

# Nehruvian Internationalism and Indian Borders: Peace and Harmony in South Asia

## Abstract

For any nation to play an important role at international level, it is essential that it should have peaceful borders. Peace at the regional level increases the power of a nation in international arena. India, as a nuclear power is ready to emerge as the global power, in the contemporary times. But being situated in the South Asian region, which is regarded as conflict ridden region, India is more strangled in the regional disputes. The present study focuses on understanding and examining the nature of regional disputes, involving India, going on in South Asia. The paper further seeks to analyse the concept of Internationalism of Nehru and its relevance in the present century. The study argues that through the rational application of Nehru's internationalism, India can achieve considerable success in resolving its border disputes with the neighbouring countries. The adoption of Nehru's vision can help India to resolve the regional disputes and thereby play an important role in International sphere.

**Keywords:** South Asia, Nehru's Internationalism, Panchsheel, Border Disputes.

## Introduction

The Democratic Institutions in India not only has to ensure liberty, equality and justice to its citizens and maintain law and order in the internal sphere, but in the external sphere, also has to safeguard and resolve different problems arising due to porous borders, so that peaceful neighbourhood could be established, which is essential for development of India as well as for the development of all the nations of South Asia. The Indian Constitution as well encourages the democratic institutions in India, through Article 51, to promote peace and security; develop just and honourable relations among nations and promote settlement of international conflicts through arbitration. (Source: Basu, D.D.: *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, 2008)

Prior to Independence, the Indian subcontinent, comprised of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, was a huge single geographical entity sharing common cultural, social and economic system and values. However, the subcontinent was divided into existing nation-states through artificial borders, which has given rise to several conflicts related to border infiltration, cross border terrorism etc., among the nations of South Asia. The borders in South Asia are mainly man-made. India, the largest nation in the region, shares land border with all the South Asian nations. The following table shows India's borders with South Asian nations:

**Table :1**

Name of the Country	Length of Border (in Km)
Bangladesh	4,096.7
Pakistan	3,323
Nepal	1,751
Myanmar	1,643
Bhutan	699
Afghanistan	106

The South Asian region is mired by several conflicts among the member nations. However, the nations of the region realized the importance of cooperation and as a result came together to form South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985. These nations tried to consolidate the regional organization for encouraging development, stability and cooperation in the region but the political



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differences and regional conflicts has been the major hindrance in the path of the success of SAARC. India is geographically situated at the heart of the region, as it shares borders with all the other nations, and therefore is also at the centre of all the major conflicts in the region.

**Figure 1: India & neighbouring countries of South Asia**



### Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the border conflicts and issues disturbing the relationship of the South Asian nations. Also the paper seeks to understand and analyze Nehru's theory of Internationalism and its relevance in resolving the contemporary border issues among these nations. The study seeks to utilize Nehru's ideas to establishing peace and harmony in South Asia.

### Methodology

The paper through Historical and Analytical approach seeks to understand the nature of border conflicts between the South Asian Nations. Further, the study uses Descriptive and Diagnostic methods to examine the theory of Internationalism of Nehru. Moreover, for the proper application of Nehru's theory and for arriving at a relevant conclusion, Scientific and Empirical methods will be used.

### Review of Literature

Ahluwalia, B.K. (1978): *Jawaharlal Nehru: India's Man of Destiny*, Newman Group of Publishers, New Delhi. The book throws light on the life and ideas of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. It not only helps to understand different ideas of Nehru but also helps to know his vision regarding India as well as regarding Asia.

Burki, S.J. (2011): *South Asia in the New World Order: The Role of Regional Cooperation*, Routledge, New York. This book examines the opportunities available to the South Asian nations in

the emerging global order. It argues that the South Asian nations can develop only when they develop the tendency of cooperation and mutual aid among themselves. These nations should bring about a change in their attitude for the benefit of the whole region.

Brecher M. (1998): *Nehru: A Political Biography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. The book highlights the development of Nehru as a leader and also traces the evolution of his various political thoughts. It examines Nehru's policies for developing India into a global player, in international politics and the role India should play in Asia.

DeVotta, Neil (2015): *An Introduction to South Asian Politics*, Routledge, U.K. This book provides an insight into the various political issues and conflicts affecting the South Asian nations. It also highlights that these South Asian nations, if desires to play an important role at the global level, has to resolve their political differences and move towards greater cooperation among themselves.

### Democratic Institutions and Indian Borders

The Democratic institutions not only has to secure socio-economic and political justice to the people, extending legitimacy to them but also has to ensure peace at the Borders, for settled life, stability and economic development. Peaceful borders are essential so that the democratic institutions can focus on the internal problems and help nation to steer forward on the path of human development.

