



ROLE OF SAARC DURING COVID'19 PANDEMICS, IT'S SUCCESS AND FAILURE. A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Finding out the "Role of SAARC during Covid'19 periods, its success and failure" is the main objective of the current study. Critical evaluation. The member nations of SAARC are Afghanistan, Bhutan, the Maldives, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. It is noteworthy that all of these nations are developing nations, despite the apparent rapidity of their rate of development. SAARC is one of the most significant and significant regional organisations in the world. Moreover, the prime aim and objective of SAARC is to give strength and unite all the member countries from all perspectives like multidimensional relationship, economic power, and self-sufficiency. When the World Health Organization (WHO) investigated reported and on coronavirus, accordingly SAARC took excellent measures and brought great safety in the region by following the guidelines of WHO and by collaborating with every member state of SAARC. The statues of SAARC as a regional inter-governmental institution is struggling a lot in terms of dealing with a number of issues since its birth, as this organization is known as back bone to connect all member countries with each other and make them work together. It is also crucial to note that this organization underwent a radical change in its operating procedures, making great efforts to replace its antiquated and outdated methods of dealing with its goals and objectives—namely, strengthening regional multilateral and bilateral relations—with more contemporary ones. The purpose of the current study is to attempt to answer the key question: How has SAARC managed to unite its member nations in the face of several other disputes and rivalries? In order to reach a just conclusion, the activity of this organisation is experimentally studied in this study project.

Keywords: Covid-19, South Asia, SAARC, Regional Organization, Pakistan, India, Pakistan Measures.

1. INTRODUCTION:

In 1985, SAARC was created as an intergovernmental regional organisation covering the South Asian region, which as of 2020 accounts for around 3.5% of the global area, 22% of the global population, and 3.70 trillion (US) in global GDP. Giving back and promoting world security and peace is this organization's main and important goal. Additionally, it works to improve the social, cultural, religious, economic, and political ties between member nations. Since its founding, SAARC has faced issues similar to those faced by other regional organisations including ASEAN, the Multilateral



Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

It might also be assumed that this organisation, like other global and regional ones, is having a lot of difficulties achieving its primary objective of unifying all of south Asia. Collaboration and teamwork in the areas of peace, tranquilly, sociocultural, economic, and political growth is one of the fundamental goals of this organisation. These obstacles on SARIC's path to achieving its fundamental purposes and objectives are caused by a variety of circumstances. The connections between India and its neighbours, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, are some of the variables. Terrorism, illegal immigration, and China's various influences are all issues.

It is significant to note that, in the current situation, SAARC is unable to bring these courtiers together to act against Covid'19 jointly. However, it is also true—and no one can dispute this—that SARIC is contributing significantly to the effort to tackle this worldwide problem. "Nearly a year after the Pandemic's outbreak, SAARC established the COVID-19 Emergency Fund. This initiative was launched through a video conference in which the member states present agreed to the terms and conditions and donated for reducing the risks associated with the Covid-19 pandemic in the region." The present plan was put out by Narendra Modi, the Indian Prime Minister. The World Bank also praised the efforts of these countries because of the swift actions taken by some countries, such as Iran and Italy, who declared the coronavirus to be a pandemic and issued important SOPs and guidelines like social distance, lockdowns, and to improve immune system. In contrast, the member countries of SARIC followed the guidelines given by WHO, and these guidelines were followed in a very satisfactory way.

According to the World Bank research, these countries are doing a fantastic job addressing this serious global health issue. The COVID-19 Emergency Fund campaign of SAARC, to which all of the member countries made contributions, greatly aided in enhancing safety and taking safeguards. The member nations coming together to battle the epidemic now is a very brave and effective move, and it may also be seen as a sign that this group will remain together for a very long time. The entire globe is continually battling and striving towards this goal, and a few pharmaceutical companies have developed vaccinations and medications. Other institutions, notably those from the SAARC countries, are also producing antibodies and are at various stages of development. It is also important to pay attention to the initiatives and suggestions made in this regard by other South Asian national leaders. Afghanistan suggested that SAARC modify a standard telemedicine framework. Therefore, benefits can spread to the most remote and inverted location of the component nations. By establishing a foundation, the Maldives advocated that nations work more closely and indefinitely on their economies.

