



Indian Water War-Mongering Strategies and Future of Regional Stability in South Asia

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Abstract:

World politics is revolving around the issue of water resources and conflicts over them. The trans-boundary flow of water further complicates the relevance of water sources to each conflicting state. The fresh water resources including ground and surface fresh water have been facing immense pressure due to the rapid industrialization, scarcity of fresh water resources, urbanization, and growing population of the world. South Asia is the world's most populous region having about one-fourth of the world's total population which requires a greater amount of fresh water and thus prone to conflicts over water resources. The issue of interstate hydro politics is the most important agenda among states. In the South Asian perspective, the partition plan was the root cause of water conflicts. India is the most influential and powerful state of the region, constantly dominating other South Asian neighbouring states i.e. Nepal and Bangladesh, over water whereas it is constantly dragging Pakistan into water wars. This paper is an attempt to focus on the water conflicts between South Asian states where India has the central position being the dominant state of the region, the geopolitical dimension of the water conflicts, threats to regional peace and security, and the possible role of SAARC in minimizing Indian Water mongering policies.

Keywords: India, Pakistan, water wars, trans-boundary water disputes, geopolitics, water security

INTRODUCTION

Almost one and a half-century ago, Samuel Lanhorne Clemens – an American publisher, lecturer, humorist, and writer commonly known by his pen name Mark Twain rightly said “Whisky is for drinking, water is for fighting over” (Cited in Bhogal, & Kaszubska, 2017). It can be rightly put in the perspective of current water war mongering strategies in the context of South Asia. Water has remained a prime source of conflict throughout human history and still, the regions having contentions upon the water resources are considered as the vital and precarious sources of future wars all over the World (Khalid, 2010). It is obvious that the trans-boundary waters and struggle

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for the rights upon quantity and quality ultimately leads to the inter-state conflicts leading to wars (Allouche, 2005). Since the start of 20th century, the fresh water resources originating from certain hydro-geographical basins are associated with future conflicts and economic nationalism due to increased dependence upon them (Gottmann, 1951). Climate Change has begun to impact the water levels in these hydro-geographical basins which have been identified by scientists and researchers. Therefore, the dangers of water shortages around the world have the potential to flame the water wars (Trollalden, 1992). In the modern time, the management of trans-boundary water resources is a major concern as it has altered the conception of state territory and thus this approach has significantly impacted this conception (Smith, 1931)

In this connection, the geopolitical position of the South Asian region provides a better opportunity for conflict eruption. The major industry of this region is considered as agricultural sector of which water is the crucial element. It is also needed to meet the needs of the growing population and for the industrial sector. Thus, the water element became the most crucial element which intensified the conflicts among the South Asian states. The conflicts over fresh water resources are not a present phenomenon in South Asia but they have historical roots before the independence between various provinces and princely states but this issue deepened with time after the partition (Singh, 2008). The Indian water mongering approach to have the control and use of trans-boundary water resources spread the waves of conflicts across various affecting states of the region. The prominent examples are the disputes among Pakistan and India over Indus Basin Rivers, between India and Nepal over *Mahakali* River, and between India and Bangladesh over the use of Ganges River which intensified the relations among the concerned states (Patz et al., 2009). The demarcated boundaries of India and Pakistan after the partition led to a base for the conflicts in the region and intentional geographical allocations to India resulted in the imbalance share of water. The restructuring of the map in India's favour by including the head-works of trans-boundary rivers with the legitimacy to use the water to meet its growing water demands, fuelled the conflict between India and Pakistan being upper riparian and lower riparian states respectively (Patz et al., 2009).

In the context of India and Nepal disputes over water, India is a low riparian country but dominating Nepal for its own advantage by using coercive means. Whereas in the case of India and Bangladesh dispute, India is again getting advantage of the upper riparian state and thus controlling the water resources to maintain its dominance and influence. Therefore, this paper attempts to answer some significant questions related to South Asian Water Conflicts i.e. How India has been targeting Pakistan through water insecurities? What are the motives behind the Indian dominance in Afghanistan and investing in the construction of multi-purpose dams on the trans-boundary waters being shared with Pakistan? How has India been developing and executing water war mongering strategies all over South Asia? How the Indian water war mongering strategies could destabilize the region? What role South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) can play in limiting the Indian Water War policies and ensuring stability in the region? To answer all these questions, the prism of Regional Security Complex Theory is used to analyse the Indian water wars mongering situations in the South Asian region.