India is part of South Asia, a region which has its own importance in the sphere of conflict studies. It is because the region has witnessed five full scale conflicts, existence of nuclear powers in the region with adverse interests and all the nations are facing the problem of terrorism, insurgency and separatist movements. The conflicts in the region have given rise to internal problems within nations as well. (Muni, S.D.: *Conflicts in South Asia: Causes, Consequences, Prospects*, 2013)

### Forms of Conflict in South Asia (Affecting India)

#### Territorial Conflicts

The artificial and permeable boundaries have been a major reason for the conflicts between the South Asian nations. India has major territorial disputes with Pakistan. Jammu and Kashmir is at the centre of all disputes between India & Pakistan and the two nations have fought four wars on this issue. India and Pakistan also have conflict regarding Sir Creek strip, which divides the Kutch region of Gujarat and the Sindh province of Pakistan. This dispute is affecting the maritime boundary negotiations in Arabian Sea and often fisherman of both sides are caught and jailed. The Siachen Glacier and Saltoro Ridge are also point of contention between the two nations. India has resolved the border dispute with Bangladesh through exchange of enclaves and demarcation of boundaries. (*Parliament passes historic land accord bill to redraw border with Bangladesh*, Times of India, May 7, 2015.)

#### Cross Border Terrorism

Closely linked with the Kashmir problem, another major issue of discord between India and

Pakistan is Terrorism. "Pakistan sponsored terrorist groups in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, funding, training and arming them in their war of attrition against India." (Thomas, Gordon: *Gideon's Spies: The Secret History of Mossad*, 2010) Through terrorism Pakistan seeks to destabilize the entire Indian peace, stability and security. The rise of fundamental forces in Bangladesh and their connection with terrorist groups in Pakistan and with international terrorist organisations is also a matter of serious concern for India. The Democratic Institutions in India needs to play a pro-active role to prevent the terrorist attacks and also follow the policy of constructive engagement, with Pakistan and Bangladesh at regional level, to root out the problem completely.

#### **Conflicts over River Water Sharing**

Another issue of friction among South Asian nations is the sharing of the common river waters. Indus and its tributaries and Ganga-Brahmaputra river system are the two major river systems of the sub-continent. Both these river systems have become source of conflict between the nations concerned, that is, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. The fragile political relations between the nations of the sub-continent have further escalated these river water sharing disputes.

There is dispute between India and Pakistan regarding sharing of water of Indus and its tributaries whereas India has conflict over sharing of Ganges water with Bangladesh. No doubt, there are agreements regarding sharing of international river waters among these nations but they often complain about its violation.

The management of international river water systems needs to be seen beyond the factors of national sovereignty and interests and should be dealt with at the regional level, so as to meet the needs of large population of the sub-continent. For this the political systems has to abandon constricted outlook and encourage regional cooperation in South Asia.

#### **Conflicts Related to Immigrants and Refugees**

The illegal immigrants and the refugees have also strained the relations among the South Asian nations. Among the South Asian nations, the immigrants and refugees comes to India from Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. These people not only places burden on the economy of the nation but also at the same time pose serious threat to national stability and security. The issue of immigrants and refugees was cited as major reason that lead to war between India and Pakistan in 1971 and the creation of Bangladesh. Often India has experienced tense relations with Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal on this issue.

According to World Bank in 2015, 231.3 million poor people lived in South Asia. A Large number of marginalized people in the region are deprived of their basic socio-economic rights. Due to these conflicts the South Asian nations are spending large amount of their money and energy, which could have otherwise utilized for the

betterment of these poor and marginalized people. Therefore, a broader outlook based on Internationalism and regional cooperation has to be adopted by the political systems of the nations, so that the region could constructively utilize its demographic dividend and emerge as strong and prosperous region.

The Political leadership of these nations have often stressed that peaceful and cooperative relationship between them is essential for the development of the region. It is often accepted that one of the greatest obstacle to the promotion of regional integration under SAARC has been the differences between India and Pakistan. If these two nuclear powers cooperate and promote economic relations, then it is believed that the region could develop at faster pace, benefitting all the South Asia nations. The friendly relations between India and Pakistan and their mutual cooperation with Afghanistan can help both, Pakistan and Afghanistan, to fight against internal insurgencies in a better manner. (Burki, S.J.: *South Asia in the New World Order: The Role of Regional Cooperation*, 2011)

Thus, the Political system of India, in order to promote peace and harmony in South Asia, has to deal with the issues relating to border conflicts. Peaceful borders are essential for India to emerge not only as a regional power but also to play an important role at international level. At the external level, the democratic institutions have to build up a spirit of Internationalism to resolve the major regional disputes of South Asia.

#### **Nehru's Internationalism**

The concept of internationalism involves the notion of existence of free and equal nations, peaceful and friendly relations among them based on mutual benefit and trust and above all, the existence of an International organization playing constructive role in maintaining harmony and goodwill among the nations. "Internationalism stands for a family of self respecting and self governing nations, united to each other by the ties of equality and living at peace and concord with each other." (Asirvatham, E. & Misra K.K.: *Political Theory*, 2005)

J.L. Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India was an ardent nationalist but his nationalism was in harmony with universal peace and brotherhood. An important contribution of Nehru to Indian nationalism was to synthesize it with international outlook. He believed in the freedom and unity among all the nations of the world. Dr. Keskar has rightly observed that "he was not an opponent of nationalism. He (supported) a broad human outlook and he realized that the frog in the pond mentality has isolated the Indian mind from the current world thought...his internationalism envisaged cooperation and exchange of thought and experience among nations." (Ahluwalia, B.K.: *Jawaharlal Nehru: India's Man of Destiny*, 1978)

Nehru's internationalism made him a strong advocate of world peace. He was against cold war, nuclear arms race, military alliances and wars. In order to keep India away from the tensions of cold war

and military alliances, he adopted the path of Non-alignment. He believed that India, as a nation, has capabilities to emerge as superpower in future only when, at present, it concentrates itself on economic and social restructuring.