Pakistan suggested that health ministers and experts attend discussions via video conferencing to improve group efforts and develop a public network of professionals who can share crucial information. Sri Lanka concentrated on raising awareness by developing a lone expert to exchange information and statistics on the cooperative efforts that needed to be made. Also noteworthy is the fact that this virtual summit was the first high-level meeting of SAARC countries' leaders of state and government following 2014. Based on these developments, it can be concluded that the coronavirus pandemic has given all countries in the globe the chance to cooperate and foster positive relationships despite difficulties and obstacles, not only the South Asian countries.

SAARC may play a crucial role in achieving the goal of coming together and bolstering bilateral and multilateral cooperation in a variety of domains by doing so publicly and completely. Since SAARC was established in 1985, it has been a proven fact that the goals of cooperating in concerted effort have not been met. Such initiatives are the best method to advance elaborate bilateral and multinational partnership. Through cooperative efforts, the South Asian area should be able to surpass other regions as one of the most impressive and powerful in the globe. Therefore, SAARC can have a huge impact in the future as a territorial and intergovernmental organisation.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Proactive precautions, self-improvement, self-reliance, government precautions, driven behaviour towards the pandemic, and lockdown intensity are the six main variables influencing the battle against the pandemic. The authors of this review have also emphasised the role of countries that are cooperating with and making a gallant attempt to combat this devastating epidemic, in addition to recommending a few important strategies to do so. According to authors, the aforementioned criteria are key and absolutely necessary to address the problems and risks associated with the coronavirus pandemic (Meenal Agarwal et al., 2020).

The future of South Asia has been fully examined by Dahiya and Behuria (2012). The author primarily studied the challenges faced by these countries in this work. They believe that the globe as a whole and the South Asian region in particular are moving forward strongly. As a result, now is the moment for SAARC to test out its ideas and drives in light of the shifting circumstances and emerging problems. The author made the case that this regional organisation had the potential to be crucial in this respect. Based on an observational exploration system, the authors of this book concluded that recent changes in the region offer remarkable opportunities for enhancing the role of intergovernmental institutions and foreign policy offices in concentrating and developing policies for collaboratively tackling specific issues like the advancement of foundations, health education, and environmental change.

According to Hassan and Reza (2020), the entire globe is currently dealing with the Coronavirus test as a worldwide epidemic. Every single significant country in the world has agreed that fighting this global issue is their primary responsibility. They are enforcing fundamental rules and taking safeguards in preparation for waging a reasoned battle to end this pandemic. The part played by countries in South Asia like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. Contrary to the industrialised nations of the globe, South Asian states, in the writers' opinion, are not taking many significant moves. They acknowledged the fact that these countries are among the world's poorest. As a result, they face a wide range of challenges, including destitution, tyranny, cruelty, and lack of education. Therefore, these countries are unable to effectively respond. They thus claimed that the world and regional groupings must play a particularly important role in overcoming the challenges and turning such crises into potential and long-term opportunities for certain other socio-political and economic concerns as well.

On March 15, 2020, many high-level meetings were conducted, some of which were quite significant. At these meetings, the governments of South Asian countries and heads of state addressed a pandemic response effort that had been suggested by the Indian prime minister. "The author is of the opinion that the 19th SAARC summit, which was postponed due to some issues between India and Pakistan, further deteriorated the functions and role of SAARC," the article states. "The author believed that this move was a surprise for the member countries of SAARC, because the role of this organisation is not up to the mark since its origin and especially after 2014. Additionally, these nations must deal with issues like poverty, illiteracy, poor health care systems, and weak economies in the area. The researcher suggested that this epidemic has created new chances and offered avenues for the member nations to improve their relations. The researcher also looked at how open the member nations were to multifaceted and regional cooperation.

3. OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

- I- To evaluate critically how the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation functions in bringing member countries together on a common platform, particularly during the Covivirus-19 Pandemic.
- II- To pinpoint the many causes of the barriers and difficulties the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation faces in its daily operations.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study used secondary sources of information and employed a mixed method research design, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods. Empirical observation is the primary



research technique for the current study's critical analysis, and an exploratory research design is employed. The role of the South Asian Association for regional cooperation is studied using a mixed method approach, with an emphasis on the Covid'19 eras and its successes and failures. "The empirical study is the evidence that mentioned countries have responded well during pandemic situations well towards the risks associated with this Pandemic and are eager to support the cause which can yield long-term benefits in terms of regional cooperation."

5. BACKGROUND OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

"Covid-19 or corona virus 2019 is a severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus". According to medical terminology Covid'19 is called as "Sars-cov-2". The first case of covid'19 was identified from the China specify its city namely, Wuhan, latter this virus speeded in the whole world very rapidly. WHO had declared public health emergency in the whole world in the beginning of the 2020 whereas, in march 2020 WHO declared this virus as a pandemic. "This Pandemic caused widespread deaths and a fast rise in the Number of cases and became as the deadliest disease in human history". This virus affected not only china but all countries of the world like Italy, Iran, US, other Middle Eastern and African countries. The total confirmed cases and the deaths are approximately 2.70 million from 2019 to date. It would not be wrong to say that every institution and foundation of the world was shocked. However, the doctor's medical teams and experts are working very hard to find out the ways to fight the pandemic. "These steps are the ray of many positive hopes and aspirations of speedy recovery from this health emergency, experts are of the view point that with the passage of some more time incubation and recovery rate will be higher and faster and a similar world will re-emerge as it was before this crisis". There are very serious Impacts of pandemic on the human life, secondly, these impacts are not for short term even it's also fact that this pandemic brought great changes and opportunities with it and this pandemic taught us great lessons.

5.1 Discovery and development of vaccine and SAARC

"Covid-19 vaccine is an immunity booster vaccine to fight against the middle and severe acute respiratory syndrome sars-cov-2. World's pharmaceutical industries and medical fraternity are developing medicines, equipment's, vaccines and associated technology for fighting against this deadly pandemic since 2019. After several phases of trials in the beginning of 2021 pharmaceutical organizations have developed and distributed vaccines and other related medicines after the approval of national and international regulatory authorities. As of now more than 10 vaccines has been approved, and distributed throughout the world. The efficacy of these vaccines is more than 90%." "The world's first vaccine was developed and approved by Russia's R. Pharma and its national regulatory authority, known as Sputnik-V vaccine". "The other worth mentioning vaccines and drugs are Pfizer-Biontech vaccine, Moderna, BBIBP-cov, Corona vac, Covaxin etc. Vaccines candidates have also crossed 300 mark in Feb. 2021".

5.2 OLD CONFLICTS AMONG SOME SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES.

Basically, the South Asia Association of Regional Co-operation (SAARC) and India is only interested in bilateral relationships among or between the member nations. And especially when Kashmir is being brutalized by Indian forces. Under these circumstances no one can find a way ahead. The Kashmir issue is biggest hurdle in the way of other confidence building measures to be resolved until and unless this problem is alive SAARC cannot generate proper unity among the members states because Pakistan and India are two great powers in South Asia. On the other hand, India's' hegemonic ambitions would not let succussed SAARC, India need to respect territorial borders of neighboring states. Otherwise, no resolution of old and traditional conflicts are possible in near future it is clearly written on the wall. It also blurring the main objective of unity of SAARC.

I- India's issues with Bangladesh:

Bangladesh got Independence in 1971 from Pakistan with Indian conspiracy because of its vested interest and animosity with Pakistan. There is also a rift between India and Bangladesh on the issue of water distribution of river gangs since then. And India never let loose Bangladesh persistently to make its decisions independently their relationship have been souring on multiple times. The



topmost issue between them is Ganges River waters which has been made barren the lands, and eventually marring the condition of million farmers of Bangladesh by establishing Farrakhan Barrage on it and depriving them from irrigation water too.

