi initiated a somewhat tit-for-tat tactic in unleashing the counter-offensive Surgical Strikes, threatened to revoke the 1960 Indus Water Treaty, the MFN status given to Pakistan and took the issue of Pakistan as a state that sponsors terrorism, to global quarters in order to brand Pakistan's image, negatively, as a terror-sponsoring state. Hence India and Pakistan, despite Modi's proactivist foreign policy initiatives, still stand on a road to nowhere, if one considers the prospects of a government-level, politically mediated and diplomatic solution to the problem—the road is, as it has been in the past, virtually blocked.

Alternative Paths towards Building Durable Peace in South Asia

The state of India-Pakistan relations reflects negatively on the platform of South Asian regionalism. Efforts at resolving disputes at the Track-I /II levels have been suggested, experimented, tested tried time and again but has not

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yielded desirable results. Hence, the question to be researched is what can be alternative route/path to resolve disputes, conflict-transformation, conflict-reduction , building confidence among the states mired in animosity and conflict, reduce trust-deficit, that can ultimately lead to effective conflict resolution and build bridges of trust , cooperation, shared perceptions upon which the road to durable and effective peace can be engendered.

The paper, in such a backdrop, enquires into the role of media images in the context of India-Pakistan relations, especially harping on the prospective alternative role of media and citizen diplomacy and Track IV diplomatic initiatives and their viability in the betterment of the same. The research question is whether media images can act as a platform for citizen diplomacy, how it can play an integrative role and initiate peace initiatives, step-by-step, with the NGOs, Women's Groups etc working in tandem, in order to smoothen political rigidities, reduce trust deficit, breed spirit of cooperation, connect with the people across the borders

Media Images in IR and Citizen Diplomacy

Media Images in IR

Media portrayals of several issues in the form of reports, commentaries, analysis etc represent a sort of mediated reality rather than an objective reality. These images impact on common people as well as the elites, the decision-makers. Hence, media images can influence the foreign policy-making process and thereby interests both students of media studies and IR per se.

Citizen Diplomacy

Joseph Montviile (**1981**) **defined Citizen Diplomacy**[1] **as** *"unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations which aim to develop strategies, influence public opinion and organize human and material resources in ways that might help to resolve their conflict."*

- The power in citizen diplomacy lies with people, who are in no way associated with the government or any power position. These are the people who are viewed as the least important stakeholders in bringing about a change in antagonistic relations.

- The capacity of citizen diplomacy lies in building trust and confidence among rival populations who have long been fed with hatred and distrust of the 'other'.

- A process of questioning stereotypes and enemy images can be initiated by citizen interactions between populations who have kept away from each other for reasons that are at best political.

- The possibility of direct contact, personal experience and humanizing the 'other' is offered only by citizen diplomacy whereas official diplomatic energies are aimed at asserting political and military superiority over the 'other'.

Media and Citizen Diplomacy

- As a venue for citizen diplomacy, the media can be used as a forum to air alternative points of view which may

not be possible in media exchanges conducted by regimes. The limitations and constraints of such interactions can be overcome through the interactive model. Citizen diplomats working through the media can also play the role of citizen journalists in their respective countries disseminating truthful and accurate information about the 'other' side (Social media termed citizens' diplomacy, 2012).

- For improved relations between rivals, it is essential that the engagement with the 'other' is not state-driven but 'people-driven'. This gives a better chance of improvement in relations as media's 'soft power'[2] can be aptly utilized by citizen diplomats.

