



India-Pakistan Water Relations: A Theoretical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Hydro politics is an important dimension of India Pakistan relations, overshadowed mainly by strategic issues between both states. Even the discussion on water issues is more focused on technical issues. However, the main question that arises is: Is hydro politics between India and Pakistan a problem of perceptions (intentions) or it forms part of overall strategic rivalry between both states? This paper discusses India-Pakistan water relations from the theoretical perspectives of (neo) realism, (neo) liberalism, constructivism, and human security school of thought. It argues that, like in general India-Pakistan political relations, it is realism/ neo-realism which still reigns supreme in explaining India-Pakistan hydro politics as well. It argues that in the wake of the Cold War, different theories emerged which undermined the traditional approaches and perspectives of realism and liberalism. These new theoretical traditions were also employed in explaining India-Pakistan political as well water relations. However, due to the competitive security of the region of South Asia in general and India-Pakistan's security dilemma in particular, the theoretical perspectives of (neo) liberalism, constructivism, and human security fall short in theorizing India-Pakistan water relations. To answer the question posed earlier, this paper has mostly analysed the available literature, both theoretical and related to hydro politics, to construct the argument. Therefore, this paper concludes that instead of employing (neo) liberalism, constructivism, and human security, it is realism/ neo-realism which still reigns supreme in explaining India-Pakistan political as well as water relations.

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1. Introduction

Before the disintegration of the USSR and the peaceful end of the Cold War, the theoretical perspective of realism was employed in explaining different world events. This theoretical tradition of realism also remained dominant in explaining South Asian international politics. However, in the wake of theoretical pluralism in International Relation in 1990s, India-Pakistan political relations have been explained through different theories and perspectives like (neo) realism, (neo) liberalism, constructivism, and the like. This paper discusses India-Pakistan's international hydro politics from the theoretical perspectives of (neo) realism, (neo)liberalism, constructivism, and human security school of thought.

This paper argues that the overall security of South Asia is scarce, competitive, and based on self-help; therefore, the paradigm of realism/ neo-realism is still the most relevant one. In the perspective of India- Pakistan water disputes, too, the theory of realism has still reigned supreme. This dominance of realism/neo-realism has been due to four factors. Firstly, the Indus Water Treaty, which has been claimed as a badge of liberalism, is realistic in its very nature. Instead of establishing joint water management of the Indus river basin between India and Pakistan, the treaty has divided the six rivers of the basin. This division has kept the two arch-rivals autonomous in a sovereign and self-help posture.

Secondly, the constructivist school of thought has explained the dispute of Kashmir in particular and the general historical animosity between India and Pakistan in terms of identity and divergent perceptions. This school has claimed that it has been the difference in the identity of the two states, which has kept the two states in a vicious cycle of mutual hatred and trust deficit. However, this paper acknowledges that identity and ideational factors were one of the main factors as India was partitioned on the basis of religious and ideational basis. However, the water resources of Kashmir and its importance for the agriculture-based economies as well as hydroelectric power generation of India and Pakistan have made the region of Kashmir so vital for both of the states.

Thirdly, the human security paradigm has focused on the human aspect of water security. It has been suggested that instead of adopting a state-centric approach, a human-centric approach should be adopted towards water security. Realists have pleaded their case in this regard because both governments have given much preference to inter-state water security over human water security. Similarly, the overall acrimonious India-Pakistan relationship, a history rich of large-scale wars, and present tensions, which Sumit Ganguly has termed as 'conflict unending,' has spoken volumes for the consistency in the suitability of realism/neo-realism in its application. Moreover, the general security dilemma between India and Pakistan has also coloured water relations in the same fashion. In a nutshell, this paper has argued that water security between India and Pakistan is still scarce, competitive, state-centric, and based on self-help, which are the core principles of the realist/ neo-realist theory.

2. Methodology

This paper first discusses different theories of liberalism, constructivism and human security paradigm and its employment in explaining the water relations between India and Pakistan. It then challenges the same explanation through the theoretical tradition of realism/neo-realism. Therefore, this study uses content analysis as the methodology to answer the main question mentioned in the abstract. For this purpose, mostly secondary data is used from various sources for analysis. The data pertains to two broad themes: Different theories like Constructivism, liberalism, realism, neo-realism etc and empirical studies related to hydro political issues between both states.

