CHAPTER - 2

SOUTH ASIAN POLITICS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

South Asia is a geographical entity though sometimes vaguely defined. It has been institutionalised with the establishment of South Asia Association on Regional Co-operation (SAARC) in 1985.

India is predominant country in the region. Its role is recognised in the region by rest of the member states, their perception towards India and India’s perception towards them are different. Smaller states treat India as a big brother due to its predominance in every sphere of national power.

Unsymmetrical perception of member states towards each other and particularly with India has been a major cause of tension in the region.

South Asia has established itself a zone of conflict in the world politics since the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. Their non-reconciliation at the political level has proved to be cause of permanent tension in the region.

Thus South Asian politics is a matter of concern not only to member states but also to extra regional countries.

This whole chapter would be an effort to analyse the vision and perception of a member states towards one another.

The proposed chapter would not only attempt to examine such questions but also would try to find the ways and mechanisms by which South Asia can emerge as a zone of peace.
2.2 SOUTH ASIA

South Asia is the distinct geographical entity, which is clearly bounded in three parts, in the north Himalayan mountains stands, on the south Indian ocean borders and on the east thick forest and hills border it, in the west it is continued with Afghanistan.

It is thus located between West Asia and South Asia and South East Asia, it extends from the Persian gulf to the States of Malacca. Its well defined boundaries which provide a it facility for regionalism, seven countries, viz, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India now Afganistan too constitute this regionally coehesive area. All the countries have closely knit historical past. They have clear cut boundry demarcation among most of the nation and political boundry division has ancient roots.

They are closely interlinked, particularly in the matter of language, culture, social attitude, religion and other aspects. Regionalism in the South Asia has come to stay and India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have emerged as core members of the region. South Asian region is characterised by poor Human Development Index. India and Pakistan dominate this region. Although both India and
Pakistan inherited similar political institutions from the British but soon after birth their past diversified.

South Asia is considered as one of the most backward region in the world. Countries of the region have so many domestic problems but equally acute bilateral problems. Although they have attempted to join together in order to solve their problems of poverty, under development, low level of production, unemployment, foreign exchange crunch etc, but their fusion is not perfect. Countries of the region alienate with each other, but a closer examination reveal that much diversion among the member states perception is due to several other underlying factors.

Member states of the region have diverse political system such as India, Srilanka and Bangladesh are democratic countries whereas Pakistan has remained much time under authoritarian rule, on the other hand Nepal was constitutional monarchy, now has moved towards parliamentary form of democracy Bhutan is having monarchy, has moved substantially towards democracy region is quite rich in natural resources but mutual suspicious has not allowed them to tap it in fullest measures.
2.3 SOUTH ASIAN POLITICS

South Asian politics is a classical example of conflict. All the member states of this region have some or other type of disputes with each other which has caused interference of foreign powers in the region. Besides internal disputes it's "geographical location and external links leads to continued Soviet, Chinese and Americans efforts to influence events in the region."\(^1\)

There is no secret that China has been supporting Pakistan in arming weapons to it over the years, there have been consistent reliable reports that the design for the Pakistani nuclear weapons were being provided by China.

China has not bothered to deny any of this, except in a vague, general and perfunctory manner. The "Chinese have never been shy of co-operating with Pakistan comprehensively and across the board in the nuclear fields"\(^2\) Chinese, Americans and Soviets political establishments have viewed South Asian region as a major centre of conflicts, hence South Asian politics have been greatly influenced by the external powers. Nepal, a strategically important country for the South Asian region has sometimes or other have developed tense relations with India under the Chinese influence. Conflict orientation
of the core and peripheral members of the regions have their roots in the history, geography and culture. Although in most of the sphere they belong to common stock as they share several similarities with each other but these common roots have given rise to conflict and disputes among themselves.”

The countries of South Asia are undoubtedly bounded together by geography, shared historical past and common cultural traits, with few exceptions, they were all subjected to British colonial rule. Their economies are still largely agrarian, and all of them suffer from acute population pressure on their natural resources "inspite of all these similarity, they lack political maturity and understanding which is real root cause of their conflict prone relations.”