A brief summary of water conflicts among South Asian states is discussed as under.

India - Pakistan

Pakistan and India, immediately after the partition of South Asian subcontinent, faced the problem of the sharing of the Indus Basin which was highlighted by the Pakistani government and public. The head-works of two important canal systems controlling the Pakistani territory were allocated to Indian Territory as a result of the partition plan of South Asia. The absence of command and control systems of those canals among both the states paved the way to agree a 'Standstill agreement' which allowed the flow of water on existing levels till March 31, 1948, by providing space to reach a long-term settlement of the dispute but the allocated time ended without any resolution (Alam, 2002). As a result, the provision of water was suspended by the provincial government of Indian Punjab which was a clear indicator of Indian desire to destroy the fragile lands of Pakistan. Eighteen days later, an agreement known as 'Inter-Domain Agreement' was concluded and the water supplies were restored (Alam, 2002). This agreement was a concrete step for the continuation of negotiations till the settlement of the dispute. The Pakistani bureaucracy perceived threats by this act of suspension of water supplies and initiated the *Bombanwala-Rav-Bedian Dipalpur* (BRBD) link canal project which facilitates the diversion of Ravi River into Sutlej River. To resolve the water sharing issues, Pakistan and India signed the 'Indus Water Treaty (IWT)' in 1960 by the financial support and active mediation of the World Bank and other western powers significantly the United States. This treaty allocated the eastern tributaries of the Indus River i.e. *Ravi, Beas and Sutlej* to India while Pakistan was given right over the entire flow of western Indus River tributaries i.e. *Indus, Jhelum and Chenab* (Prentice, 1964). The World Bank provided massive both the countries to build water storage facilities to better the water flow channels supposed to be lost to the other country (Mustafa, 2007).

The discriminate drawing of the political map of South Asia and the natural course of rivers provided unique and multiple dimensions for the eruption of potential conflicts among both the rival states, the IWT structures added great opportunities of conflicts to it. The most alarming issue for Pakistan is the Indian construction of storage facilities and other projects on the Pakistani allocated water tributaries of Indus River (Iyer, 2002). The most significant and current disputes are the *Baglihar* Dam, the *Tulbul* Navigation or *Wular* Barrage, the *Kishanganga* Dam and Indian storage of the water from *Ravi, Beas and Sutlej* Rivers (Bisht, 2011). In the utmost of the cases, Pakistan considers itself as the victim of Indian Water mongering activities and policies. The *Baglihar* Dam project, being constructed on the *Chenab* River and under dispute since 1992, the western Indus River tributary allocated to Pakistan. This project includes substantial water storage capacity and covers 144.5-meter concrete dam having potential 450MW (Mega Watt) hydroelectric power project which has the capacity to be upgraded to 900 MW (Tariq, 2010). The *Tulbul* Navigation/ *Wular* Barrage, started in 1984, remained as a disputed project due to Pakistan's concerns over it based on its construction upon *Jhelum* River. The purpose of the construction of this barrage was to improve the water flow by creating 20-kilometer stretch for navigation among *Baramula and Sopore*. This project was halted in 1987 (International Crisis Group, 2012).

