The Issue of Terrorism: The Prospect of Security in South Asia

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Abstract

South Asia was under the colonial regime for a long period of time and it is a very diverse and unique region. South Asia has been plagued by terrorism for so many years. Due to terrorism, South Asia has suffered economically as well as politically and it has strained the relationship between many countries. Almost all the countries of South Asia are the sufferers of this threat and therefore a number of conventions and frameworks have been formulated to eradicate this. Terrorism is a challenge for all and a good cooperation among all the stakeholders is required in this regard. SAARC as a regional organization of South Asia has a lot of responsibility in this issue. Since its inception, SAARC has done various things but due to the political differences between the members it has failed to evolve an effective strategy. It has also failed to implement its guidelines and conventions on the ground and therefore a reform in SAARC is very necessary. To make South Asia a terror free region, all the countries should join hands and should work collectively. They should work by removing their political differences because a unified and strong SAARC will help South Asia in numerous ways and it will bring hope for the betterment of this region in all the possible ways. In this regard the present paper tries to examine the issue of terrorism and the prospect of security in South Asia.

Keywords – Terrorism, Strategic Considerations, Security, SAARC.

Introduction-

South Asia consists of eight countries – India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and Afghanistan. South Asia is a culturally and politically distinct region and almost all the countries share a close cultural proximity among themselves. South Asia is a very densely populated region as one fifth of the world population live here. South Asian countries were under the colonial regime during the time period of 1757 to 1947. Therefore, the impact of colonialism can be seen on the culture and politics of South Asia. However, South Asia is not free from challenges and difficulties and terrorism is one of such issues. In the 21st century, terrorism is a big challenge and due to the advancement of telecommunication and information technology, terrorist groups have increased its network and support base in different parts of the world. They can do their terrorist activities in any part of the world. All the countries of South Asia have also been suffering from terrorism and it poses a serious challenge for the law and order and for the peace and tranquillity of South Asia. Large number of innocent people have lost their lives due to terrorist attacks in several part of this region. South Asia has a regional organization known as South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and it was established in December, 1985 and its headquarters is situated in Kathmandu, Nepal. Its main aims are to foster the economic development and to maintain peace, harmony and prosperity among the countries of South Asia. But its work on the issue of terrorism is not satisfactory. Due to the political differences between the countries of South Asia, terrorism is constantly rising in this part of the world. Various terrorist organizations such as Lashkar-E-Taiba, Jaish-E-Muhammad, Hijbul Mujahideen have been originated from the South Asian country Pakistan. The Lashkar-E-Taiba was responsible for the 26/11 terrorist attack in the Mumbai city of India. It was the deadliest terrorist attack ever happened in India. In this attack 166 people lost their lives. Although India handed over the list of terrorists involved in this attack but Pakistan never took any strict action against such terrorists. Pakistan constantly support these terrorist groups financially as well as by supplying arms and ammunitions and at the same time it provokes the anti-Indian activities in the Kashmir valley of India. Such issues are the bone of contention between India and Pakistan. Several other terrorist organizations such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda are also increasing their support base in this region, so it is a big challenge for the security

agencies. They are spreading their propaganda in South Asia, especially among the youths. Although, all the countries in South Asia have formulated their own counter terrorism legislations and guidelines but still SAARC as a regional organization have some role to play but due to the internal differences among the countries of South Asia, it is not being played well by the SAARC. It has failed to play a remarkable role like the other regional organizations such as ASEAN and the European Union. SAARC has formulated anti-terrorism laws but it has failed to implement them effectively. SAARC should take the initiative to solve the differences to increase the unity among the member countries as it is the foremost regional organization in South Asia. South Asia is a region which is rich in all the aspects and therefore a special coordination is very necessary among all the countries and SAARC has a big responsibility to play in this regard. There are so many other problems in South Asia and therefore all the members should work unitedly and at the same time they should take proper initiatives to solve the problems with consensus. (Paul, Paul, Konwer, 2011, pp. 82-90)

Methodology –

The present study is a secondary study and the data for the proposed the study has been collected from books, journals, articles and so on. The methods of descriptive and historical study have been used to find out the answers of the proposed research questions.

