

CHAPTER - V

REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND SAARC

Regionalism has been in focus in political scene since 1924, when there was a vision of “single Europe”. But after 1945, this became the order of the day. The number of regional organizations has increased three fold over the period. It has taken many forms, ranging from the ‘military blocs to economic communities, consultative bodies to regional forums, political association to council for economic cooperation.¹ The regional organizations emerged because of the urge to solve regional problems in a cooperative and common Framework their main responsibility is to “promote peace and stability² in their region and help up in the “development and improvement in quality of life and conditions of the people in the area.³

Soon after its inception United Nations realized that a “regional approach” was necessary for settling International conflicts as well as for achieving economic and social progress a pre-requisite for lasting world peace. For this, the U.N. provided articles related to the “regional arrangement” under Chapter VIII of the U.N. Charter to satisfy this the regional commissions were created.

During the formation of UN, debate was going on between the champions of regional organization and international organization of universal

1 Prasad Bimal, *Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Problems and Prospects*, Vikas Publishing, New Delhi 1988.

2 “UN at 40 A foundation to build on”, New York, 1985.

3 Taylor P, “Non-state Actors in International Politics from Trans-regional to substate organization”. Westview Publications, USA and London, 1987.

nature, as to which was undermining others' authority.⁴ Advocates of regionalism believed that, it is a better alternative than universal organization. They believed that in this "big and heterogeneous" world, similarity of national problems, women loyalties and common interests are found only in "limited segments" on the other hand, universalists believed that in this age of interdependence, number of problem require global sanctions. On the question of peace, regionalists believe that "local threats to peace are more willing and promptly dealt by governments of that area than by uninterested states which are far from the scene.

Universalists, on the other hand, believe that peace can be dealt effectively only by a universal organization because "threat to peace if unchecked could spread beyond local or regional units." In regional organization the threat of regional super power is also predominant, whereby the concerned super power takes the character of sun and other members behave as solar system. Universal organizations checks the power of bigger States. In spite of all these differences, they coexist in a "sometimes competing and sometimes mutually supporting relationships".

Asia which is considered to be the most dynamically changing part of the world also witnessed various attempts at regional organization and cooperation. They were "Asian relation Conference in 1947, 18 nation conference of Indonesia held in 1949 in which Nehru took the Dutch actions in Indonesia as "challenge to a newly awakened Asia."⁵ There was Asian Union

4 Claude (Inis Iro), "Swords into Plowshares: The Problem and Progress of International Organization". New York House, 1971.

5 Arora B.L. "Indian-Indonesian Relations 1961-1980, New Delhi, 1981.

proposed by the Philippines in 1950 recommended general cooperation in non-military areas. The Afro-Asian conference held in Bandung in April 1955 sponsored by Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan accelerated the attainment of freedom of nations in Asia and Africa. Two other international organizations for international cooperation were the UN Economic Commission for Asia and Far East (ECAFE) which later became economic and social commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) which encouraged regional cooperation in Asia and other one was Colombo Plan which was a programme for technology Cooperation and exchange among South East and South Asian countries. But till later half of 60s and 70s none of the regional organization proved to be successful. Military alliances like SEATO, CENTO, ASPAC, and economic system like ASA, MAPHILINDO and RCD either could not take off or lived a very short life. The reason was that in most of these organizations, outside power or rather super powers were involved and their aim was to further their own interest.

The second half of 1960's and 1970s saw the "second wave of regionalism"⁶ which was more aggressive in nature. ASEAN and SAARC are by product of this wave. These organizations emerged because they realized that solutions to their problem was in their own hand. They realized the importance of togetherness. In spite of facing lot of difficulties, they are progressing.

The second wave of regional cooperation in Asia represents a more 'pragmatic approach' on the part of the nation-state in Asia towards solving the

6 Taylor, P. *Non-State Actors in International Politics from Transregional to substate organization.* Westview Publications, USA and London, 1987.

particular problems in the respective regions. Due to the impact of regionalism the focus has been shifted from political issues to the greater economic interactions. Under the circumstances, the importance of regional economic communities and functional economic groupings has become much significant. As the result the Association for South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was launched in 1967 and the South Asian Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was transformed from an idea to an institutional reality in 1985.⁷

Patterns of Regionalism and Regional groupings :

Various regional groupings can be best identified with several patterns of regionalism. It can also be said that regional groupings or organisations are based on some particular patterns. These patterns are :