The recent dispute over water between India and Pakistan is the *Kishanganga* Dam which was recently resolved by Hague's Permanent Court of Arbitration. India planned to construct a hydro power project having capacity of 330 MW in the *Jhelum* River in the Indian held *Jammu and Kashmir* region. Pakistan, likewise, raised various concerns regarding the impacts of the project on

Pakistani territory and environment and conflicting and violating the IWT. Though India agreed to review various aspects of projects no agreement was driven out of various negotiations. Thus Pakistan Commission of Indus Water decided to request arbitration to resolve the conflict with the World Bank in 2009 (Salman, 2006). Though the project was started in 2007 but halted due to Pakistan's opposition and the arbitration of Hague's Permanent Court of Arbitration. Pakistan pointed out that this project will affect the flow of *Neelum River* (in India called as *Kishanganga River*). In February 2013, The Hague Permanent Court of Arbitration stated that India can divert a minimum amount of water power generation purpose and emphasized that at least 9 cumecs⁵ of water flow must be maintained in *Neelum River* to sustain the environment downstream. Recent developments in connection to Indo-Pak Water Wars were the Indian decision to build three run-of-the-river hydropower projects over the Chenab River i.e. *Lower Kalnai Project (48MW)*, *Ratle Hydropower Project (850MW)*, and *Pakal Dul Hydropower project (1000MW)* in the Indian Occupied Kashmir. Pakistan has raised serious concerns over these projects stating that India is deliberately working on these projects by diverting Pakistani waters to choke water supply to Pakistan as well as flooding Pakistan during the rainfall season. Pakistan also considers this Indian decision as a violation of the Indus Water Treaty (The Express Tribune, 2021). In March 2021, the officials of both countries had extensive two days Water-Sharing Talks in which the designs of Lower Kalpani and Pakal Dul projects were discussed. Moreover, serious concerns were raised by Pakistan regarding the design and storage capacities of these dams and highlighted that India is continuously violating the water-sharing Indus Water Treaty (Niazi, 2021).

India and Afghanistan vs. Pakistan Iran

Since 2001, India has invested almost US \$3 Billion in the development projects within Afghanistan. In the perspective of water wars, Pakistan and Iran are being impacted by the Indian-built hydro projects. Afghanistan has been blamed by Iran and Pakistan for 'aggressive dam development' projects over a decade which are escalating and intensifying tensions over the shared waters. The *Salma Dam* – branded as Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam which was built on the *River Harirud* in the *Herat Province* with the project cost of US \$230 Million has already disturbed the down-stream flow of water into the Iran and Turkmenistan which has caused tensions among neighbours. Though this project has added to the development of Afghanistan as it is currently producing 42MW of electricity and irrigating 75000 hectares of land with an increase in Afghanistan's share of *Harirud River* to 74% while limiting Iran's and Turkmenistan's share to 13% each due to damming of the river by Afghanistan which Iran previously used to receive 30% of it. The *River Harirud* has vital importance in the region as 3.4 million Iranian residing in the Mashhad City while 1.3 million Afghans are dependent upon this water source. The damming has severely impacted Iran in contrast to Turkmenistan which has little dependence upon this river as the city of Mashhad has been experiencing shortages of water while the agricultural sector has suffered losses of 4.3 million per year in the *Razavi Khorasan Province*. Therefore, the water issues among these neighbours have intensified tensions in recent years as Iranian Security Forces targeted and killed various Afghan Villagers drawing water from the river (Ramachandran, 2016).

⁵ The *cumec* is a measure of flow rate, as shorthand for "cubic metre per second" (cms) or m³/s (m³s⁻¹).

On the other hand, the trans-boundary Rivers of Afghanistan also runs through the low riparian Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan which is mostly dependent upon the agricultural sector. To ignite proxy water with Pakistan through Afghanistan, India has proposed damming of River Maidan – a Kabul River tributary originating from Hindu Kush Mountain's *Sanglakh Range* and stream down in the *District Char Asiab* of Kabul. Kabul River is 700km Long River originating from the Central Afghanistan's Hindu Kush Mountain and flowing downwards to various cities of Afghanistan mainly *Kabul, Suribhi, and Jalalabad*. Kabul River, in the East of Jalalabad, joins the Kunar River (also called Chitral River) in Pakistan's territory and then joins Mighty Indus River after crossing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. The dam has named as '*Shahtoot Dam*' whose feasibility study was completed in 2012 with the cost of US \$1.86 million. The Afghan Ministry of Energy & Water has given the contract of the *Shahtoot Dam* to Iranian Poyab Company. The estimated cost of the project is around US \$ 236 Million and will have a storage capacity of 147MCM (Million Cubic Meters). On February 9, 2021, Memorandum of Understanding was signed for the Construction of *Shahtoot Dam* by Afghan Foreign Minister and his Counterpart during a virtual summit regarding the construction of *Shahtoot Dam*. This dam project is being marked by India and Afghanistan as pumping up Indo-Afghan bilateral ties and is expected to bring prosperity in conflict ridden Afghanistan in the reconstruction scenario (Simon, 2021).