Nehru believed in the unity of Asian countries. According to him, the Asian continent could find its rightful place in world order, only when the Asian nations collaborate with each other for peace and development. Apart from Asian brotherhood, he also promoted Afro-Asian unity. He was staunch advocate of Asian- African unity for attaining complete socio-economic and political modernization and development. He observed "...Asia stretches her hand out in friendship to Europe and America as well as to our suffering brethren in Africa....we of Asia have a special responsibility to the people of Africa. We must help them to their rightful place in the human family." (Guha, R.: Makers of Modern India, 2012)

For promoting peace, prosperity, trust and confidence among nations, especially among the Asian nations, Nehru propounded the principles of Panchsheel. These principles are- Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, Non-aggression, Non-interference in each other's internal affairs, Equality & Mutual advantage & Peaceful co-existence & Economic development. Nehru said that "...in order to have one world, we must also, in Asia, think of the countries of Asia co-operating together for that larger ideal." (Guha, R.: Makers of Modern India, 2012) These principles of Panchsheel, if implemented by the Foreign policy makers, with diplomatic rationality and broader outlook, could resolve several conflicts in the contemporary world.

Finally, Nehru believed in the possibility of World federation. He was of the view that, world peace can be attained only if world government is established. In his speech at Asian conference in 1947, Nehru said "Internationalism demands that each country shall take an intelligent interest in world affairs and give up the desire to live in isolation from the rest. Nationalism and Internationalism must be balanced and harmonized in the interest of world peace and world unity."(Cited from- Thakur, Harish (ed.): *Gandhi, Nehru and Globalization*, 2010)

These ideals of Nehru, if accepted and properly executed by the countries of South Asia for the welfare of their citizens can be helpful, to a great extent, in resolving the major issues of South Asia.

The democratic institutions can work properly, within the nation, only if they are able to secure peace at the regional and international level. India can emerge as global power, if it can resolve the neighbourhood crises in South Asia. These crises, engulfing the nations of the South Asia, can be reduced in intensity by adopting Nehru's outlook and attitude of Asian unity. By following the path of Panchsheel and constructive engagement, the South Asian nations can overcome their differences and disagreements and work together for the welfare of the poor and marginalized sections of the society, which constitutes more than 60% of the population of the region.

### Suggestions

1. The internal prosperity of a society depends on the peace and stability in the external sphere. The Indian democratic institutions not only has to work for securing liberty, equality and justice in the internal sphere but also has to ensure peace at the regional level, through encouraging the sentiments of South Asian identity. India as the largest democracy, nuclear power and growing economy should use its capacities in a constructive manner, not only to foster its own development but also to encourage the development of its neighbours.
2. The South Asian nations, as part of the Indian subcontinent, enjoy strong social and cultural relations. In the contemporary times, no doubt, there exist political differences among these nations, so initially warm relations could be encouraged in the social, cultural, scientific, health, tourism and economic spheres, which will eventually phase out the political disagreements prevailing among these countries. The people to people contacts should be encouraged in various fields. In this regard, to develop positivity and trust among the people, the help of Non-Governmental organisations can be taken. The efforts for peace should never be discarded.
3. As the largest nation in South Asia, India should encourage constructive engagement, at priority basis, to smoothly and swiftly resolve the regional conflicts relating to territorial issues, cross border terrorism, water sharing issues, issues relating to migration and refugees etc. In this regard, the Indian democratic institutions should develop mechanism with the sovereign institutions of the other nations to bilaterally resolve their dispute by mutual exchanges and consent, without allowing the narrow political sentiments to hinder the larger public interest of the people of South Asia.
4. The SAARC nation states needs to adopt the principles of Panchsheel and the ideal of Asian unity. These nations have to realise that mutual conflicts would harm their own interests whereas mutual cooperation can help them to move ahead on the path of development. The Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) and various other diplomatic means may be used to slowly and gradually develop closer relations between them. Track 1.5, track 2 and track 3 diplomacy must be encouraged to eliminate the differences and build confidence among the nations.

### Conclusion

Nehru was aware of the conflicts between the Asian nations but still he believed that these nations can resolve their differences, if they believe and work according to the notions of equality, fraternity, mutual cooperation and respect for each other. He said "...there is today conflict in many countries, and all of us in Asia are full of our own troubles. Nevertheless, the whole spirit and outlook of Asia are peaceful and the emergence of Asia in world affairs will be a powerful influence for world peace....all countries of Asia have to meet together on an equal basis in a common task and endeavor. It

is fitting that India should play her part in this new phase of Asian development." (Guha, R.: Makers of Modern India, 2012)

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