- Firstly, in many cases a 'great power' may identify an area geo politically important and hence try to foster a concept of regionalism among the states sharing common values, cultural background and similar economic and political systems. The European Economic Community (EEC) may be cited as a suitable example of this case. After the world war II, Western Europe was identified as a potential area for the "Euratlantic community" by the united states mainly for her geostrategic interest. The West European nations agreed to it and formed a community. But the question may arise here that why these states agreed to the plan of forming a community? During the World War II, all European states experienced military defeats and the Nation-states there were falling to pieces. After the war, the European states regained their formal

⁷ Chaudhary Anusua Basu Ray, *SAARC at Crossroads, The Fate of Regional Cooperation in South Asia*, Shivam Offset Press, New Delhi, 2006.

sovereignty at some point, but the National institutions remained fragmented and unstable and totally unable to reconstruct the normal national life without the protection of the great victor power, especially the US.⁸ To quote Spinelli :

“If the respect of the public and of rulers for national sovereignty has fallen, this is also true for administrative, social and economic bodies. Such bodies, which are normally profoundly interested in the maintenance of sovereignty and to whom the system of national states usually gives a strong voice in the conduct of the political life of the states, found themselves in full decline at the end of the war.”⁹

So, the threat perception, both internally and externally, always existed in the post World War II European states which played important role in the formation of the EEC. After the war, it was understood that, the only way to preserve the West European independence and strength was to form a community to cooperate with each other.

Secondly, another type of regional group come into being where a number of like-minded regimes in an area seek to build up an association in order to cope with the growing threat perception within the region. The ASEAN is a relevant case. Due to the threat of internal communist insurgencies and growing economic dominance of Japan, Southeast Asian nations as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore came closer to each other and formed the ASEAN in 1967.

Thirdly, in another case, one regional superpower may take the initiative with other small neighbours to form some grouping in a respective area. The

8 Altiero Spinelli, “*The growth of the European Movement since world war II* in C.Grove Haines (ed.), *European Integration*, Johns Hopkins University Pres, Baltimore, 1957, p. 43.

9 Ibid.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) may be cited as an example. Saudi Arabia, the big power of the region, initiated the process of regional cooperation at the Arab. Summit Meeting in Amman in 1980, and in May 1981, the Gulf Summit meeting in Abu Dhabi formally announced the establishment of GCC.¹⁰

The Contrast, regionalism in South Asia has its own pattern. A threat perception did not constitute the basis of South Asian regional cooperation rather a positive concern for solving the socio-economic problems of the member-states played a vital role. South Asian regionalism is not initiated by the external 'big power' or is it the brainchild of the regional superpower (India) in South Asia. The proposal for regional cooperation came from Bangladesh, one of the smaller neighbours of India. Thus, the South Asian regional cooperation is unique in nature in the sense that it is an outcome of positive thinking.¹¹ That's why it is said that South Asia as a region has its own character and regional cooperation in South Asia is a 'home-grown' thing.¹²

European Union – The Success Story

European Union (EU) is a successful regional organization. It has set up standards for other regional organizations also. The origin of the European union can be traced back to 1951 when the European Coal and Steel community (ECSC) was formed by Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and Netherlands under the Treaty of Paris. Two new bodies were created by these countries in 1957, viz. European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) with a view to

10 James A. Bill, "Resurgent Islam in the Persian Gulf, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 63, pp 1084-1093.

11 Emajuddin Ahmed, *SARC: Seeds of Harmony*, University Press Limited, 'Dhaka, 1985, p.12.

12 *Ibid.*, pp.7-9.

integrate the economics of these countries and achieve political unity. All the above three bodies collectively came to be known as European community. Amendments were carried out to the earlier treaties by the Single European Act of Luxembourg in 1985 and the Maastricht Summit of 1991. The European community was renamed as European union on 1 November, 1993.¹³

The chief objectives of the European community include :

1. Consolidation of the tariff schedules of the members into a single system applicable to imports from Third world countries.
2. progressive reduction and removal of all fiscal and physical restrictions on the free movement of goods, capital and labour, between member countries.
3. harmonization of economic policies of the member states. With a view to eliminate competition, the members concentrate on the production of commodities for the entire community and as such each member concentrates on the production of limited number of items and produces them in bulk.¹⁴

EU – The Role Model

The E.U. is undoubtedly the most integrated regional grouping in the world and serves as a model for many other regional groupings. Though sometimes it also faces the problems of intergovernmental disagreements and disharmony but still the achievements of integration were much higher than

13 Chander Prakash, *Comparative Politics and International Relations*, Cosmos Book Hives Pvt. Ltd, 26th edition, p. 447.