In the last few decades, severe water crises in the capital of Afghanistan have grown the value of Kabul River as it is located on an arid region where it receives around 362 mm of annual rainfall. Similarly, the urbanization is constantly increasing; underground water level is constantly falling due to deep digging and drilling of wells; still potable water access in Kabul is only limited to 10% of the residents. *Shahtoot Dam* will be able to make drinking water available to 2.2 Million people residing in Kabul and will be a prime source for the provision of irrigation water to 4000 hectares land in Kabul and its peripheries (Bhaumik, 2020). Currently, it is estimated that 12 hydropower projects can be built on the Kabul River within Afghanistan with an overall energy generation capacity of 1177MW by further reducing the flow of Kabul River water into Pakistan. Contrary, Pakistan is also considered as a water-stressed agricultural-based economy having dominant reliance on the Indus River but the significance of Kabul River cannot be ruled out as around 2 million residents of Tribal areas of Pakistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province are dependent upon Kabul River and its tributaries. Pakistan also built Warsak Dam upon this river which contributes 250MW of clean electricity and finally at *Attock*, it adds around 20-28 MAF (Million Acre Feet) of water into the Indus River.

India - Nepal

India and Nepal has a very deep-rooted historical background of water disputes. Nepal is blessed with about 6000 rivers and streams of which it shares about 264 rivers and tributaries with India. These tributaries and rives constitute a key source of Ganges River. The root cause of dispute between India and Nepal is the *Mahakali River* (in India called as *Sarda River*) which is a vital Ganges River tributary. It remains a cause of dispute as well as a source of demarcating borders between both countries. The origin of the *Mahakali River* i.e. *Kalapani* region, is an internationally recognized disputed area covering about 400 square kilometers. It supplies 47 % of its water and occupies 13% of the Ganges Basin (Upreti, 2006).

Nepal has a diverse relationship being an upper riparian state with India due to its weak status vis-à-vis India. It has faced various challenges in its willingness to construct dams as a result of severe confrontation by the lower riparian India and has various doubts and mistrust in Indian proposed hydropower projects. Besides other factors, Nepal's perceived trust deficit was the outcome of various unequal treaties with India i.e. *Sharada Dam construction* (1927), 1950 Treaty and Letters Exchange of 1950 and 1965, Koshi Agreement (1954), *Gandak Agreement* (1959), *Tanapur Agreement* (1991) and the *Mahakali Treaty* (1996) (Ulfat & Shams, 2020). India is dependent upon Nepal for water management and to meet its energy needs for more than 400 million people living in *Ganges, Barahamputra and Meghna* region. Hydel studies conducted in Nepal in 1960 indicated its power generation capacity at 83,000MW which cannot be achieved due to unstable economic conditions (Malhotra, 2020). While India being the growing industrial state, is willing to buy the energy generated by Nepal to meet its energy needs.

