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South Asia Security and Kartar Pur Border: A Path to Peace OR?

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ABSTRACT

South Asia has been a unique geographical region where all member states share commonality of interests in history, politics, economics and socio-cultural aspects due to close geographical proximity. Because of this uniqueness, South Asia is considered a single geographical unit where security issue has a cross border dimension. For Sikh community, Pakistan has opened the Kartar Pur border between India and Pakistan. It is a step forward to bring peace across the region. Though it has also raised many questions on the security of South Asia; would tension between Pakistan and India be diluted or escalated? Would it trigger peace or security threat across the region? What would be behavior of India and Sikh community in the new scenario? How a sovereign state can establish relations with a community group (religious community) of neighboring sovereign state by passing later? How it would affect the pattern of state relations at regional level as well as at international level? The research paper is mainly based on an attempt to answer these queries. The descriptive and analytical method is used along with the primary sources in the form of in-depth interviews and focus group activities.

Key Words: South Asia, Security, Kartar Pur border, Pakistan, India.

Introduction

Indian continent was named as South Asia by United Nations in 1945. In colonial India, three prominent religious communities, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were coexisting from many decades. Hindus and Muslims launched a separatist movement against British rulers and each achieved a separate homeland in 1947, to live according to their own religious ideology. The Sikh community neither launched a separatist movement for their own nor demanded a separate state for Sikh community to live in it. Though Sikhs participated in the separatist movement against British rulers and aligned themselves with Hindu community. After getting independence from colonial rulers in 1947, they considered Indian state as their homeland and started to live with Hindus. Consciously or unconsciously, their majesty rule and glorious past was alive in their mind and desire to rule on a separate land was twinkling in their hearts.

The separatist emotions of an identified community group in a state emerged when it has a feeling of being deprived of economic resources, rights, privileges

and facilities as compared to other community group. In the beginning, such feelings and emotions remain under the surface of society, be present in the subconscious of individuals who belong to deprived community group. When wishes of out-group (Jost & Sidanius, 2004) are not satisfied or facilitated, then it is turned into a wave of emotions that appears first on the surface and then is transformed into a movement for 'self- identity' (Turner & Stets, 2005). The individuals of out- group started to claim for their own separate identity to be recognized by state or society. State then either satisfied the demands and recognized their group identity or suppressed their identity movement using state authority.

In case of Sikh community in South Asia, they also have a social, cultural, and religious identity and desired to retain it. During freedom struggle by Hindus and Muslims to get self-rule from colonial ruler, Sikh community did not strive for a separate homeland and decided to live with Hindus happily in India after 1947. They demanded a share in the state resources and their demand was not accomplished by Indian state. This deprivation has lead identity emotions and feelings of the Sikh community to appear on the surface and emerged in the form of a secessionist movement, 'Khalistan' in Indian Punjab in 1984. The Khalistan Movement aspired for a state to be carved out of Indian Punjab and Pakistan Punjab (Jodhka, 2001). The movement was forcefully crushed by Indian government but Sikh could not forget this setback. The murder of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in October, 1984 and Rajiv Gandhi in May, 1991 by a Sikh body guard was an indication of avenge. After that incident, pro- Sikh policies were adopted by Indian government to assimilate the separate identity movement and to lessen the depressed feeling among Sikh community. Some share to Sikh community was given and Sikh officers were appointed on important posts of government like Prime Minister (Manmohan Singh, 2004-2014), Defense Minister(Rajnath Singh), Commander of armed forces of India (Birender Singh Dhanoa) and chief minister of Indian Punjab (Captain Amarinder Singh).

Apparently, Indian government is successful in curbing secessionist movement, 'Khalistan' but not to a great extent. Sikhs have an emotional attachment to Punjab (Indian Punjab and Pakistan Punjab). They are among one of the rulers who ruled Punjab from 1799 to 1849 under Ranjit Singh who was defeated by British rulers in 1849. After making Punjab a part of British colony, the whole Indian continent came under the control of British rulers. Beneath the layers of human sub-consciousness, recognition of community identification is still alive among the Sikh community. It was also quite visible at the opening of 'Kartarpur border' by Pakistani government on 28th November, 2018. The absence of Hindu officials in the opening ceremony has indicated tense relations between Hindus and Sikh. Hindu community is not happy by the decision of Pakistani government and it had to accept the opening of 'Kartarpur border' under Sikh community pressure. So chances of recurrence of a conflict between these communities, Hindu and Sikh are visible.