14 Ibid.

disintegration. E.U. member states are economically and politically integrated.

There are many reasons for such integration some of them are as follows :

- Firstly, the integration process within Western Europe was deliberately launched as a limited scheme to integrate only two economic sectors, coal and steel. Attempts to rush the process (in the EDC treaty) failed, so a gradual approach to integration prevailed undeniably, the scope of integration has increased as more and more areas now fall under the European Community's remit, or are the subject of intergovernmental cooperation in pillars two or three.
- Secondly, the domestic context of the participating members. The EU member states are all democracies. The trauma of World War II, and particularly the holocaust, has also had a lasting impact, driving the conviction that another such catastrophe must be prevented. There is a propensity to diminish the importance of sovereignty in favour of the greater collective good.
- Thirdly, the west European integration process faced some security problems. The only solution to this problem was enhancement of Economic integration which was willingly accepted by France and Germany.
- Fourthly, US also played an important role in encouraging the European integration. In 1947, the US set conditions for Marshall Plan aid: The Europeans had to agree a point plan for economic cooperation. The European response, to create the committee of European Economic /Cooperation, was a disappointment in Washington, which was urging the

Europeans to set up a customs Union.¹⁵ The US strongly supported the creation of the European Communities a few years later.

- Finally, European Integration has taken place within a security framework provided by NATO and the US defence guarantee. Although not all of the EU's member states are in NATO. But still it is believed by many theorists that integration among West European Countries could occur only if they feel safe, vis-à-vis both external threats and the threats each might pose to the other. And NATO provided such assurances.¹⁶

Above mention reasons are not enough to describe the success story of EU. There are certain other reason which echoes the success story of EU. EU emerged as a very unique model of integration not only because it has an integrated common market, but also because it has created an atmosphere where the movements of the common people belonging to the various member-states are not restricted within their concerned national, territorial boundaries. Besides the Commission, the European Union has an independent Parliament and also a court of justice. While the court of justice is free from national interference and an interpret law, the European Parliament can affect the work of the commission had and the Council of Members in the decision-making procedure through consultative processes. The Single European Act (SEA), which came into force in 1987, has also elevated the position of the European Parliament.¹⁷

15 Smith Karen E, *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, Polity Press, 350 main Street Malden MA 02148, USA 2nd Edition, p. 78.

16 Ibid.

17 S.F. Godman, *The European Union*, Macmillan, London 3rd edition, 1996, pp. 6-7.

So far as the European Court of Justice (ECJ) is concerned, it has laid the legal foundation for an integrated economy and polity.¹⁸ Since the signing of the Treaty of Rome (Treaty) to the making of the Maastricht Treaty (1991), the European Community (EC) has gone through a series of ‘intergovernmental bargain’s, each of which sets the agenda for the independent Court of justice.¹⁹ Later on after 1965, the national courts of the respective member states could be asked to invalidate the provision of any domestic law if it was found to be in conflict with directly applicable provisions of Treaty. By 1975, the domestic courts of the member-states could be asked for invalidation of a national law found to conflict with the self-executing provisions of the community’s ‘secondary legislation’, ‘the directives to national governments passed by the EC Council of Ministers. And by 1990, the community citizens could ask their respective national courts for the undue delay in passing these directives.²⁰ In that way, there was a gradual penetration of the EC law into the domestic law of its member-states. Through the legal integration, the ECJ has emerged as a supranational legal institution, which strengthens the legitimacy of the community over the member states.

It is to be mentioned here that so far as the bilateral relations are considered among the member-states, these are outside of the normal EU foreign policy discussions.

18 G. Frederico Maxiri, “The Making of a constitution for Europe” in *Common Market Law Review*, Vol. 26, 1989, pp. 594-614.

19 Maravesik Andrew, “Preferences and Power in the European Community, *Journal of Common Market studies*, Vol 31, 1993, pp.473-524.

20 Anne Marie Burley and Walter Mattli, “Europe before the Court” A political theory of Legal integration”. *International Organization*, Vol. 47, No.1, 1993, p. 42.

Thus, from the above discussion it is very clear that EU emerged as a strong and stable regional organization. It has become a role model for other regional organizations, EU is not only concerned about its own regional cooperation, but it also encouraged regional cooperation in different regions. It also gives supports to different regional organizations like SAARC and ASEAN.

