CONCLUSION

Continental South Asia comprising India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan forms a mosaic of diverse lands and the people. The rich cultures embedded virtually in antiquity, a conglomerate of different faiths, languages different value systems prosper here in contrasting political environments. Forming though geopolitical region, the area also has extremes of topography, temperatures and rainfalls.

Densely populated the constituents of this region have mainly agricultural economies from where they draw a major portion of the gross domestic product (G.D.P.). At various stages of industrialization and different levels of scientific and technological development these countries represent a contrast of the sorts. India has sizeable industrial sector and has achieved a world-class scientific-technological progress in certain areas and Pakistan too has set up its industrial sector and has shown progress in science and technology. Rest of the countries remains by and large untouched by industrialization.

Democratic mode of governance in largest India along with Nepal and Bangladesh, civil/military rules in Pakistan and a form of constitutional monarchy in Bhutan define the political spectrum of this region. Nature has endowed them with bountiful resources which can be developed to make the optimum use for raising the infrastructure (which they lack), and standard of living (which is very low) to strengthen the state and society.

The Indus River basin (Chapter III) is shared by India and Pakistan. Apart from historical and cultural importance of the Indus, the present and more pragmatic significance of this river is its waters. The partition of India in 1947, not only artificially divided this land and its people but also the waters of Indus between India and Pakistan. This river and most of its tributaries flow down from higher Indian reaches to lower riparian Pakistan. These countries are still living in the bitterness of the partition and have experienced tense relations including three wars (1948, 1965 and 1971) and recently conflict in
Kargil. Both these countries are suspicious of each other’s intentions. Accusations and counter accusations have marred their relations for better part of their post-independence period.

Indus waters are crucial both for India and Pakistan. Its shared use can help in building many hydroelectric projects, control recurring floods, use for domestic purposes and for agriculture. Their mutual distrust and unfriendliness has always hampered the optimum utilization of the direly needed water in this part of the Continental South Asia. The failure to arrive at a agreed solution to share Indus basin waters, brought in the efforts by the World bank to mediate between India and Pakistan.

After scores of meetings, ad hoc agreements and arrangements, hard bargains and efforts by many outside countries especially U.S.A., Britain. Australia, Japan and Germany culminated in 1960 Indus Waters Treaty. We can safely conclude here that already more than four decades old 1960 Treaty needs updating and considering the changed geopolitical environment. It can also be inferred that a joint approach is required by India and Pakistan to chalk out an integrated development strategy for utilization of water resources of the Indus. It may seem difficult in the ever-persisting hostile, unfriendly environment but it is an imperative.

The Ganga basin (Chapter IV) encompassing India, Nepal and Bangladesh has not only cradled the ancient Indian civilization but has enormous concentration of population and the most happening and volatile region of South Asia. The waters flowing in this basin are very important for the human survival and economy of the concerned riparian countries. The partition of India in 1947 resulting in the creation of East Pakistan artificially divided the lands and peoples of Bengal. The sharing of waters from the Ganga, which flowed from India in to East Pakistan has remained a bone of contention between India and Pakistan before 1971 and India and Bangladesh after 1971. The basic issues involved here are the concerns of India, which wants to save the Calcutta Port, which is a major economic feature of Indian state of West Bengal. India naturally does not want to allow the free flow of
the Ganga waters at its own peril. It intends to regulate the waters by constructing the Farakka Barrage. This is opposed by Bangladesh accusing India for denying its share of water during the lean season and releasing unwanted overflowing water during the Monsoon when Bangladesh does not require it. Bangladesh that is profusely inundated by the combined flow of Ganga and Brahmaputra during the monsoon, accuses India for high handedness and taking advantage of its upper riparian status for manipulating water flow to the disadvantage of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh also contends that India is not willing to take a holistic approach of the entire waters of this basin involving Nepal. Only then the Basin sharing countries can judiciously share, manage and utilize the combined Ganga-Jamuna basin waters. The Farakka barrage and the controversy related to it is a culmination of mutual distrust between India and Bangladesh furthering the political conflict between the two.