It is not possible to pursue co-operation in economic, social and cultural fields beyond a certain limit in the absence of political understanding and harmony in the region. Thus South Asian politics is perfect reflection of distrust.

Their behaviour perhaps seems to be influenced by Chanakya’s philosophy that “don’t trust your neighbour who is your natural enemy, but rather look for support from state beyond who are your natural allies, or as a
supplementary principle, if you have to be surrounded by two or more larger states, play them off against each other."

It is now a stark reality that South Asian politics is largely based on hatred and distrust, although they have tried to carve a new path of regional co-operation but its maturity is still in seedling stage and international political interaction of the regions appears to have been based on powers, monistic self interest and counter balancing of others by involving foreign powers.
2.4 ROLE OF INDIA IN SOUTH ASIA

India is having predominant position in South Asia, Its advantages in land area, population, strategic position, diplomatic and military power has placed it at the pre-eminent position. “it is having an area of thirty two lakh eighty eight thousand square kilometers and its share in the region’s area is around 73.4 percent.”\(^1\) Its assets of national powers compel it to follow a dynamic role in the region. Although its foreign policy is based on peaceful coexistence non-alignment, disarmament, support to neighbouring countries but its intentions have back fired on it, instead of being treated as a supporter of neighbours cause, India is considered as ‘big brother’ who wants to dominate the region. They have tried to attack India verbally, have and allowed involvement of foreign power in the regions. “In order to neutralise this alleged Indian desire to dominate (or worse, to pose a threat to its territorial integrity) Pakistan had for decades in the pasts invoked the military assistance”\(^2\)

In response India was forced to play an aggressive role in the region. Although since 1957 or sixities at the international level, its
activity is less aggressive. "since 1957 India has tended to be content with a rather quite role in the international affair to be more moderate, stridently radical and revisionist even on anti colonial issues." but it was in contrast to more active behaviour in the region later on, more concentrated to achieve certain objectives which led to dismemberment of Pakistan. India’s active regional behaviour generated concern in the member states of the region particularly in Pakistan.

Its national assets and compelled regional political behaviour has been termed by the neighbours that India is showing big brotherliness and bilateral problems are direct off shoot of this psyche of neighbouring countries. India’s role in the region is sandwiched between its compelled foreign policy orientation and not so good relation with the other states of the region. The result is a confused, negative, maligned picture of bilateral relationship pattern in the region.
2.5 **ROLE OF PERIPHERAL SOUTH ASIAN STATES**

Role of peripheral states in the South Asia politics is not of much significance as they lack military or diplomatic power to influence the politics in this region. Their location in the region is at the periphery of the South Asian geography. Moreover their population and proportional growth rate also limit them to play a prominent role in the region. Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal & Maldives constitute the peripheral state.

Their status can be analysed by the following comparative table.

**TABLE -1**

**BASIC INDICATORS (1987)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Area (Thousands Sq. Km)</th>
<th>Population (Million Mid-1987)</th>
<th>GNP ($) Per Capita</th>
<th>GNP % Distribution</th>
<th>Energy Imports as and Merchandise Exports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agric.</td>
<td>Indus.</td>
<td>Manuf. Serv.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>106.10</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>3288</td>
<td>797.50</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>17.60</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>102.50</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>16.40</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to this, core members India and Pakistan stand far bigger than these countries as Pakistan’s area is 8,03,936 sq. km. which is far bigger than Bhutan, Nepal etc. and
India stands at the top. In such background peripheral countries find their role very much restricted and their major foreign policy projection is how to relate and deal with their larger South Asian neighbours. Instead of concentrating on South Asian region, their major effort is to extend their contacts with the western countries. “Sri Lanka and Nepal all are dependent on outside help to develop, and all follow a non aligned force in the world affairs. Sri Lanka’s economic and cultural links with the west are most extensive. In recent years it has moved closer to China and U.S. in the world politics.”