South Asian military and security complex revolve around the bitter and entangled conflict between estranged neighbors – India and Pakistan. Brighter prospects for a South Asian century are difficult to realize unless the two countries reconcile their differences and agree to prosper in peace. Among all the levels of diplomatic relations between the two, Citizen Diplomacy (CD) is the most significant but the least practiced. This is because the India-Pakistan conflict is more a battle of perceptions in which governments try to outdo the 'other'. It is in this context that the paper scrutinizes the role of mainstream media in building confidence and promoting better relations. Research has proved that the role of media in inter-state conflict is nationalistic, jingoistic and populist. Media become the purveyor of hatred when they actually possess the potential to facilitate peace and cooperation. Both the mainstream media and processes of Citizen Diplomacy can synergize to alter state-centric perceptions of conflict. *Media can serve as an excellent avenue for Citizen Diplomacy.* Through the communications media, citizens of both countries can meet, exchange views, hear the unheard and witness the unseen. It is imperative for Citizen Diplomacy to effectively utilize the platform provided by media to positively transmit ideas and cultures across the border, to shatter prejudices and to debunk myths that contribute to the perpetuation of conflict. By employing the case study method, three key 'media peace initiatives' in different mediums like the press and online media have been examined. These initiatives present a collaborative effort between the media of the two states. One may examine a 'media institution' which represents institutionalization of media exchanges between the two states. *To study these novel initiatives, theoretical inspiration is sought from Johan Galtung's 'Peace Journalism' Model.* One can challenge the notion that the media can only be warmongers. Media can work as facilitators of Citizen Diplomacy and arrange for a wider network of citizen exchanges and interaction to take the cause of sub-continental peace ahead.

While *'Aman Ki Asha'* is a joint peace initiative of the two largest selling newspapers of India and Pakistan; *Romancing the Border* (RTB) is an online initiative on Facebook that attempts to establish connections among young Indians and Pakistanis. SAFMA – South Asian Free Media Association is an institution that works for media exchange and interaction in South Asia.

These case accounts are used to reinstate the fact that the media can and must become an active forum for citizen diplomacy if the frequency of interaction and communication among Indians and Pakistanis is to be encouraged and sustained in an atmosphere of distrust and hostility. Media ventures like the ones mentioned above are based on the model of *'Peace Journalism'* propounded by *Johan Galtung*[iv]. The concept of peace journalism works on the premise that the media should adopt the high road while reporting a conflict and pay more attention to the causes of discord and violence rather than violent events.

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In the year 2010, **South Asian Free Media Association**, a mainstream media body devoted to freedom of expression and access to information in South Asia celebrated ten years of its existence. It was established with the two - fold objectives of:

- Media development, free flow of and access to information and a free, professionally competent, unbiased and independent media in the region.

- Promote a culture of dialogue and an environment for understanding, tolerance, peace, conflict resolution and cross-border cooperation leading towards a South Asian Union.

- SAFMA's objectives are limited to creating a conducive atmosphere for the media in South Asia to work in an environment free from political and social barriers that are a part of the South Asian security complex. However, as an institutionalized forum for media exchange, the power of SAFMA has not been utilized to effect in building people to people contacts. The credibility which SAFMA has established in all the years of its operations in South Asia should not be let off without using it to create a forum for common people on both sides to visit and get to know the 'other'.

A number of criticisms are leveled at the media's role in citizen diplomacy. There is no dearth of forums encouraging people to people contact between Indians and Pakistanis, even though such existing mechanisms have not been able to function effectively. During a security situation, will the media continue to be a platform for citizen diplomacy or will it portray a state-centric view? Again the question remains, whether these avenues can be utilized in the context of India's relations with her other neighbors.

There is no doubt that people to people contacts will enhance regional cooperation in South Asia. With the explosion of the media in this region, it is suitable to utilize its potential for citizen diplomacy. However, the media's role has to go beyond virtual exchanges; to be harnessed to let people actually meet the 'other'. Media's role in citizen diplomacy may help to negate the adverse impact that official diplomacy has on relations with the two nations. Since social media messages on twitter and facebook go viral; the mediums can create a network of professionals on both sides of the border. Citizen diplomacy via the media is thus an informal attempt at improving formal political and diplomatic relations. Of course, in the case of India and Pakistan, even the role of the media has been observed to remain hostage to inter-state relations. Citizen **Films, New Social Media-Mediated Reality**

Even films, television programmes, new social media can be utilized as avenues in this context. Films like Bajrangi Bhaijaan, Veer Zara, and Filmistan showcased Indo-Pakistan solidarity as mediated reality. The culture of peace can we be woven as a mediated reality first and then translated into effective governmental-level efforts. Popular opinion needs to be generated which can act as stimulants in the realms of decision-making at the top levels of govt.