3. India-Pakistan Water Disputes and Different Theoretical Perspectives

Theory is a core element of any scientific research. It is used to find explanations to questions for the benefit of humanity. In International Relations, theory establishes causal relationships of "if" and "then" between events by explaining why some events occur after others (Schneberger, Pollard, & Watson, 2009). In other words, it explains the laws of national behaviour by putting forward hypotheses and then testing them against the empirical data (Burchill et al., 2013). In this regard, good theories are those which have rigor and relevance. That is the relationship that it establishes between different concepts and is strongly supported by data and is of vast significance to explain broader events (Schneberger et al., 2009). Most of the writers on the theories of International Relations agree that there does not exist a single theory that explains every aspect of international politics. Therefore, instead of sticking to a single theory, a healthy, continuing debate and dialogue are recommended for understanding world events (Burchill et al., 2013).

During the 1990s, students of International Relations started employing theories other than the dominant ones of realism and liberalism, especially realism. It was because of two reasons. Firstly, the paradigm of realism failed to explain certain events in the international political arena. These events include the disintegration of the USSR, the peaceful end of the Cold War, creeping multipolarity, effects of globalization on the traditional notions of states' sovereignties, the emergence of strong non-state actors, the threat of terrorism and climate

change to international security, and different cooperative arrangements (Gupta, 2008). Secondly, during the 1990s, a great deal of theoretical pluralism took place. Consequently, a theoretical debate propped up. Criticism from neo-liberals, constructivists, post-modernists, and critical theorists diminished the realists' dominance (Acharya & Stubbs, 2006).

Ultimately, the newly emergent theories were applied frequently across the globe. Such a global theoretical shift also cascaded upon the theorizing of South Asian international politics. Remarkably, the Indo-Pak political disputes that have been historically contextualized in realist parameters are framed in different newly emerging theories (Mehsud, 2017). Presently, such theories are believed to be relevant in the context of Indo-Pak water disputes as follows.

3.1 Liberalism

With the collapse of the USSR, democracy and capitalism defeated totalitarianism and socialism. This victory revived the liberal school of thought, which believed that democratic setups at the domestic level would bring an end to international conflicts. It also argued that free trade between nations could help in diminishing parochial loyalties and ultimately result in peace between the countries which engage themselves in free trade (Burchill et al., 2013). Such liberal optimism also touched the horizon of South Asia, and the theory of liberalism/neo-liberalism is applied to Indo-Pak international relations as well.

In the context of Indo-Pak hydro politics, this school of liberals argues that instead of generating conflict and feuds amongst nations, water induces cooperation amongst co-riparian states. Historically, one can find many instances in India-Pakistan water relations where both the states engaged in cooperative arrangements in water apportionment. In the wake of the partition of India in August 1947, the newly independent states of India and Pakistan immediately signed the Standstill Agreement. After the expiry of the agreement on 1 April 1948, another agreement called the Inter-Dominion Agreement, or the Delhi Agreement was reached between the two riparian's in May 1948.

Similarly, when negotiations started for the Indus Water Treaty in 1951, other ad hoc agreements were reached at par with the mainstream dialogues for a permanent treaty. Through the involvement of an international multilateral institution- the World Bank- these dialogues proved successful, and the Indus Water Treaty came into being in 1960. The treaty not only successfully established peace over water apportionment questions but also charted a detailed mechanism for conflict resolution between the two signatories over water allocation. In addition, a permanent commission- Permanent Indus Commission-was established to resolve different disputes arising from time to time. All these peaceful arrangements augment liberals' position in explaining India-Pakistan water relations.

Liberals further claim that the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 has maintained peace between the two nations over water allocation issues and has successfully resolved different water issues like that of Salal dam in the 1970s and the recent Baglihar dam dispute in 2007, and Kishenganga in 2013. It is further applauded that both the co-riparian states of Pakistan and India have shown great respect for the Indus Waters Treaty and have pledged to keep the treaty in letter and spirit. Such a peace-inducing nature of the Indus Waters Treaty could also be seen in the fact that the treaty remained intact even both the nations fought wars with one another. For instance, the treaty remained intact when a full-scale war was fought between the two countries in 1965. Similarly, when the Kargil war was raging in 1999, the Indus commissioner of the Permanent Indus Commission held regular meetings, and data was shared by the concerned authorities.