Objectives –

The objectives of the study are the following –
1) To study the problem of terrorism in South Asia.
2) To study the prospect of security in South Asia.

Terrorism in South Asia –

Terrorism is a major issue in South Asia and due to this every year thousands of innocent people and armed forces lost their lives. There are so many active terrorist groups in South Asia. Sri Lanka faced a long civil war due to terrorism and still fundamentalism is very high in countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh. Due to the threat of terrorism, a fact has been overshadowed that the economies of so many South Asian countries are steadily growing. They have undertaken various projects for the economic and infrastructure development. South Asian countries have attracted huge foreign direct investments in the recent years and they are to trying to create a business-friendly environment. But terrorism is an obstacle for this development. It hampers the economic growth. But to eradicate this threat an effective strategy and close relationship between the countries are required.

Pakistan is the hub of terrorism in South Asia. The Pakistani terrorist groups are responsible for the terrorist attacks in many South Asian countries. Pakistan gives shelter and financial assistance to all the terrorists and it is also clear from the fact that the world's most wanted terrorist and the mastermind behind the 9/11 attack that is Osama Bin Labden was found in Abbottabad in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan and he was killed by the American army. Many international organizations and countries asked Pakistan to act against these terrorist groups and their leaders but Pakistan never take any such action. However, Pakistan is facing so many financial and other restrictions from various fields. The terrorist groups from Pakistan were also responsible for the political unrest in Kashmir as well as for the terrorist attacks in many parts of India. From 1992 bomb blast in Mumbai to the recent Pulwama attack in Kashmir, in all these attacks the Pakistani terrorist groups were the main culprits. On November 26, 2008 in Mumbai, terrorists killed 166 people mercilessly in various parts of the city. The Lashkar-E-Taiba was responsible for this brutal attack. The Indian government handed over the lists of terrorists involved in this attack but Pakistan government never showed any such pure intention to act against them. Other than Mumbai the terrorists also attacked various other cities in India like Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Varanasi, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Pune and so on. However, in the Kashmir valley the activities of the terrorists are very high and they always target the government property and the armed officials. They always try to destabilize the political situation in Kashmir. In 2016 the terrorists from Pakistan did the Uri attack in Kashmir. In this attack 18 Indian Army officials were martyred. Some days after this attack the Indian Army launched a massive surgical strike against such terrorists and killed them in the territory of Pakistan. Similarly, on February 14, 2019 the Pakistani terrorists attacked a CRPF convoy in Pulwama and killed 44 jawans. After this attack on 26 February the Indian Air Force conducted another operation and killed the terrorists in an air strike in the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). So, these terrorist activities always strained the situation between India and Pakistan. Bangladesh is also not free from terrorism. Terrorists group like Huji and Jamat ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) are still active in this country. Though the Bangladesh government under Sheikh Hasina carries out counter terrorism operations regularly against them but still they do their activities in various parts of Bangladesh. However, many top

leaders of these terrorists have been arrested by the Bangladesh police in the recent years. The religious extremism and fundamentalism are giving the ideological support to these terrorist groups and in the recent years the religious extremism have increased surprisingly in Bangladesh. The threat of left terror was also there in Bangladesh but with the support of security agencies and government the intensity of this type of terror is comparatively low at present. Terrorists use Bangladesh as a corridor for the supply of arms and ammunitions and it is a serious issue for the security agencies. The terrorists and fundamentalists always use anti-India sentiments and sometimes they use the territory of Bangladesh for their terrorist activity. They often take financial and other help from Pakistan. However, the Sheikh Hasina government has taken strong action terrorism and it should be continued despite the change of government.