II- India's issues with Nepal:

India has border dispute with Nepal which has ignited nationalist movements and protests in Nepal despite of many similarities of social, cultural, and religious between both. Indian war monger leaders never wanted to resolve this dispute peacefully. On the other hand, Nepal's citizens are repeatedly demanding separation from India but being land lock country, it is a compulsion to accept imperialist acts of India.

III- India's issues with Sri Lanka:

Sri Lanka has been unhappy with India because of its intervention policies of Sri Lankan domestic issues. During civil war in Sri Lanka, the Indian intelligence agency (RAW) funded and helped the separatist LTTE terrorists of Jaffna and other issue is like Indian intervention in the state of Tamil Nadu which is long standing territorial disputes between both countries.

IV- India's issues with Pakistan:

Since independence Pakistan and India had fought three times war over Kashmir territorial dispute. Although on the pressure of international forces many times ceasefire was called the was in 2003 but situation remained same as exchange of regular firing across the Line of Control (LoC) never stopped. Kashmir occupation by Indian forces is considered by Pakistan as illegal act on the part of India by violating demarcation treaty of Britishers and multiple resolutions of UNO. Latest skirmishes between both countries were held when Indian war planes tried to cross LoC into Pakistani territory but shot down by Pakistani air force in this all-Indian pilot was captured alive and then released by Pakistani government after two days as a good gesture to maintain the peaceful relations between two nuclear power states.

It is observed that India's hegemonic dreams never let her to maintain peaceful relationships with its neighboring countries and small countries of South Asia which always live under threat of their territorial sovereignty from India and that is what also weakens the role of SAARC in maintaining unity among member states. General H.M. Ershad, former president of Bangladesh once he talked about the motto behind creation of SAARC in 1985, "was because all small and neighboring states were allergic to India, so they wanted to collective check on Indian ambitions and not let India make decisions freely and unilaterally".

Another significant barrier to the SAARC's functioning, in addition to these political divisions and mutual mistrust amongst the member nations, is the demographic, economic, and technical disparity between India and other members. the imbalance between. India will surpass other members in terms of population, GDP, and technology, which is unique to SAARC. India is responsible for two-thirds of the region's global exports and more than three-quarters of its GDP. India is also at the region's centre, while the other six nations are close by. India therefore serves as a bridge between the SAARC nations.

Another feature of SAARC is that four members, India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, belong to the middle-income developing country group. Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan belong to the least developed countries. The gap between the two regional groups does not encourage rapid economic cooperation, as least developed countries want special incentives. This is very difficult. Apart from that, in the case of products such as SAARC's exports, the degree of complementarity, which represents the degree of regional economic cooperation, is very small. They compete, not complement each other. The goal of SAARC's economic cooperation is a gradually integrated South Asian economy to fulfil the common desire of 4.68 billion South Asians for a more prosperous region. The steps taken to achieve this goal were more formal than substantive. India plays an important role in the region and is more well-formed than it really is. India plays a central role in the region. If India behaves like an elder rather than Orwell's brother, SAARC's economic cooperation can move forward.



5.3 Some successful steps taken by the SAARC countries during pandemic:

The COVID-19 Emergency Fund was launched by SAARC, which brought together the countries represented at the conference. The total amount of money committed to the fund totaled a modest US\$18 million, and its structure was operationalized with the support of an agreement among those who contributed, with India serving as both its main donor and manager. A narrative point of view inquiry claims that SAARC forerunners would participate in provincial involvement to combat the Covid-19, a pandemic that knows all boundaries. From a financial standpoint, Bangladesh may have contributed US\$1.5 million of the \$10 million saved into the asset by India, along with US\$1 million each from Nepal, US\$1 million from Afghanistan, US\$5 million each from Sri Lanka, US\$200 thousand each from the Maldives, and US\$100 thousand from Bhutan. However, considering the size of its economy and, most recently, the low assembly of its massive drug industry for local reasons, signs of its limited limit (on the off chance that it isn't done on Pakistan has announced that it will provide \$3 million to the COVID-19 Emergency Fund. Although the Secretariat of the Institution, located in Kathmandu, is in charge of overseeing SAARC institutional plans and has not yet established the general rules for the use of the asset, Pakistan supports the idea that all joint commitments should be linked to these goals. India, on the other hand, protects the use of the resources as a "independent crisis stage," remaining outside of the SAARC-approved schedule of exercises (New Delhi is concerned that Pakistan may use the institutional component to requirement drives proposed by the country), which over time led to differences between these two countries.