Discussion

Sikh rule in Punjab

The Sikh empire is one among many empires in Indian continent and it has lasted from 1799-1849. It was basically concentrated in Punjab region. The downfall of Mughal Empire gave space to the rise of Sikh empire. With the death of Mughal ruler Aurangzeb in 1707, Mughal Empire became weak and was broken down into small self-governing, autonomous parts or groups. The 'Dal Khalsa' army took the decline of Mughal Empire as an opportunity and Guru Gobind Singh launched a military expedition against the Mughals and the Afghan. As a result of this army expedition, the Sikh army increased in number and then divided into small independent 'misls' (sects or group) (Gough & Innes, 1986). Each 'misl' was controlling a specific region and city. Under the leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, all these autonomous, self-governing Punjabi 'misls'¹ have merged into one unit or 'Khalsa Army'. He laid the foundation of Sikh empire in Punjab and was crowned on 12th April 1801, the day is known as 'Baiskhai'. Ranjit Singh himself was a mere leader of a Sikh Misl. Through his strong leadership, he unified all Punjabi 'misls' under his command and became Maharaja of Punjab (Griffin, 2006). Sikh empire was based on the basic concept of 'Khalsa', so Ranjit Singh modernized his army with training and latest weapons. After the death of Ranjit Singh, the Sikh empire began to decline due to internal rifts, cleavages and political weaknesses. In 1849, it was defeated in Anglo-Sikh wars- first war in 1845-1846 and second war in 1848-1849- and whole Punjab became a part of British rule. The Sikh empire ruled for fifty years in four major regions; Lahore, Multan, Peshawar and Kashmir. Duleep Singh (1838-1893) was the last Maharaja of Sikh Empire (Griffin, 2006).

Sikhism² evolved as a result of a conflict between ruler authority and religious clergy and it has been interpreted by some scholars as religious prosecution in Indian history. During Mughal era, two Sikh Gurus, Guru Arjan (1563-1605) and Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675) were executed as they were forced to change their religion to Islam (Fenech, 2001). As a reaction it triggered the movement against Mughal rulers to protect the religion and freedom of conscience. The last Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh, founded the 'Khalsa'. Guru Gobind Singh was deeply affected as his father Guru Tegh Bahadur who was beheaded by Aurangzeb (Seiple, 2013). Guru Tegh Bahadur raised his voice against religious oppression and killing of non-Muslims. The state was not accepting the existence of non-Muslims during Aurangzeb's rule. As deeply motivated by his father's execution,

¹ .Misls: It refers to small sovereign state of Sikh and Sikh commanders of these misls were an independent warlords. It is a kind of Sikh Confederacy that appeared in 18th century in Punjab after the decline of Mughal Empire. There were about twelve Sikh Misls of Punjab. It was a kind of "aristocratic republic" as described by Antonie Polier.

² . An Indian religion combining Islamic and Hindu elements, founded in the Punjab in the late 15th century AD by Nanak.

Guru Gobind Singh established 'Khalsa' in 1699. The formation of 'Khalsa' was a significant event for Sikh community. 'Khalsa' means pure and it refers to a group of Sikh warriors. They were assigned a duty to protect non-Muslims or innocent people from religious victimization. Since then, 'Khalsa' acted as a religious and political institution for Sikh community (Singh, 2008).

Sikhism appeared in the parts of North India (these parts are now included in Pakistan and India). During the period of Mughal Emperor Babar, the Sikhs were living freely and friendly. Sikhism came into conflict with the state policies during Mughal emperor Jahangir and Aurangzeb who reintroduced 'Jizya', a tax that non-Muslims living in an Islamic state have to pay the government and in return that Islamic state provides protection to non-Muslims. Emperor Akbar had 'Jizya' waived in 1564 (Powell, 2015). Hindu Barahmins in Kashmir refused to pay 'Jizya' and got in confrontation with Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Under these circumstances they sort protection from Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur in Punjab, against their denial to pay 'Jizya'. History is silent and did not answer the query why Hindu Barahmins did not seek help from their own religious clergy 'Pandit' at that time. Hindu Brahmins delegation misinterpreted to pay Jizya tax as an intention to convert them to Islam forcefully. As Kripa Ram who was leading a delegation of 500 Hindus met Guru in Anand Pura in Punjab and said while weeping and howling, ".....these together with the Jizya tax are the kind of difficulties which we had to endure and now it is their intention to convert us to Islam by force. We shall do whatever you say (Shah, 2012)". Through such tactful ways of Hindu Brahmins, Sikh religion and its Gurus entered into a conflict with Mughal ruler.