EU – SAARC Relations

The EU was supportive of regional cooperation efforts in South Asia even before the birth of SAARC. As the European Commission offered help together with ITU in the early 1980's for programme of cooperation in the field of telecommunication. But SAARC was cool to that proposal as at that time discussions on South Asian regional Cooperation was taking place. And K.K. Bhargava the then secretary General of SAARC did not consider it as an authentic programme.²¹

The EU welcomed the establishment of SAARC. Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, had in his message to the Bangladesh President and other Heads of State or Government participating in the Dhaka summit conveyed good wishes of the Commission for the success of their deliberations.²² European Parliament Adopted a resolution on EU- SAARC relations on 25 October 1988 in which it called upon the 'Commission to contact the SAARC institutions and SAARC member states in order to ascertain the areas of regional cooperation in which the help of the community

21 Bhargava K.K. and Hussein Ross Masood, *SAARC and European Union: Learning and Cooperation Opportunities*, New Delhi Har. Anand 1994, pp. 51-52.

22 *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 8 December, 1985.

is desired” and “to examine the possibility of concluding a cooperation agreements with SAARC.²³ But the proposal did not elicit a favourable response from the SAARC as it was still not favourably disposed towards external assistance.

However, the end of the cold war and subsequent developments, SAARC was now willing to explore cooperation with the EU, EU responded positively and the important consultations between the EU and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of SAARC began to take place from 1992 to explore mutually beneficial areas of cooperation. The efforts finally were to result in the form of a MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) but only in 1996 owing to the EU’s stress on SAARC forging economic relations in feasible areas and political cooperation without which it found no point to support.²⁴

The draft inter-institutional cooperation was approved by the EU and the SAARC in the form of MoU on Administrative cooperation, which was signed at Brussels on 10 July 1996. The MoU was valid for three years from the date of entry into force and was to be tacitly approved thereafter on an annual basis with provision for termination from both sides (Article 8). The MoU sought to promote cooperation between the commission and SAARC by sharing their experience and providing mutual institutional support. It sought to focus cooperation on three areas, viz. exchange of information on issues of mutual interest; staff training to strengthen the functioning of the SAARC

23 Amir Jayraj, *The European Union and SAARC: Estranged Inter-Regional Partners?* In India and the European Union edited by Rajindra K. Jain, Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 2007.

24 Bhargava and Hussain, Op.cit, pp. 53-55.

institutions, and, technical assistance beside other areas jointly agreed by the parties (Article 2).²⁵

The MoU is a broad agreement between the EU and SAARC. Therefore it has its own significance. The MoU represented :

- a) a first and a significant step in building EU- SAARC relations.
- b) SAARC's willingness to gradually open-up and to deal with others on beneficial terms;
- c) Desire of SAARC to enrich itself by sharing experience of others as well as strengthen its own organization.
- d) EU's support to regional organizations and recognition of bloc-to-bloc relation.
- e) Legitimacy and encouragement to initiatives on future EU- SAARC relations.

It is clear that barring a few areas like the MoU, institutional relations between the EU and SAARC is not very significant and there exist no programme for regional action outside the MoU. Infact, even the MoU focuses only on administrative cooperation and related areas but does not address the basic issues relating to economic cooperation or a regular "dialogue" to evolve common perspectives. Obviously EU- SAARC relations are at minimal level compared to EU's relations with other regional organizations.²⁶

25 Op. cit, Amir Jayraj, p. 138

26 Ibid, p. 141.

SAARC AND ASEAN – Reasons for failure and success : SAARC and ASEAN have one thing in common and that is Asia. Both are regional organizations of Asia. Whereas SAARC consist of South Asian countries ASEAN consist of South East Asian countries. Both of the organizations took birth in different years. ASEAN is about eighteen years elder than SAARC. ASEAN is considered as a successful regional organization. Whereas SAARC is known for its slow progress. The reasons behind the failure of SAARC and success of ASEAN is a matter of analysis. And to begin with one should start with the comparison of institutional arrangement and geographical background of SAARC and ASEAN. As the success story of European Union has been already discussed. It is very clear that well knitted organization omits well functions. Though other factors also played an active role geographical economic and political factors of member states are also important for the well functioning of any regional organization.