Similarly, provision for joint hydel projects amongst the states of South Asia under the auspices of South Asian Associations for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and inclusion of resolution of water disputes in the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) between India and Pakistan are cited as notable pillars of the rising cooperative water security of the region (Chakma, 2009). Moreover, the general strategic stability and cooperation after the nuclear tests, strengthening of multilateralism and institutions as of SAARC, and regional economic liberalization and interdependence under the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) are

considered as enough omens for cooperative arrangements across the overall political landscape of South Asia (Chakma, 2009).

3.2 Constructivism

Secondly, social-constructivist theory or constructivism stresses the role of identity in determining political outcomes (Burchill et al., 2013). This school believes that there does not exist a material world outside their independent of human perceptions. It is human perception and interpretation that give meaning to material things and thus effects political outcomes. It offers great importance to social structures and their impact upon the foreign policies of states. Constructivists argue that it is the identity of a state that determines its foreign policy (Ratti, 2006). This argument implies that states with one identity would fight others with a different identity (Sridharan, 2005).

In South Asia, this paradigm of social constructivism explains the security structure in terms of identity. This argument seems strong in the Indo-Pak case. It is argued by this group that since both the states are created on different ideas of nationalism, i.e., India based on secular-Indian nationalism and Pakistan based on Islam (Two Nation Theory), therefore, both nations are fighting one another based on different perceptions and identities. Constructivists find the hydro politics of India and Pakistan in such a context of different identities of the two nations.

3.3 Human Security

Thirdly, the human security paradigm argues that security should be people-centred instead of state-centred. Commission on human security defines human security as "the protection of the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment." This school suggests that as South Asia is plagued by domestic violence, drug trafficking, environmental pollution, religious and ethnic conflicts, poverty, diseases, human rights violations, violence against refugees, corruption, bad governance, etc., therefore, human security paradigm best explains the security environment of South Asia (Chakma, 2009).

Instead of seeing water security as state-centric, the proponents of the human security model find it much acute and worrisome at the human level. Individual and domestic levels of water-related violence and disputes between different water users as units of states, communities, tribes, and classes, along with issues of dams and displacement, access to safe drinking water and sanitation problems, and water privatization are given priority under this paradigm. In a word, this model explains water security at the domestic level (human-centric) against water security at the international level (state-centric).

4. Realism/Neo-Realism: The Dominant Model in India-Pakistan Hydro Politics

Without any shadow of a doubt, realism as a dominant paradigm lost its leading role in the 1990s due to one reason or another. However, interestingly, this theory is still dominant in explaining the regional politics of South Asia (Gleditsch, Salehyan, & Schultz, 2008). Global politics might have experienced different events and different changes, which are anachronistic to the realist paradigm, yet, South Asia in general and Indo-Pak security structure in particular, is a realm where realism still reigns supreme. To prove this argument, realism/neo-realism is first briefly introduced and is then applied to the hydro politics of India and Pakistan in the following section.

Realism, realpolitik, or power politics is the oldest and popular-most theory of International Relations (Ratti, 2006). It has been defined differently by different writers. However, it is universally agreed that realism as a theory of International Relations "emphasize the constraints on politics imposed by human selfishness ('egoism') and the absence of international government ('anarchy'), which require 'the primacy in all political life of power and security'" (Burchill et al., 2013). In addition, state centrism and rationality are commonly considered as parts of the core principles of realism (Burchill et al., 2013). Realism maintains that at the domestic level, human egoism is restrained by hierarchical rule. In contrast, at the international level, since there is anarchy, therefore, there is a continuous struggle for power amongst states to secure themselves. Such a struggle for power and selfish

interests under anarchy stands as the foremost goal of a state, which implies no universal moral restrictions on the behaviour of states (Burchill et al., 2013).

During the 1970s, neo-realism emerged as a variant of realism. Neo-realism, instead of taking account of the individual behaviour, propounds that state policies are determined by international anarchy and capabilities' distribution (Burchill et al., 2013). It explains that since states as rational actors find themselves in a conflict-ridden anarchical structure, therefore, they pursue power for their security (Ratti, 2006).