The circumstances that resulted in the death of Guru Arjan (5th Guru) in a controversy with Mughal Emperor Jahangir were created by a Hindu governor, Chandu Sha, in Lahore at that time. Chandu Sha conspired with Guru Arjan's brother who was angry due to the denial of Guruship to him. At the same time Akbar was not pleased with Jahangir and was inclined to succeed Khusrove, Akbar's grandson, to the throne of Mughal Empire (Rathermund & Kulk, 2010). In the mean while, Khusrove met with Guru Arjan and Chandu Shah taking advantage of all these circumstances poisoned Jahangir's mind against them. He manipulated the environment and suspected that Guru Arjan was helping the rebelled prince Khusro against Jahangir. The cause of enmity between Chandu Sha, governor of Lahore and Guru Arjan was matrimonial. Guru Arjan has refused to marry his son Guru Hargobind with Chandu Sha's daughter. So the later took it as an insult and humiliation. He conspired against guru, escalated it as political and religious controversy with Jahangir, and executed Guru Arjan Dev³ in 1606 (Rathermund & Kulk, 2010; Shah, 2012). This incident sowed the seed of hatred in the heart of Sikh community against Mughal ruler. After wards, Guru Hargobind, 6th guru, militarized the Sikh as security and protection for Sikhs from

³ The tomb of fifth Guru is situated outside the Lahore Fort.

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Mughal rulers. The hatred and enmity of Sikh community led to the decline of Mughal Empire and establishment of Sikh empire in Punjab.

This conflict then led to the emergence of Sikh 'Khalsa' in 1699 AD, by Guru Gobind Rai who became 9th Guru of Sikh faith after the death of his father. In 1675, the 9th guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded on the order of Aurangzeb as he resisted the religious prosecution of non-Muslims by state (McLeod, 1999). Then in 1699, his son Guru Gobind who became the 10th Guru of Sikhism founded Khalsa – a warrior community – on the day of 'Baisakhi' (festival of annual harvest). The surname "Singh" (lion) was also awarded by him to the first five 'Khalsa' volunteers. He also changed his name from Guru Gobind Rai to Guru Gobind Singh (Mahmood, 1996), and became 6th Khalsa volunteer. They came into a political conflict with the tax policies for non-Muslims introduced by Aurangzeb. Guru Gobind initiated such Sikh traditions which indirectly challenged the state tax policies for non-Muslims and refused to pay taxes such as 'Jazia', pilgrim's tax and Bahadar tax (Dhavan, 2011). For example, Guru Gobind Singh asked 'Khalsa' to leave the ritual to shave head which mean Sikh were not to pay Badar tax by Sikhs living in parts of Mughal Empire.

Before the formation of Khalsa, 'Masand's system' or agents were used to organize Sikh religion. The 'Masands' were appointed by Sikh gurus to collect donations and revenue which was spent on Sikh community. Masand system was abolished by Guru Gobind Singh and he established a centralized system with the help of 'Khalsa' under his direct command. It had divided the Sikhs into two groups, one who named them as 'Khalsa' and second who were Sikh but did not take any oath as 'Khalsa' (Oberoi, 1994).

The early Gurus were religious and did not interfere in politics and state policies. But fifth Guru, Arjan, became suspicious in the eyes of Jahangir as he helped the rebel Prince Khusrove against emperor. Thus Sikh religion entered in politics and confronted the Mughal state. After the execution of Guru Arjan by Mughal emperor, the Sikhs transformed from a pacifist religious community to a militant sect. The process of Sikh transformation reached its culmination under Guru Gobind Rai. The resistance from Hindu kings to pay 'Jizya' tax to Muslim Mughal rulers has been interpreted in history as a policy of forceful conversion to Islam by Mughal Aurangzeb (Oberoi, 1994). These circumstances united the Marhathas and Sikh against Mughal power and decline of Mughal rule in Indian continent began. It started the Mughal-Sikh war which resulted in the establishment of Sikh empire under Raja Ranjit Singh. The political conflict (Hindu, Sikh, Muslim conflict) was transformed into a religious and military conflict and it resulted in the rise of a temporal state of Sikh in Punjab, controlling Multan, Lahore, Kashmir and Peshawar.