The scenario in Nepal is also very dramatic. Monarchy was there in this country for a long time. However, the Maoists started a war against the monarchy and it was a serious law and order challenge for the security agencies in Nepal. The monarchy is not there in Nepal now a days and the Maoists in coordination with other political parties are trying to formulate a new constitution for the country. Sri Lanka also faced a long civil war and it was mainly for the LTTE. Due to the ethnic conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese so many terrorist organizations were born in Sri Lanka. However, due to the large-scale counter terrorism operations carried out by the Sri Lankan government and Sri Lankan army, these terrorist groups have been wiped out. Sri Lanka government keep a strong vigil on the internal security situation to make the country safe and secure. But still some Islamic terrorist organizations are there in Sri Lanka and the government is taking strong action against them. Maldives is a small South Asian country and it is also not free from terrorism. This country faced a serious challenge from Islamic terrorism it was clearly visible from a bomb blast in Sultan park in Maldives. The government of Maldives is taking various initiatives to tackle this threat and in this regard the security agencies are carrying out regular counter terrorism operations. The government of Maldives have signed several bilateral and multilateral agreements and treaties with South Asian countries for a better and smooth security and intelligence cooperation. The government is also taking initiative to strengthen the security agencies of the country and for this improvemwnt the government is taking help from other countries as well. Bhutan has also faced the challenge and threat of terrorism. However, Bhutan has successfully wiped out the camps and launchpads of ULFA and other insurgency groups of North East. The Indian Army also carries out counter insurgency operation with the help of Bhutanese Army in the forests of Bhutan. The threat of terrorism is still there in Bhutan as the country faces a challenge from the Maoists groups. Afghanistan faced the most brutal form of terrorism. The country and its people faced the challenge from Taliban and due to its terrorist activities like bomb blast, kidnapping and hijacking a large number of people have lost their lives in Afghanistan. Due to terrorism, the economy of Afghanistan has suffered the most. At present the activities of Taliban is very high in Afghanistan and the Afghanistan is under control of the Taliban. The President of Afghanistan has fled the country and the country is under the terror regime of Taliban. They are now running the government in this country. All the countries are evacuating its citizens from this country. Even the United States of America is withdrawing its defence forces from Afghanistan. The future of Afghanistan is very dark if it happens for a long time. Therefore, the situation in Afghanistan is a very serious security concern for the South Asian countries.

Terrorism is an obstacle for the economic development of South Asia. All the countries should increase the partnership and diplomatic ties among themselves for the fast and all-round development of South Asia because this region has the potential and capacity to become the economic hub of the world. This region is also rich in several natural resources therefore, the proper utilization of these resources will help this region in so many ways. South Asian countries should devise a strategy for increasing the export of these natural resources so that the region can become an economically prosperous region. SAARC should take initiative to solve the problems of South Asia which are pending for a long time. Because the solving of these problems will be beneficial for this region in a number of ways. (Kumar, 2012, pp. 1-148)

The Prospect of Security in South Asia –

The prospect of security for any region is very important. The security scenario of South Asia in a large way depends on SAARC because the role of SAARC is to protect the regional security as well as to promote regional cooperation. From its inception in 1987, the SAARC has adopted a number of conventions and frameworks to counter terrorism. In 1987, the SAARC adopted a convention known as "Regional Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism". This convention urged for greater and extensive regional cooperation among the member states of SAARC. This convention was upgraded in 2002 and some resolutions were incorporated into this convention as