In the Asian continent, states in both South-east Asia and South Asia have yearned and worked for both development and security since they attained their independence. Both the regions were beset by problems generated by the legacies of colonialism, movements of peoples, traditionalism, scarcity of resources and the like. However, being pressed by an emerging urgency from the externally imposed strain on them, countries in both the sub regions have devised many differing strategies for ensuring and fulfilling the developmental aspirations and security needs of their people. Both south east Asia and South Asia currently have their own regional entities: the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Asian

Association for Regional cooperation (SAARC), each fashioned itself in its respective region for the purpose of cooperative endeavours.²⁷

BACKGROUND

Southeast Asia has a much longer history of experiments with regional cooperation than south Asia. South East Asia has also had experience of greater variety of experiments, from largely intra-regional to largely extra-regional, from purely politico-military to largely economic. ON the other hand South Asian experience is more recent, mostly intra regional and almost entirely non-political and unrelated to political military issues.

There were certain political conferences which took place in late 1940's and 1950's in which both South Asian and South east Asian countries participated though they did not lead to the establishment of permanent institutions. The Asian Relations Conference, the Conference of Asian Australian Middle Eastern Nations on the Indonesian question are some of the examples of such political conferences. But at last both the regions have their own regional organizations.

As has already been said that southeast Asia had somewhat longer history of experiments. The journey starts with the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) which was formed in 1961 by the US and its allies and included Thailand and Philippines as its members. It was largely politico-military in nature. The Five power Defence Arrangement (ANZUS), was

²⁷ Kalam Abul, *Sub-Regionalism in ASIA: ASEAN and SAARC Experiences*, UBS Publishers, New Delhi, 2002, p. 138.

another experiment in the same direction with Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and the US as its members.

The Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) formed in 1961 was more of an inter-regional effort comprising Thailand, Malaya and the Philippines. But it did not survive long due to the differences that arose between the Philippines and Malaya over the incorporation of Sabah into Malaysia. MAPHILINDO came into existence in 1963 to bring together the three Malay majority members of Southeast Asia – the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. It was also a failure. Then came ASEAN which came into being in 1967.²⁸

Southeast Asia clearly reflected the larger divide in the world as a whole between the communist and anti-communist powers with the Indochina states on the one hand and the anti-communist ASEAN states on the other side. Thus the shared perceptions of a common threat among the anti-communist Southeast Asian states worked in favour of regional cooperation unlike South Asia where we had Pakistan part of SEATO and CENTO and the other South Asian states members of NAM. Moreover this gave ASEAN much closer affinity with the US in the global power struggle. On the other hand SAARC stuck more closely to the non-aligned movement.²⁹

Founding Documents : SAARC and ASEAN

In the case of both ASEAN and SAARC, the founding document resulted from a conference at the level of foreign ministers and was signed by

28 Chibber Bharti, *Regional Security and Regional Cooperation, A comparative study of ASEAN and SAARC*, New Century Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p. 106.

29 Ibid.

the foreign ministers in the case of ASEAN in Bangkok in August 1967, in the case of SAARC in New Delhi in August 1983. These are better known respectively, as the Bangkok Declaration and the New Delhi Declaration. In the case of both organizations, the Heads of state or Government signed a joint statement only later on. But in both cases the subsequent document has some similarities.³⁰

Similarities between the Founding Documents

- The main purpose of both declarations was to declare that the countries of the respective regions are coming together to form a regional organization with a view to achieving certain objectives and goals realizing that the interest of the people lies in working together. Bangkok Declaration highlights that the countries are coming together, “.....mindful of the existence of mutual interests and common problems among countries of southeast Asia and convinced of the need to strengthen further the existing bonds of regional solidarity and cooperation.”³¹ New Delhi Declaration says it is, “.....conscious of the common problems and aspirations of the peoples of South Asia and the need to accelerate their economic and social development through regional cooperation, convinced that regional cooperation in South Asia is beneficial, desirable and necessary and that it will help promote the welfare and improve the quality of life of the peoples of the region.”³²

30 Chopra Pran, *SAARC and ASEAN : Comparative analysis of structures and Aims in SAARC – ASEAN prospects and Problems of Inter-regional cooperation* edited by Bhabani Sen Gupta South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 1989, p. 6.