The establishment of Sikh empire gave them a separate religious and cultural and socio-political identity in India, especially in Punjab. After the fall of Punjab in 1849 to British rulers, Indian society was polarized into identity based three communities, Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs. British ruled Indian continent for about a hundred years. In 1947, British India was divided into Pakistan and India as a

result of separatist movement by Hindus and Muslims (Gilbert, 2015). It was a successful movement based on concept of self-identity to get salvation from British slavery. Hindus and Muslims both participated in independence movement and achieved a separate homeland to live according to their own socio-cultural and religious values. The Sikh community did not demand a separate state on the basis of their self- identity and they decided to live in India with Hindu community. The Sikhs had aligned themselves with Hindus against Muslims in India. In March 1947, during the political crisis in Punjab, Jinnah and Muslim League had extended a peace gesture towards the Sikhs and offered them a share of the government. But the latter turned down the offer and preferred to make an alliance with Hindus (Ziring, 1999). The things became sadder and sorrow when Redcliff divided Punjab between India and Pakistan. It was an emotional setback for Sikh community as Punjab being the center of their religious places, was divided between two states that emerged as each other's enemy (as India was not ready to accept the existence of Pakistan). Redcliff award has affected about 20 million Sikhs in India as it has divided their holy and sacred places between two enemy states. Thus, religiously the most affected community by Redcliff Award was Sikh community. After partition, west of Punjab became a part of Pakistan and eastern part became a part of Indian. The Sikhs, about 2500,000, who were living in Pakistan, moved to India. Most of Sikh refugees were settled in the area near the Pakistani border and are in majority population in many districts along the border. Their number encouraged them to seek autonomy in greater Indian federation which erupted in violence and assault on Golden Temple (Harimandar) of Amritsar in June 1984 by Indian army.

Religio-Cultural Importance of Kartarpur for Sikh Community

Kartarpur has a historical and religious significance for Sikhs. Every year many Sikhs visit Punjab in Pakistan to honor their religious places like Nankana Sahib, Punga Sahib, Dera Sahib and Kartarpur. Nakana Sahib is the birth place of Guru Nanak where he spent his early life. At the age of thirty, Guru Nanak traveled around the world for 20 years in four directions. He travelled to Tibet in North, towards South he reached Sri Lanka, in the west; he approached Iraq and Makkah and made a lengthy journey in the east through sub-continent in India. After returning from each journey, he stopped at Punjab. He met with religious scholars at each place and discussed their belief system, relation between human and spirit, complexities of God and ethics to live good life.

Then in 1521, he settled in Kartarpur, a small village in Punjab (situated at the border between Pakistan and India after 1947). Though Guru Nanak was born in Nankana Sahib but he spent the last 18 years of his life at Kartarpur which now attracts many Sikh pilgrims for congregational prayers. In kartarpur, Guru Nanak established the institution of Sikhi, and Sangat and Pangat started here and its

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followers were called Sikhs. He laid the foundation of a new belief system, faith and a new way of life which was different from Hindu and Islam religion. Kartarpur village acted as an ideal place where guru initiated his teachings and practices a new faith. Till the birth of 10th Guru- Guru Gobind Singh- such religious places, Gurduwaras were established in other parts of Punjab, like Khadur Sahib, Goindwal, Taran, Amritsar, Anandpur. These were built by their successive Gurus. Kartarpur is the historic place where religion, history and culture of Sikh community took birth.

In 1947, after the creation of Pakistan and India, Punjab was divided into Indian Punjab and Pakistan Punjab. Most of important shrines of Sikh community were included in Pakistan Punjab and Kartarpur is one of them being birth place of Guru Nanak. Nankana sahib, Sacha Soda, Hassanabdal and Kartarpur sahib are present in Pakistani Punjab. The nearest one is Kartarpur which is only three km from border between Pakistan and India. Every year many Sikh pilgrims visit Pakistan to see their holy places. Kartarpur Gurdwara is a landmark for Sikh community being the first place where Sikhism as new belief system originated. After the opening of Kartarpur border between Pakistan and India, Sikh pilgrims can visit this holy Gurdwara without visa. Its opening has bridged a pilgrimage between Baba Nanak Gurdwara in Gurdaspur 'India' and Kartarpur Gurdwara in Pakistan. It is also one of the oldest worship place built by Guru Nanak Dev G. Sikh pilgrims can view Kartarpur Gurdwara darbar from Dera Baba Nanak through a telescope from Indian side and they called it as "Darshan". After its opening, Sikh has got a visa free visit to this holy place to pay a tribute to Nanak. This event has been viewed as a hope and better understanding and reconciliation between two neighboring rivals. In future such arrangements and relaxations could be demanded by Hindu pilgrims to visit their spiritual and historic monuments like Katas Raj Temples and Pakistan had to accept it.