Most recently, Nepal and India are indulged in the border dispute with the start of COVID-19 pandemic in which disputed lands within Himalayan region are being claimed by both countries. In November 2019, a revised political map of India was published in which Union Territory of *Laddakh, Jammu & Kashmir, and Kalapani* as part of India created outrage in Nepal as the area of *Kalapani* is a contested region between Nepal and India. This dispute escalated when Indian Administration in the bordering district letters the Nepalis Bordering Administration to check on the illegal entrance in the *Kalapani, Lipu Lekh* and *Limpiyadhura* (KLL) region (Maharjan, 2020). Nepal contested this Indian Decision as it historically claimed the areas of KLL in accordance to the *Sagauli Treaty* (1816) among Nepal and Britain after *Gurka (Anglo-Nepalese) War* which recognized the Kali River as the western Boundary between Nepal and India while the area beyond that river in the east belongs to Nepal. On May 8, 2020, India inaugurated an 80KM long road passing through *Lipulekh* which is a disputed territory since the 1962 Indo-Sino War. The KLL region is a strategic three-way junction between China and Tibet, and these contested areas provide a practical and shortest route between China and India. As a reaction to the Indian expansionist move, Nepal published a map that shows the KLL areas within its border (Bhattacharjee, 2020). In the perspective of water wars, these disputes could impact the existing agreements and treaties among Nepal and India as these agreements and treaties remained a cause of political instability, civil unrest and protests within Nepal because most of the Nepalis considered these treaties as the source of dependability of Nepalis on India and also as the result of incompetent political leadership which failed to negotiate with India on a better position.

India - Bangladesh

India and Bangladesh (former East Pakistan) has a long-standing history of water disputes upon water sharing of Ganges since 1951 which erupted after the Indian decision to build "Faraka Barrage" in the West Bengal across the Ganges just 10 miles away from the East Pakistan Border (Presently Bangladesh), to divert Ganges River water into *Hugli River* (Haftendorn, 2000). India regarded Ganges River as an Indian River and also as an essential source to water supply to various parts of the country from the west to the south. The *Faraka Barrage* was completed and started functioning in 1975 and became an essential source of irrigation and drinking water supply, and improved navigation standards to various adjacent states. While on the other hand, Bangladesh being the victim of Indian water dominance claimed the increased Indian control over the Ganges

River's water flow into Bangladesh and alleged India for releasing excess water during the monsoon period and cause flood situation (Brichieri-Colombi & Bradnock, 2003).

Bangladesh has two treaties with India over the sharing of Ganges water and Faraka barrage. The most recent is agreed in 1996 which focuses on the water management during the dry season between both the countries but do not cover the drought situations and thus has a very limited scope and provisions for improvements (Treadwell & Akanda, 2009). Karthykeyan (2010) explained the challenges and problems in sharing Ganges River between India and Bangladesh as

“The problem of water-sharing between the two neighbours to three factors: one real, second perceived and third practical. First, the Indo-Bangladesh river basin has the largest concentration of world's poorest population with a high rural population density, making water an extremely sensitive political issue. Second, Bangladesh being the smaller neighbour often treats India with mistrust, making it difficult to conduct discussion on common interest issues in good faith. Third, the large number of riparian countries involved in the processes of multilateral diplomacy and negotiation further entrenches the difficulties involved in arriving at an agreement and complicates the processes”.

Geopolitical Framework

While analysing the water conflicts of South Asian sub-continent within the framework of geopolitics, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) provides insight in analysing and comprehending the regional security aspects that how focus can be given to a specific security agenda and ways to integrate it in a region. Security Complex, according to Buzan is, “a group of states whose primary security concern link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Therefore, RSCT divides the political world into the regions of mutual problems, disagreements, disputes and internal dynamics and thus the new international conflicts often erupt among the regional and inter-regional actors, and for that reason some robust patterns like security interdependence must exist. From the South Asian perspective, there are certain interests of various countries to maintain their dominance over the other countries. Pakistan and India are the major rivals and actors in the geo-political arena of South Asia. The geographical position of India provided it a great opportunity to maintain its prominent, influential, and dominant position among other South Asian states. India has border linkages with almost every country of South Asia and a gateway for most of the landlocked countries. India is ambitious to become a major regional as well as a global actor and its growing economy due to rapid industrialization and increasing population need a greater amount of water for various purposes. Thus, India engaged itself in various water related conflicts with neighbouring states to utilize their water resources and to maintain its hegemony in the region (Brichieri-Colombi & Bradnock, 2003).

