

Research Paper

Water Politics in South Asia-Vis-à-Vis -India, Pakistan Relation**Raja Nazakat Ali**Ph.D. Research Scholar, UNESCO Madanjeet
Singh Institute of Kashmir Studies, (UMIKS)
University of Kashmir
Srinagar.190006.**ABSTRACT**

Water is an important source of life on earth. About ¾ or 71 percent of the surface of the earth is water. 40 percent of the world population is directly at the mercy of fresh rivers water and about 2/3rd of these people live in developing countries. Water for all as a basic need can be defined as a public good and human right. This target dominates the entire world as a global water challenge. The United Nation (UN) defines water as a public good. According to the economic definition, this scarce resource does not meet all the economic criteria of a public good.

Introduction:-

None should be excluded from its consumption. Water as a Public good is an important resource which should be accessible to everyone in sufficient quantity and quality (basic supply); it is essential for human life and their health. Water is an economic resource; it has always been an aid for social and economic development, but also a commodity of conflict and cooperation particularly amongst developing countries.

Most likely, water creates tension among the countries where the rivers cross the national boundaries of two or more countries and make it a problem for policy makers to resolve their tensions not only at inter-state but also at intra-state level. In this respect three categories of water disputes can be defined as: national level, regional level and international level. South Asia, four countries out of eight integrated to are involved in water sharing conflicts and all are facing three types of conflicts, as below:

National Conflict:

Disputes on water sharing insides of the countries among different provinces and states of the country, i.e. Indian states of Punjab and Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, in Pakistan Punjab and Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhawa (K.P.K) and Punjab over water sharing.

Regional Conflict:

Where the river cross national boundaries, i.e. India and Pakistan on Indus River, India and Nepal on Mahakali and some other rivers and India and Bangladesh on Ganges River.

International Conflict:

Where the rivers cross the national boundaries between two or more countries, as Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Tigris, Euphrates, etc. the use and misuse of water in upstream countries affect its quality and quantity and usage in the downstream countries. Riparian status can affect the upstream flow of water by large scale reservoirs and dams.

All these groups of countries in South Asia share international river basins, and are agrarian based countries. The need for water is essential for their development and prosperity. However, increasing demand of water for these agrarian based countries is breeding disputes among them

and also becomes a tool of politics in the region. Consequently, water is directly or indirectly involved in the formation of their policies and becoming the part of politics.

Water Politics in South Asia

Water politics refers to the political strategy or diplomacy majorly affected by water availability and growing demand of water. When water is involved in the formulation of political policies for a particular country, and is used as a political weapon, it is known as water politics or hydro-politics. As human population is growing at an alarming rate, consequently water quantity is declining. Thus scarcity of water has a great potential to breed a conflict between the states and internal actors. In the present century, water has become an inevitable issue for the world politics and water politics has made a very complicated inter-state relationship.

South Asia is an abode of more than one-sixth of the world population which is dependent on agriculture. As a result, water has become scarce and gains critical economic value. And the demand for water has surpassed with rival demand by various economic sectors, states and regions; it has increased competitions, tension and disputes and has become a significant asset of political framework. Thus the importance of water for life has made it a strategic natural resource and will never be free of politics. Because, water could be major source of future conflicts among states (What some have called the coming of the water wars). South Asia has a diversified topography wherein the rivers are not confined to a particular country but flow across the countries (borders) creating a problem over water sharing. Thus water resources have become a root cause of social, political and economic conflicts among the nations of South Asia.

Background of Water Politics in South Asia

As Britishers were on the mission of exploiting more and more from their colonies, they have developed some tools and mechanism to develop the productivity of raw materials for their industrial growth. In this sense the Britishers had introduced a large scale development and management of water resources of the sub-continent under a colonial policy. The objectives were to exploit maximum agricultural potential and to enhance the European industrial growth and market. In achieving this, regional and local

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administration played a pivotal role in the identification of feasible water projects. The management of developed water resources was handed over to provincial departments. The princely states as the owner promised to access the water to everyone. But, the physical integration of the river system and scattered population in the sub-continent made the development of water resources a matter of confrontation among various region and nations. These conflicts are mostly reflected by the conflicting demand of the regional, provincial and state level which has given birth to water conflicts. Consequently these water conflicts turned into socio-political conflicts in post colonial era.

After the partition, British India was divided into component states, dominated by India and surrounded by weaker states like Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. This division not only created new borders but also divided the hydro resources of the subcontinent and cut off the water ways; since the flowing water does not follow the political boundaries and flows across the boundaries, as a result, division and sharing rights over flowing waters between newly created nations gave birth to conflicts at political level among these nations states. Consequently, many conflicts occurred among the nations of the region followed by landmark agreements, treaties and memorandums of understanding for peaceful solution such as Indus Water Treaty, Mahakali Treaty and Ganges Treaty.

Despite the existence of a number of agreements, disputes and conflicts have arisen every now over the distribution of water, not only among countries but within the provinces and states. There are illustration of this, in the state of Punjab and Haryana and the Southern states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu in India and the Sindh and Punjab provinces in Pakistan. In fact these inter-state conflicts over water lead to intense political pressures effects the intra-state relation. According to some water experts that water conflicts are more likely to occur on the local and regional level particularly in developing countries where common property resources may be more critical to survival and less easily replaced and supplemented. The politics of water and sharing arrangements have become complicated. As Peter Glick report; "One factor remains constant: The importance of water to life means; that providing for water needs and demands will never be free of politics".