Conclusion

Security, whether it is of an individual or a state is a very sensitive matter. Security of South Asia is of a great importance due to geo-strategic position. South Asia has been a unique geographical region where all member states share commonality of interests in history, politics, economics and socio-cultural aspects due to close

geographical proximity. Because of this uniqueness, South Asia is considered a single geographical unit where security issue has a cross-border dimension. Many steps are taken for the security of south Asia and opening of Kartarpur border is one of them. Though it is a step to bring peace across the region but side by side it has also raised many questions on the security of South Asia.

Would it Trigger Peace or Security Threat Across the Region?

The phenomenon of peace and security in south Asian region can be explained in the light of simple 'Law of Diffusion' which states that things, matters, atoms or molecules move from a high concentrated and saturated area towards a less concentrated or saturated area through a permeable membrane. Now if Kartarpur border acts as a permeable membrane on one side of it is India, with prominent Hindu and Sikh community, and on the other side of border is Pakistan with Muslim community. Hindu and Sikh community relations are not at peace in India. After 1947, there is a wave of Sikhism in India and both communities have come into conflict at different times. The most prominent form of conflict is Khalistan movement in 80's which endangered the peace and stability of Indian state. Though this separatist movement was crushed successfully by the government but still there are threats to peace and stability in India from Sikh community. The current example is Gurdas pur attack on 27th July 2015 and 'Khalistan Refrendum' on 2nd Nov. 2021, a call for an independent state of Punjab by Sikh community. Sikhs have a political, cultural and religious association with Punjab. The waves of Sikhism in India are alive and would permeate into Pakistan region through Kartarpur border. This secessionist movement would also threat the security of Pakistan as the capital of Khalistan is Nankana Sahib in Punjab, Pakistan and tension between Pakistan and India will escalate. We have to think beyond the biased behavior which means that we should consider this situation as a threat for both India and Pakistan Punjab. If our neighbors are not secure then we also are in danger.

How a Sovereign State can Establish Relations With a Neighboring Resented Group by Passing Parent State?

South Asia is a heterogeneous region where each state has many political, ethnic and cultural groups who are in conflict with the parent state. Besides Pakistan and India, other South Asian states also have insurgencies and secessionist elements that have threatened peace and stability of region. Nepal has to face Maoist insurgency from 1996-2006 which was a 10 years long armed conflict. Sri Lanka had an intermittent insurgency against the government by liberation tigers by Tamil Eelam. Liberation tigers want to create an independent Tamil state as Tamil Eelam in north and east.

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Bangladesh confronts a security issue as Chittagong hill tracts conflict in 1973 and then in 2001 Bangladesh Indian border dispute appeared. By passing parent-state and to welcome a resented group is not safe and sound. Kartarpur border will set a precedent for other states and community groups to follow role model and a peaceful step may transform into a conflict. If such pattern of relation is followed then a fission reaction will occur which will break up the South Asia nucleus into a smaller sovereign state. As a result of radioactive decay process, integrity of region will damage. It would spoil security and stability of whole south Asian region.

How it Would Affect The Pattern of State Relations at Regional Level as Well as International Level?

Establishing relations with a resented community group by passing parent stage, a new pattern of regional and international relations will appear. It will change nature of state relations at regional and international level. The model of sovereign-sovereign state relation will transform into sovereign-non sovereign community relations. A new prototype of (state relations with community) relations will describe international relations and other global actors would have to adopt it. It would cause other state to follow it to establish relations with resented groups of neighboring states by passing parent state. This wave of behavior will create chaos across the border, across the state and across the world.

No doubt the opening of Kartarpur border on 9th November, 2019, to facilitate Sikh community pilgrims, is one of many efforts by Pakistan for peace in South Asia but peace at the cost of own existence is not rational. We should adopt a careful policy as our Intentions are not but Actions may lead to the Tensions.

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