On the other hand, South Asia is well defined by SAARC, established in 1985 having member states – Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives. Since the establishment of SAARC, no concrete steps have been taken to promote the regional cooperation mechanisms in the region. Besides South Asian states having water related disputes, there are various deep-rooted conflicts among different nations and cultures of this region. These conflicts are mostly religions, ethnic issues, linguistic aspects, caste system, economic deprivations, and lack of confidence and trust-deficit in intentions and motives of each other. South Asia, being the world's

most populated area, is creating certain opportunities for economic and socio-political instability because of the growing scarcity of resources to becoming prone to conflicts (Ahmed & Bhatnagar, 2008).

WATER RESOURCES: POTENTIAL CONFLICTS IN SOUTH ASIA

The major causes of the South Asian water conflicts are due to the trans-boundary flows of shared water and controlling the flow of water to one state by another state. That is the main reason that all the South Asian states are facing water conflicts. India, as the main and dominant actor in South Asia has water conflict with all the South Asian states. Though certain agreements and treaties were concluded by India with Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh but the Indian strategies to maintain its hegemony in the region especially concerning water issues are raising alarming concerns for the other South Asian states on water sharing and availability (Gleick, 1993). The increasing elements of urbanization, growing industrialization, and increasing population challenged the South Asian security nexus and the most prominent and alarming factor is the scarcity of water and its sharing has become an attraction in politics (Patz et al., 2009).

South Asia, the most populated region of the world, is emerged as the land of various diverse conflicts. In the present age, the disputes over the oil reserves are shifted to the most needed natural resource i.e. water. This region is facing a tremendous increase in population and alarming decrease in water resources. Being the region of developing economies, it is facing such conflicts. By 2050, a three billion increase is expected in the world's total population, and about 90% of which will be in the developing countries of the world. The growing climate change effects and the transformed patterns of rainfalls drastically affected the continuation of the level of water in the rivers. India, with the world's fastest growing population, is at the center of this issue. Most of the water sources coming into Indian Territory are coming from the neighbouring states which are about 75% and thus contributing to an increase in the dispute over water resources in South Asia. The trans-boundary flow of river waters and sharing the rivers basins by various states are the core sources of disputes among the states despite the issue of water sharing. In the context of South Asia, three river basins are the most important aspects of conflicts among regional states as discussed before i.e. Indus River basin shared by Pakistan and India; a major cause of conflict between them. Though IWT resolved the issue but after few decades, violations by India ripened the dispute. The other basin is the *Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin* shared by India, Nepal and Bangladesh which is also a prime source of dispute among these neighbours (Babel & Wahid, 2008).

Las but not least, Pakistan has deep concerns regarding the flow of trans-boundary waters into the Pakistani territory. In case of any war with India, India has the ability to control the flow of Indus River into Pakistan and thus choking the Pakistani economy. Similarly, India has strategically built dams on the waters flowing into Pakistan to severely impact Pakistan as it will get added advantage to choke flow of water originating from Afghanistan through *Shahtoot Dam* and thus could escalate tensions in the regions. Ironically, there is no legal framework exists in Pakistan and Afghanistan which could limit any water conflict among the neighbours. Afghanistan has unclear standing and not currently willing to enter into negotiations to develop legal frameworks for the sharing of trans-boundary waters which could be due to influence of India, inaccurate statistics regarding the use and demand of water, lack of diplomatic and technical expertise, and/or due to its insecurities vis-à-vis its neighbours.

ROLE OF SAARC IN REGIONAL STABILITY

Regional cooperation is not an easy task that can be implemented among South Asian states. The major state actors of South Asia i.e. India and Pakistan, experienced several armed conflicts in the past and were accused as the major factor in the disintegration of a federation of Pakistan (Giordano, Giordano, & Wolf, 2002). The establishment of SAARC in December 1985 was a milestone towards efforts for regional cooperation among South Asian states. The formation of SAARC provided a platform for the member nations to have discussions and negotiations on the development of cooperation in trade. Meanwhile, important issues like water disputes were totally neglected by the forum. Besides the efforts of SAARC in promoting cooperation among members in the last few decades, SAARC is not as efficient and effective as its neighbouring 'Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)' still its existence is an opportunity for experts and policymakers to focus and hold informal sessions to explore the possible solutions and policies to resolve bilateral and regional disputes (Ahmed & Bhatnagar, 2008)