For realism, south Asian security is scarce, competitive, and power-oriented (Chakma, 2009). Such competitive security is manifested in Indo-Pakistan three historical major wars of 1948, 1965, 1971, the proxy war of Kashmir since 1990, border skirmishes, atomic explosions of 1998, the Kargil crisis of 1999, the 2002 military stand-off, and the recent 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks and its subsequent tensions between the two arch-rivals (Chakma, 2009). Sumit Ganguly, a prominent Indian analyst, has termed such an on-again-off-again syndrome of Indo-Pak relations as "conflict unending" (J. Ganguly, 2002).

Interestingly, this paper finds the general political, regional insecurity amongst the South Asian states cascading over international water relations of the region as well. It argues that water disputes are an off-shoot of the general security dilemma, especially between India and Pakistan. It finds both water and non-water relations directly affecting one another. Therefore, such dominance of realism in explaining India-Pakistan political concerns also exists in Indo-Pak water disputes. All of the significant water disputes between India and Pakistan like the Salal dam dispute, the Bagliahr Hydroelectric Project dispute of 2005-2007, the Wullar Barrage dispute, the Kishanganga Hydroelectric Project dispute of 2013, and many other disputatious Indian projects on the Indus rivers system, which owes much to the differing interpretations of the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 are driven by power politics and strategic security considerations. The following discussion would justify this argument and nullify the views of the other theoretical models.

Firstly, let us discuss the Indus Water Treaty as a badge of liberalism or realism. As discussed in the beginning of the preceding section, liberal internationalists applaud the Indus Water Treaty of 1960 as a successful instance of cooperation between the two states of India and Pakistan. The treaty resolved a longstanding water dispute between India and Pakistan that had marred cooperation on water sharing since the inception of the two states in August 1947. The role of the World Bank, the creation of the Permanent Indus Commission, and a detailed mechanism for dispute resolution along with other cooperative arrangements in political and economic spheres hardwired into different articles and appendices of the Indus Waters Treaty are the arguments on the side of the liberal.

However, this paper contends such an idealist view of the Indus Waters Treaty and the cooperation it establishes between the two riparian of India and Pakistan on sharing the waters of the Indus river system. It argues that the treaty is not as idealistic as the liberals claim. Since the inception of the treaty in 1960, both the co-riparian states of India and Pakistan have bemoaned the treaty. The treaty, due to such criticism, is under a continuous state of stress and strain. The political leaders and parties that signed the treaty from both India and Pakistan are termed traitors, and the treaty was termed a sell-out and an instrument of betrayal from both sides.

While responding to such criticism, the then president of Pakistan-Ayub Khan- stated; "we have been able to get the best that was possible...very often the best is the enemy of the good, and in this case, we have accepted the good after careful and realistic appreciation of our entire overall situation... the basis of this agreement is Realism and pragmatism" (Ali, 2008). Similarly, the very nature of the Indus Waters Treaty in itself was a manifestation of realpolitik, self-help, sovereignty, and security.

Instead of creating joint management of the vast river system of the Indus basin, the treaty divided the six rivers of the basin between the two co-riparian states of India and Pakistan. The division of the six rivers by giving the three eastern rivers of Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas to India and the three western rivers of Chenab, Jhelum, and the main Indus to Pakistan

paved the way for self-help, and by dividing the rivers, it left nothing in between the two states to cooperate. Ramaswamy R. Iyer refutes the idealist claims by arguing that, "If the Indus Treaty of 1960 had been a constructive, cooperative water-sharing treaty, it could have been built upon and taken further; but it is a negative, partitioning treaty, a coda to the partitioning of the land. How can we build cooperation on that basis?" (Iyer, 2005).