Politics of Water and India- Pakistan Relation:

As far as India and Pakistan are concerned, no two countries in the world have so much in common as them. Both countries have certain cultural, religious and linguistic similarities. However, since independence they have continuously been in a state of undeclared war with varying degree of uncompromising issues, especially over water. It is historically constructed, emotionally stimulating, and politically divisive. Although, water is technically not a core issue between the two, but differences over the use of the river water is core issue. In recent years utilization of water is the foremost and disrupting issue between India and Pakistan.

In 1960, both governments were happy to sign the Indus Water Treaty, but public reaction to the Treaty is very different. People in Pakistan, criticise the loss of three eastern rivers, despite the huge amount of financial aid Pakistan received in lieu of this loss, in India public criticise the loss of its three western rivers. The reaction of media, academicians, and different groups of society and farmer groups from both sides are utterly opposing the Indus Water Treaty. Even opposition members of both governments call the Indus Water Treaty as a suspicious and critical. The water

experts from both countries are also not happy with the treaty. Consequently, both governments are facing immense pressure from different groups of society. However, it is not difficult to understand the changing tune of political relation between two countries. It can be understood by revision of recent projects made by India on western rivers, which were fully opposed by Pakistan and considered as major threat on Pakistan's security.

Indeed, the Indus Water Treaty between the two has survived the ups and downs of Indo-Pak relations, but recently it has come under strain with India's plans to construct large hydroelectric projects, including the Baglihar, Wullar Barrage, Tulbul Navigation the Kishanganga, the Nemobazgo, all of it regarded as a core issues and stand out as the most controversial projects. From the Pakistan's point of view, India's line of action on the riparian issue hardly warrants a high degree of trust in good neighborliness. In addition, political mobilization on dam construction on the western rivers has stimulated anti-India sentiments among farmer associations, politicians, and fundamental groups and in army as well. From defensive (army) point of view, some argue that Indian intentions are directed towards flooding Pakistan during inter-state tensions and that flood waters could destroy Pakistani defenses including Upper and Lower Chenab Canals in Sialkot region all the way to Panjnad in the South. From the Indian side, it is argued that: India could use the water as a bargaining chip to settle issues in other related areas. According to some there are several strategic water canals in Pakistan. For illustration the Bambanwala Ravi Bedian (BRB) link canal in the Sialkot-Lahore sector was used by Pakistan as fortification of its defenses along the Indian borders during the 1965 war. In 2002, after India mobilized its forces as part of Operation Parakram, Pakistan diverted waters to these defense canals increasing the existing severe water shortage of 50 percent to over 70 percent. In this situation water is seem to be a political and defensive weapon between India and Pakistan, which no one is ready to compromise with it.

These disputes over water are being pitched politically. Both countries' motivations are not too difficult to translate. First, in order to keep the Pakistan's disputes with India, water becomes the existential driver. It pays political dividends for both countries' establishment, to focus their lens on each other. Nowadays Pakistan is facing serious challenges of water crisis, and it is directly linked to relations with India. It is easy to understand the mood of political atmosphere between India and Pakistan; When President Asif Ali Zardari opined in Washington post that "The water crisis in Pakistan is directly linked to relations with India. Its resolution with India could prevent an environmental upheaval in South Asia, but failure to do so could fuel the fires of discontent that may lead to extremism and terrorism. The mood and temperament of the political systems and other interest groups as well as the political atmosphere determine the state of affairs of India, Pakistan conflict over water.

Since the dawn of Indus Valley civilization, the Indus Basin has been closer to our people's heart and souls, propagated love and unity throughout the basin. Unfortunately today, the ebb and flow of the waters of love has turn into hate and destruction between Pakistan and India. Owing to the rapid growth of industrialization, agricultural development and domestic usage, water resources are declining rapidly which is turn into political,

economic and regional conflicts. South Asian nations are called a single geographical unit and sharing three major river basins viz. the Indus, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. The 'Water Politics' in South Asia is concerned, the complex orientation of the rivers in South Asia cut across a number of countries in the region complemented by a tense and uncompromising political situation amongst the fellow riparian countries brings out strategic role played by water.

Conclusion:

Water is primary source of economical and industrial growth and has a direct link with economical and social development. Being one of the most important political and economical issues, it has created hostilities among the countries of South Asia. The relations between India and Pakistan have been strained after the partition by Indus water dispute. The boundary line which was demarcated in 1947, introduced a new dimension of Hydro-politics or conflict over water in the region. At that time this issue was political for India and economical for Pakistan, but today it is political and as well economic for all countries of the region. Before turning into military conflict, it is necessary to develop friendly relationship among concerned states and to find out security and prosperity in the region, to settle this complicated issue equal footing and with appreciation of each other's concerns and countries. There is needed to understand and address the issue politically, officially and scientifically through the effective people of South Asia. It is the responsibility of policy makers to revise and reshape their policy for the settlement of the issue.

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