per the guidelines of the United Nations. This upgraded convention also deals with several forms and types of terrorism and it also addresses the matters relating to the financial help given to terrorism. SAARC formulated all the conventions with an aim of increasing the unity and coordination between the members and the convention adopted in the 2008 also reflected the same. SAARC formulated an agency to tackle various challenges of terrorism known as Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk (STOMD). Its main office is situated in Colombo in Sri Lanka. The main task of this desk is to collect and receive information about the terrorists and to formulate a suitable strategy to counter them. This desk helps the security and intelligence agencies of South Asian countries. SAARC has also created an agency to deal with the drug related crimes and it is known as Drug Offences Monitoring Desk. However, the SAARC has also created a group of expert police and army officials to work in accordance with these groups and to increase the coordination among these agencies. Although the SAARC has created so many agencies and forums to deal with terrorism but still it lacks the necessary support and cooperation. SAARC should formulate guidelines in this regard to increase the coordination and diplomatic ties among the member countries. The counter terrorism agencies of SAARC have the potential to counter the threat of terrorism as well as to strengthen the security scenario of South Asia and therefore all the countries should come forward with the necessary political will and determination. They also should remove the internal hatred and differences among themselves. There is a necessity of an agency like INTERPOL in South Asia because an agency like INTERPOL can handle the security situation of South Asia in a better way. However, discussions are going on in this regard and a fruitful result is expected by all. The most significant achievement of SAARC in the recent years is the approval of the SAARC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) which was signed in August, 2008 at the 15th SAARC Summit. It aims to ensure better partnership and close contacts among the SAARC members. SAARC should increase the cooperation with other organizations like the United Nations and the ASEAN to counter terrorism more effectively and strategically. South Asia is a diverse region and there are so many difficulties which are being faced by the SAARC like the terrorism, illiteracy, poverty and so on but these obstacles can be solved to a great extent if the member countries are interested enough in manging the affairs of the SAARC in a systematic way. They should take the initiative in organizing the SAARC summits regularly because regular holding of SAARC summits will give proper guidance and support to the member countries.

South Asia is facing the problem of terrorism for a long time and an effective mechanism is the need of the hour. To strengthen the security of South Asia, a reform in the working pattern of SAARC is highly essential. SAARC should take strong action against those who support terrorism and provide financial help to them and at the same time it should also ensure that more diplomatic and political relations should be made between the countries. Because more people-to-people engagement and contacts with the countries will make their relationship warm and better. India is also facing some form of internal terrorism like insurgency and Mao terrorism and therefore SAARC has a duty in this regard also. Because it is the responsibility of the SAARC to make the member countries terrorism free. ASEAN has established a law enforcement centre in South East Asia for better security arrangement in the region. SAARC should establish a similar centre in South Asia because the threat of terrorism in South Asia is higher than that of South East Asia. The prospect of regional security is always dependent on the SAARC and on the willpower of the member countries. A strong and powerful regional organization can make the region prosperous and therefore a strong SAARC is the need of South Asia because it can guide as well make the region more secure. (Rosand, Chowdhury and Ipe, 2009. pp. 1-27)

Conclusion –

South Asia is a region which has faced the most brutal and horrible form of terrorism. Terrorism is the biggest threat for the humanity in the 21st century. In the recent years the South Asia has seen so many terrorist incidents like the 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attack, Dhaka Gulshan terrorist attack, Colombo serial bomb blast and so on. In these terrorist attacks, the law and order situation were deteriorated in a large way. However, all the countries in South Asia have made serious efforts to combat this threat. But still much more work needs to be done. SAARC as a regional organization of South Asia is responsible for maintaining peace and prosperity and therefore, SAARC also should solve the complexities in the relationship between the member countries and should work for a peaceful and economically developed South Asia. Pakistan always sponsor and support terrorism and it is a real threat for South Asia and SAARC should impose some restrictions against Pakistan. Because the terrorist organizations from Pakistan are not only a threat for South Asia but also for the world. However, SAARC should devise a framework for its member countries to counter all the types and formations of terrorism and should increase close cooperation with other

regional organizations. However, over the years SAARC has failed to work effectively to stop terrorism. SAARC has also failed to increase the unity among its members and therefore so many challenges remain unsolved. But SAARC should pay more attention towards terrorism and all the countries should work jointly in this regard. SAARC should take a strong stand against the dominance of Taliban in Afghanistan and at the same time it should ensure the safety and security of the people of other South Asian countries. It also should help the Afghan people in all the possible ways and should try to establish a democratic government in Afghanistan. The countries of South Asia should give a politically stable government to its people because political unrest sometimes give rise to terrorism and they should take care of it. A united and strong South Asia will not only be a major power in Asia but it can also showcase its power capacity in the world and therefore all the countries should come forward to make this region more powerful.

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