Secondly, since the decade of 1990s, India has begun the construction of many new projects on the western rivers which the Indus Waters Treaty had allotted to Pakistan. There are differences in the total number of these Indian projects as India refused to disclose the details of the projects due to the on-going situation in Kashmir and the general India-Pakistan mutual trust deficit. However, due to the downstream adverse effects of these projects on agriculture, hydroelectric as well as strategic interests, Pakistan have raised objections over 67 of such Indian projects on the western rivers (Khalid, 2010). Pakistan argues that these Indian projects are against the letter and spirit of the Indus Waters Treaty and are in violations of specific clauses of the treaty. Amongst these 67 projects, three- the Baglihar, Kishengaga, and Tulbul-are the most controversial.

Pakistan claims these projects as against the treaty, whereas India refuses any non-conformity of any of the projects to the treaty. Quiet in line with the reasoning of the security-oriented logic of the realist paradigm, the objections levelled by the Pakistani side against the projects are of a security nature. Pakistan finds these Indian projects on the western rivers, upon which the states and society of Pakistan rely, a strategic threat to Pakistan's national security. In most cases, Pakistan's stated objections are against the existence and locations of gated spillways in Indian projects.

Pakistan argues that the gated structures, often located at the bottom of the projects, give India a strategic edge vis-à-vis Pakistan. Gated spillways give India strategic control over the flow of the water of the western rivers. Such a control over the aqua-bomb empowers India to control the strategic manoeuvrability of Pakistani troops in the terrain of Pakistan and could render the famous defence canals across Sialkot- Lahore sector, defenceless against any potential Indian invasion. Similarly, this Indian capacity to store water or divert water could damage the Pakistani agriculture-based economy (Thapliyal, 1999).

India, time and again, has assured Pakistan of no such strategic intentions. However, Pakistan sees herself strategically vulnerable vis-à-vis India, being armed with the strategic asset of water. Even India herself has expressed such strategic vulnerability due to 2000 Chinese working on Neelum-Jhelum projects near the sensitive LOC. It fears that the presence of such a large number of Chinese personnel close to the Indian border in a disputed territory could be a threat to Indian national integrity.

Thirdly, India has extended help to the Afghan government in its drive for the construction of dams on the river Kabul in the wake of the post 9/11 US invasion of Afghanistan and establishment of a pro-Indian regime in Kabul. Pakistan has objected to India in this regard as well. Pakistan contends that Indian assistance to Afghan dams is an extension of Indian water hegemony from Kashmir to Kabul (Bakshi & Trivedi, 2011). Since Pakistan is the lower riparian in the case of river Kabul, therefore, the planned 12 Afghan dams have further aggravated Pakistani strategic fears against India and Afghanistan.

Fourthly, in the wake of terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November 2008, an Indian water bureaucrat-M.S.Menon-advocated unilateral abrogation of the Indus Water Treaty (Khalid, 2010). Pakistan responded in kind that any such move by the Indian side would be tantamount to crossing the nuclear red lines. Pakistan has mentioned in its nuclear doctrine that any action to stop water flow to Pakistan, to strangulate Pakistan's agro-based economy, would compel Pakistan to use its nuclear arsenal against India (Brennan, 2004). This point further justifies the realistic nature of Indo-Pak water disputes.

Next, the main issue of discord between India and Pakistan is Kashmir. Both the nations have couched the Kashmir dispute in terms of their respective nationalism and identities (Sahni, 2006). Pakistan contests the region because it is a Muslim majority territory. Therefore, it belongs to Pakistan as Pakistan was created on the basis of the Two-Nation Theory (S. Ganguly & Bajpai, 1994). India, on the other hand, contends that federating

Kashmir with India is its duty to prove its secular nationalism (S. Ganguly & Bajpai, 1994) and disprove Two-Nation Theory.

As discussed earlier, the theory of constructivism supports such an argument. It states that the deep-seated hatred between India and Pakistan is driven by the different identities of India and Pakistan. However, it is not an issue of divergent identities or nationalism. Hans J. Morgenthau-the founding father of realism- in his book, *Politics Amongst Nations* has mentioned that nations would always cloak their interests in terms of ideologies and ethical considerations.

However, the immediate aim of international politics is the power that is devoid of moral or ethical considerations. For realism, this realist premise is proved in the case of the Kashmir dispute as well. Realists argue that losing or winning Kashmir might not weaken or strengthen the identities or ideological foundations of Pakistan or India. Instead, it is the waters of Kashmir that have made the territory so precious for both nations. Moreover, the Indian side fears that if Kashmir becomes part of Pakistan, it will lose its upstream status against Pakistan and Pakistan will win hydrological independence against the upstream rival India.