However, the most important tradition of this local reengagement relates to the institutional level's use of political verbalization to control the Covid-19 and its effects on people and the economy. In this regard, SAARC plans to include the acquisition of medical gear, prescriptions, and emergency clinic supplies that will be distributed among Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Maldives, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. On March 26, a videoconference between high-level health professionals was held to discuss explicit conventions that deal with public boundary screenings and individuals following, online crisis response group training, steps to foster specialised participation through a shared electronic stage, and a long-term data exchange between health professionals through the implementation of the Information Exchange Platform (IPE). Things that might be done using the lessons learned from the regional Telemedicine network projects carried out in Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bhutan.

Despite the fact that there are currently few COVID-19 cases in South Asia, which makes the amount raised by SAARC there small from the start, the region is one of the most populous and least developed on the planet, which poses a greater threat to the spread of the virus. India is therefore working to make local involvement in SAARC appropriate through the creation of this institutional tool, which is connected to the public control proportions of the participating nations and which may expand depending on how the epidemic in the region develops. This has not yet led to joint gatherings and discussions between SAARC member nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

As a result, SAARC nations also want to schedule meetings with SAARC trade and industry ministries in order to discuss ways to minimise the financial impact of the impending crises. All nations also intend to organise a survey with SAARC, since many countries experience clinical supply shortages and difficulty exporting medical products due to the burdensome ratios of importing countries. However, many countries manufacture comparable commodities, competing on the world stage rather than creating a mutually beneficial value chain, making it challenging to make plans or energies intra-SAARC meetings.



This can be best analyzed with the help of following data as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Countries	India	SriLanka	Pakistan	Bangladesh	Nepal	Afghanistan	Maldives	Bhutan	Total
Contribution in 10 US million \$	5	3		1.5	1*	1	0.2	0.1	21.8

Table 2

Countries	Total number of Confirmed Cases	Total number of Recovered cases	Recovery percentage	Rate in
India	1,04,52,403	10,076,455	96%	
Pakistan	5,02,416	4,56,969	90%	
Bangladesh	5,22,453	4,46,801	89%	
Sri Lanka	47,840	40,838	85%	
Nepal	2,64,780	2,58,441	97%	
Bhutan	810	466	57%	
Afghanistan	53,522	43,948	82%	
Maldives	14,065	13,308	94%	
Total	1,18,58,289	1,13,57,226	95.77%	

4. CONCLUSION

Current study discusses the Role of SAARC during Covid'19 pandemics, it's success and failure. A Critical analysis. In this study it is analyzed how recently SAARC and its member countries have taken some important initiatives to cooperate for mitigating issues and problems caused by this deadly virus sars-cov2. This empirical study helped to form a conclusion on the basis of both qualitative and quantitative estimation that this virus has not only negative impacts on these countries but it has also brought new opportunities for these emerging countries to get developed, like how to be get united, how to start working collectively. There are some other initiatives taken by SAARC countries like Covid19 emergency fund and as well as some other funds and projects which are helpful for these countries for long period of time. "It has also been analyzed in this study that despite being a developing and backward region South Asia responded well to the pandemic and the whole world including World Bank (WB) praised South Asian region's response in general and India and Pakistan's efforts and contribution for the cause in particular, the main focus of this study is to add something new to the limited existing literature by observing, analyzing and synthesizing properly the available literature". In this study, a multifaceted approach to a longer time period of pandemic causes and consequences for regional collaboration has been attempted.

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