The distrust is not confined only to India – Bangladesh water sharing relations. The relations between India and Nepal are also infected by this mutual distrust. While India has the capability and wherewithal to build dams, tap and utilize the waters of Ganga flowing from the higher reaches of Nepal, the later is not inclined to such proposals. India’s interest lies in building big dams to produce electricity and irrigate its agriculture. Nepal is suspicious of Indian proposals, as the big dams will permanently bring large areas of its scarce agricultural land under water. Nepal also does not want to be permanently dependent on India for the export of its electricity that will be produced by Indian economic and technical help and may be on her terms and costs. Thus Nepal is interested in building small hydroelectric projects through her own resources to meet its domestic needs.

In this scenario the waters of Ganga remain mismanaged, underutilized which is detrimental to the interests of the three countries sharing the Ganga Basin. Short and ad hoc arrangements that have prevailed here over the last many decades are no solution to the problem. Though India, Bangladesh and to some extent Nepal have assessed their water resources, no country has so
far come forward with an objective sincerity to initiate a mechanism for proper management and optimum utilization of Ganga Basin.

The Brahmaputra River basin (Chapter V) too needs a comprehensive view taken by India, Bangladesh and Bhutan together. Its many tributaries emerge from Bhutan, northeast India and Bangladesh to join Brahmaputra. A huge quantum of its waters flows unhindered, untapped and less utilized entering the Bay of Bengal. The basin sharing countries have not initiated any major effort to practically utilize its water potential. The efforts, if any, are merely confined to meetings of the officials of these countries and remain on paper.

The river has the potential to threaten the security of India and Bangladesh. China is an additional factor as it has potential (at Drachu in Southern Tibet) to change the course of the river severely affecting its water potential for lower riparian India and Bangladesh. Such proposal is further harmful for India and Bangladesh whose agriculture, drinking water, navigation, pisciculture and delta depend heavily on Brahmaputra. The annual recurring floods devastate and wash away the roads, bridges, rail tracks and other infrastructure built by the available meager resources in India and Bangladesh.

Security of a country not only includes military/defence preparedness but also the socio-economic security provided to its population. A ferocious flooding Brahmaputra or dry Brahmaputra is certainly capable of threatening the lives and properties of the people in portions of India and Bangladesh.

The river Brahmaputra needs to be viewed more comprehensively. Which is possible only if the respective governments of the three riparian states show inclination towards the common use and management of its waters. Only the political will and farsightedness of these countries can materialize the proper utilization of its waters. Any single riparian country without active, positive effective involvement of others cannot even dream to manage Brahmaputra waters.
Seen from geopolitical perspective, it thus imperative for the countries of Continental South Asia to share, manage and utilize all the river water flowing on their lands and across their borders jointly and collectively. Agreed there are conflicts and competition between them, the strands of cooperation need not be sidetracked. Political conflicts in various parts of the world between the sovereign independent nations have at many places, under circumstances, created parallel areas of cooperation for them.

It is pertinent to add here successful example where conflicts and cooperation have been allowed to go hand in hand. The countries of Continental South Asia can look at and emulate the experience of the countries sharing the Mekong River in South East Asia. The Mekong River flows from Tibetan Plateau to South China Sea, through the territories of China, Myanmar, Laos, Kampuchea and Vietnam. These countries are cooperating in Mekong River Development Project that provides facilities for generation of hydroelectric power, irrigation, flood control, drainage, and improvements in navigation, water management and water supply. Four countries are carrying out the project, initiated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and Far East (ECAFE), with assistance of 21 governments and 11 United Nations agencies. The political dissensions between/among the Mekong sharing countries notwithstanding, the pragmatism forced them to cooperate for the sake of generation of resources in the national and peoples’ interest.

Water being ingredient of life cannot be bound by the demarcation of political boundaries. It is abundantly available in the Continent. Its proper management can be the foundation of cooperation in this geopolitical region. And that is the reality. No model building or application and no political or ideological concerns can block the imminent cooperation among the countries of Continental South Asia sooner is the better in this regard. The collective effort and common concerns of the governments and the people of these countries is a reality for the future of river water resource management in the Continental South Asia.