It is commonly stated that Kashmir is water, and water in Kashmir (Waslekar, 2005). Since most of the rivers of the Indus basin either flow through Kashmir or their headwaters are located there, therefore, its possession by Pakistan is necessary for its water security. If India loses Kashmir, it will lose its waters' strategic edge over Pakistan. Therefore, whatever the immediate disposition of the issue of Kashmir is as: A proxy war, a war of identities, a badge of secularism or Two Nation Theory, a fight for self-determination or a freedom movement; power is the ultimate objective of Pakistan and India in Kashmir. And the main currency of power in the context of the Kashmir dispute is its river waters.

Fifthly, it is a fact that both India and Pakistan are host to acute water issues at the human level as that of safe drinking waters, privatization of waters, issues of dams and displacement, violence over water amongst different classes and communities, etc., however, these issues are at the backburner. Before the partition of India in 1947, the provinces of Sindh and Punjab were at loggerheads over water distribution, but such inter-provincial nature of water disputes lost its importance with the division of India. When India was divided in 1947 water issue became international between the newly born states of India and Pakistan (Mustafa, 2007). Such an inter-state level of water disputes has overshadowed the intra-state and human-centric water issues to date. No doubt, newspapers headlines are replete with the human-centric water issues; however, both the states still mourn the "enemy without" instead of the "enemy within." Such an inter-state focus of hydro politics in India and Pakistan invalidates the human security paradigm and thereby validates state-centrism, which is a prominent tenant of realism.

5. Conclusion

This paper has explored the employment of different theories in explaining the water disputes between India and Pakistan. Historically, realism has remained dominant in explaining the international political dynamics of South Asia in terms of power. However, in the wake of the Cold War, different theories other than realism have been applied to explain international politics of the world. Such a shift has also been witnessed in the regional politics of South Asia. Regional security dynamics in general and Indo-Pak relations, in particular, have been tried to be explained in other paradigms of liberalism/ neo-liberalism, human security, and constructivism. However, Indo-Pak relations are still best explained through the model of realism (Chakma, 2009).

In Indo-Pak water disputes, too, the paradigm of realism/neo-realism is equally applicable, as proved in the aforementioned points. The fact is that the overall security mindset of real politics has cascaded upon water politics as well. Since the division of India, both the nations of India and Pakistan have been trapped in a mutual trust deficit syndrome. Analysts assign different reasons for such a mutual trust deficit. Firstly, the legacy of colonialism and partition of India created territorial disputes as that of Kashmir, Siachen Glacier, Sir Creek, etc., between India and Pakistan that widened the gulf between the two

neighbours. Secondly, there is an imbalance of power between India and Pakistan, and the ensuing trust deficit and conflict are a direct consequence of such an imbalance.

Moreover, the persistence of this conflict is due to persistence in this imbalance and Pakistan's efforts to balance the imbalance, internally or externally (Rajagopalan, 1998). Thirdly, this trust deficit and security dilemma resulted from different threat perceptions and security policies of India and Pakistan. India's strategic thinking is much like that of British India as "it tries to regionalize security within a sub-continental framework". By considering the regional states as a legitimate security periphery, New Delhi tries to keep these states away from falling into external powers' orbit of influence (Chakma, 2009). This Indian regional doctrine is viewed by Pakistan and other smaller states in general as an Indian policy of establishing a 'regional hegemony' or a revival of undivided India (Akhand Bharat) (Chakma, 2009). Such a security environment filled with mutual fears and trust deficit cascades upon other types of relations like water relations and integrates them into the general competitive and scarce-trust security apparatus.

In a nutshell, liberalism/ neo-liberalism, human security paradigm, and constructivism explain some aspects of India-Pakistan general politics and hydro politics. However, mutual trust deficit, water security dilemma, zero-sum approach, mutual water vulnerabilities, strategic structures of different water projects, recent stress and strains in the Indus Waters Treaty, mutually contested sovereignties and state as the primary unit of reference makes the realist paradigm a dominant model of theoretical inquiry in explaining India-Pakistan water relations.

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