Sri Lanka is the strongest peripheral states. This states remained confined in their tamil problem. Therefore they have tried to act cautiously in this region and have usually good relations with India particularly during the period of 1956-76 and 1994 to 1999 as for illustration because of the opposition of Indian government did not accept membership of military organisations SEATO “because of the opposition of the Indian government did not accept membership of military organisation SEATO” thus it has towed a line of positive relationship with India in certain matters too.
2.6 PERCEPTION OF SOUTH-ASIAN STATES

2.6.1 PERCEPTION OF INDIA

India is a major power in the region because of its size, geographical and strategic location, due to such powerful assets, it is forced to dominate the region. It is the second populous and seventh largest country area wise in the world. Such parameters have given automatically much power to the India. "It is central point of South Asia with reference to size, location and power, India is like a pivot from the angle of geopolitical on which international politics of South Asia depends upon." Because of such factors India views its neighbours in a positive manner but is also forced to adopt a dynamic foreign policy.

India has divided its neighbours in three categories. Pakistan with which it has a long history of tensions. Due to this India has consistently perceived Pakistan as its natural bitter partner to deal with in the contrast to its perception of other states.

It has tried to maintain good relations with such states. "Gujarat doctrine" is the case in this point but bilateral animosities stands with these states too. India has adopted three methods to deal such states which are result of its analytical perception of, first response in this matter is to develop bilateral agreement
with smaller states which gives India a special role in their external security. Thus India has treaty arrangements with Bhutan, Nepal. Second response is related to the insecurity of the smaller states by insisting that, “in the event of internal instabilities which require military and other forms of assistance, India should be consulted as first resort, commentators in South Asia have called this the India doctrine.”² and final perceptive response is to go for regionalism by executing arrangement with the smaller countries.

It has realised that it cannot remain stable without making neighbouring states strong along with internal balancing by making herself militarily strong enough. These perceptions and objective have pushed it to play a more active role in the region. Although India is aware that its more activeness is a cause of concern particularly to the smaller state. There is no gain saying the fact that India is aware that the smaller states perceive threats about their security which may cause them to look to external powers. It is true that “These threats are nonregional power’s internal subversion in region and India itself.”³
2.6.2 PERCEPTION OF THE PERIPHERAL STATE TOWARDS INDIA

India possess strong elements of power and its position and status in the regional and world politics have forced it to act in a dynamic manner to preserve its national interest, "the proper orchestration of elements of power and not merely their possession." Has caused to produce fear psychosis in the peripheral states of South Asia.

Peripheral states view India’s dynamic behaviour as a initiating point towards their instability, because they have not been able to develop a cohesive nation states either they are away from it or exist in the process of developing such framework of nation state it. It has been observed that those, "South Asian states who have worked with the democratic political system, are in the process of the nation building." but it is not true for others.

Failure to observe democratic patterns of governance in peripheral South Asian states have threatened existence and continuation of their own nation state system, centrifugal tendencies are at work in these countries. Such tendencies coupled with India’s active behaviour at international political level has given them sufficient cause to distance away from India. Thus peripheral state’s perception towards India is usually of fear.
They view India's proponderance in the region as a threat to their survival. Unfortunately they fail to appreciate the fact that "nation development and national integration in their own country has led to domestic turmoil with spilling over national boundaries and affecting peace and stability in the region."³

They put blame squarely upon India, which may not involve to proliferate a serious trouble with peripheral stated as India, "is big in size and that the proportions of our problems and difficulties is much. We do not want to take on more problems. Our policy is not to interfere in the affairs of others."⁴

Smaller states are truly conscious of their security needs, and a psychological threat from India. India has attempted towards of such perception but has not been successful in the fullest manner.
2.7 CONCLUSION

Study has found that South Asia is having different set of perception. India has different perceptions about its neighbours, in the same way core as well as peripheral states carry usually a negative perception about the India.

India is compelled by its geostrategic location to involve in the region on every important issue. It can not remain neutral.

Study has also discovered the fact that South Asian politics is basically governed by core members.

Peripheral states have only one objective, somehow to maintain its notionhood and to extract anything useful for themselves from any quarter of the international politics.