SAARC, in the context of water disputes among South Asian states, aims to explore dimension through which it can contribute as a mediator in resolving the water conflicts within the region and to explore the ways and means through which the existing agreements and treaties should be made comprehensive and long-term in nature. The increasing conflicts over the South Asian trans-boundary water resources require greater attention of the regional as well as international organizations, as these conflicts have a greater tendency to emerge as violent conflict leading to full-fledged war. The involvement of two conflicting nuclear power countries intensified the dangers of the conflicts over water (Thapar, 2006). Although, mostly a third party is asked to be involved as a mediator or arbitrator to resolve the conflict and support the negotiations and facilitate the agreement process. In contrast, South Asian states strongly opposed seeking mediatory help from a third party except in the case of IWT. In such a case, SAARC is the most favourable platform, having a great sense of hydro-politics in the region and an enhanced understanding of water management concerns in the context of complex interstate interactions. There will be more chances of acceptability of SAARC, being a regional organization, by the South Asian States who are not in favour to involve a third party in negotiations. Thus it can play a vital role as a mediator and facilitator to prevent conflicts and can provide impartial and credible assistance to promote the process of cooperation among the member states especially on the region's shared rivers (Ahmed, 2016).

Recommendations

After examining various water-sharing treaties in South Asia i.e. Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan, the *Mahakali Treaty* between India and Nepal, and the treaty between India and Bangladesh over the Ganges River, the following are the suggestions for conflict prevention and for sustainable regional cooperation in future.

- India, rather than threatening Nepal in case of *Mahakali Treaty*, should utilize its potential in its favour despite developing conflicting situations between each other. India and Nepal should engage themselves in developing power projects to increase cooperation.
- India, being the prominent actor in all the water conflicts in South Asia, should distribute the water resources to each country to limit the conflicting situations.

- SAARC should be strengthening at the regional level and cooperation should be promoted instead of conflict.
- International Community must work to establish legal framework for trans-boundary water sharing between Afghanistan and Pakistan to avoid a violent conflict among the neighbours. While Afghanistan should limit its insecurities vis-à-vis its neighbours to enter into negotiation for water sharing.
- The violation of treaties and agreements regarding the water sharing issues should have serious implications on the violators.
- The Indian hegemonic behaviour should be neutralized and redirected towards more cooperative activities.
- The political leadership should focus on the advantages of cooperation among themselves and the activities politicizing water conflicts at the domestic level should be neglected.

CONCLUSION

South Asia is the region of the most populated and disputed river basins of the world i.e. the Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Kabul facilitating more than 700 million populations. This article focuses on the RSCT to understand the nature of trans-boundary water flows and conflicts over river basins which provide the basic source of contention among South Asian neighbours. The increasing scarcity of fresh water resources intensifies the need for efficient and effective management of all three river basins of South Asia favouring all the concerned countries. The growing Indian water mongering activities over water resources of South Asia are posing great challenges to the long-term peace, regional stability, and economic development in the region. Ironically, the element of nationalism and politicizing the water issues, and incompetent technical approaches to water management complicate and posed obstacles in the objectives of prevention of conflicts over water resources. Thus more optimistic and less nationalistic plans are needed for water sharing to gain more fruitful, sustainable, and equal utilization of water resources by all the South Asian States. The South Asian states need an effective and efficient joint mechanism of water sharing among each other which could be done at the platform of SAARC. Though various treaties have been concluded by the South Asian states to share water resources all the treaties and agreements among South Asian states have been the victim of violation by one of the states by inflicting damages to other. The bilateral arrangements for the settlement of disputes prove to be less fruitful. Thus, there is a dire need to strengthen the SAARC at the regional level to promote cooperation among all the South Asian states.

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