Mediated reality needs to be translated into effective real steps towards designing policies at the Track-I levels from which peace can be engendered in the region. The road to peace in South Asia apparently seems deadlocked with political factors being the arresting notion, yet the endeavors towards taking small and honest steps towards peace-building and overall stability of the region should be continued with.

CONCLUSIONS

Looking Ahead: The Visions of a Better Future

In the final analysis, there remains no doubt as to how the SAARC should move forward towards realizing its basic objectives. For decades, regional cooperation in South Asia has been plagued by a host of malaise, most prominent among them being the nature of India-Pakistan relations. Thus initiatives must be taken to achieve a comprehensive breakthrough in the age-old hostilities between the two South Asia. Similarly, all attempts must be made to resolve all the outstanding bilateral disputes among the member-states of the SAARC, so that regional cooperation can proceed at a brisk pace. Political stability in the South Asian region and the satisfactory resolution of all the complex issues are important prerequisites for the effective functioning of the SAARC. This can be facilitated if the vision of a *South Asian Community* based on peaceful coexistence, economic cooperation, religious tolerance, and cultural understanding can be realized by the people and governments of the region. Simultaneous action is necessary for consolidating functional cooperation, functional cooperation, for strengthening economic collaboration within the framework of the SAARC, and for political dialogues necessary for ensuring agreement on the agreement on the principles and objectives, and for conflict resolution. *Economic considerations must take precedence when hard-core politics cannot achieve the desired goals.* And only with such concrete efforts, can the prospect of regional cooperation be realized.

The future of South Asia has to be written by the South Asian societies rather than by the states which are mired in conflict. Reflecting on the above the paper argues that there may be a clarion callfor the civil-society-sector linkages, citizen diplomacy, people-to-people contact that can somewhat soothed the rigidities prevailing at the political, elite-levels, , to come forward in furthering the future of a region so immense in its potentialities-connectivity. The media, both traditional and new media can act as cementing forces, its conflict-transformation and peace-building potential can be positively harnessed with a positive mindset. Academicians and specialists working in this area can also come up with some positive discourses –can act as harbingers of new ideas that can foster the spirit of cooperation and strive to build bridges of connectivity-a requiem for peace and conflict resolution among the two frontline states of South Asia.

- In terms of spatiality, in the South Asian Region, three types of spaces can be envisaged-Statist/elitist/ political space/rigid borders symbolizing divisions among countries/political rigidities at elitist levels(space-1)

- Mediated space(space-2)

- In between these two layers a convergent spaces(space-3) can be possibly constructed/envisaged-a space for civil-society sector linkages

- That can strive to act as drivers of integration, peace-building, conflict-transformation, connectivity and attempt to build bridges for facilitating elite /statist level connectivity and thereby stimulate possible alternative path to peace.

Complimentarily needs to be maintained between Track-I/II and Track IV/V initiatives in order to promote viable and effective engines that can drive the peace process and make it durable. The bridges of trust , cooperation, common mindset ,understanding of oneness, that can be built up in this process or at least attempted can go a long way in reducing trust deficit, conflict transformation, reduction of animosity levels, create an atmosphere for conflict reduction, resolution and confidence building and lead to building of an effective security community by a process of dilution of the complex

and competitive security matrix of the region-these bridges if effectively utilized by policy makers can lead to inbreeding of an effective culture of peace in the region which is a dire necessity.

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20. *Data collated from the Indianstat.com—an article based on the projection of the National Poverty Ratios (Sensitivity Analysis), in India; (1996-1997, 2001-2002, 2006-2007, 2011-2012).*

21. ***A.U. Ahmed, R.V. Hill, L.C. Smith, D.M. Wiesmann and T. Frankenberger***, *"The World's Most Deprived: Characteristics and Causes of Extreme Poverty and Hunger", Washington D.C. Paper presented at the International Food Research Institute, July 2007.*

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