31 ASEAN, “Bangkok Declaration,” 8 August 1967, Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat.

32 SAARC, “New Delhi Declaration”, New Delhi, August 1983, Kathmandu SAARC Secretariat.

- Both documents make it clear that the association concerned is an intergovernmental one, not a supranational one. Neither involves a pooling of any part of the sovereignty of the member countries. The Bangkok Declaration specifies, "...the countries of South east Asia share a primary responsibility for strengthening the economic and social stability of the region and ensuring their peaceful and progressive national development."³³ The New Delhi Declaration says, "...regional cooperation should be based on and in turn contribute to mutual trust, understanding and sympathetic appreciation of the national aspirations of the countries of the region."³⁴
- Both documents stress national development along with regional peace and stability. Both documents further emphasize the spirit of equality. The Bangkok Declaration specifies, ".....establish a firm foundation for common action, to promote regional cooperation in Southeast Asia in the sprit of equality and partnership and thereby contribute towards peace, progress and prosperity in the region."³⁵ The New Delhi Declaration also accepted that ".....cooperation shall be based on respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity political independence, non-interference in internal affairs of other states and mutual benefit."³⁶
- Each document in its own way also distances the organization from super-power linkages and alliances. The Bangkok Declaration very specifically says "all foreign bases are temporary and remain only with the expressed

33 Op. cit ASEAN Bangkok Declaration

34 Op. cit SAARC New Delhi Declaration

35 Op. cit ASEAN Bangkok Declaration

36 Op. cit SAARC New Delhi Declaration

concurrence of the countries concerned and are not intended to be used directly or indirectly to subvert the national independence and freedom of states in the area or prejudice the orderly processes of their national development.³⁷ The New Delhi Declaration makes no reference to bases but serves the same purpose of opposition to them by emphasizing the orientation of the organization. In its preamble it recalls, “the Declaration on collective self-reliance among Nonaligned and other developing countries adopted at the Seventh Nonaligned Summit held at New Delhi which called upon all countries concerned to mobilize all necessary resources and deploy the requisite means in support of sub-regional, regional and inter-regional cooperation among non-aligned and other developing countries.”³⁸

- As far as the stated aims and objectives of the two associations are concerned both ASEAN and SAARC emphasis on active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields. Both declarations also show interest in cooperating with other international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.

Differences between the founding Documents

Besides similarities these are also differences between the founding Documents of ASEAN and SAARC. Differences are as follows :

37 Op. cit ASEAN Bangkok Declaration

38 Op.cit SAARC New Delhi Declaration

1. The most glaring difference that comes out between the founding documents of the two organizations is that the New Delhi document under the ‘General Provisions’ specifically mentions that, “Decisions at all levels shall be taken on the basis of unanimity.”³⁹ Thus allaying fears in both India and other members of each other. There is no such rule as far as ASEAN is concerned.
2. Another difference between the two documents is that the New Delhi Declaration under ‘General Provisions’ bars taking up bilateral issues in SARC meetings. “Bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from the deliberations.”⁴⁰ There is no such provision in the Bangkok Declaration.

These differences are basically due to the differences in the environment when the cooperative efforts were undertaken among the countries of the respective regions. When ASEAN was formed there was more or less a strong view in favour of cooperation. The issues was to cooperate in which sphere to gain maximum benefit. As far as South Asia is concerned the first concern was whether to cooperate or not due to long differences in the national interests and threat perceptions of the member states, especially the two largest ones, India and Pakistan.⁴¹

SAARC AND ASEAN : A Comparative Perspective

Though it is true that SAARC is a later comer in the field of regional cooperation. ?And its whole framework is a copy of ASEAN. But still there

39 Ibid.

40 Op. cit. SAARC New Delhi Declaration

41 Op.cit. Chibber Bharti, p. 112.

are some points which favours SAARC and put it at the better position than ASEAN. The very first point is that SAARC represents the whole of south Asia,⁴² which is in sharp contrast to ASEAN. ASEAN represents only a fragment of South-East Asia and the Burma and Indo-Chinese countries like Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea are out of it., Secondly, SAARC is the spontaneous result of the urges and aspirations of the ruling elites of South Asian Countries, whereas ASEAN was the culmination of US attempts to form a regional organization of pro-western countries in the wake of the escalation of Vietnam war in the late 1960s. Thirdly despite the wide differences in the foreign policies of South Asian states, the international relations of the region is not one of polarization, on the other hand, during the last few years. South-East Asia has witnessed the politics of confrontation between ASEAN and the Indo-Chinese States. Lastly ASEAN took almost to ten years in holding its first summit of Heads of State after its formation, whereas SAARC held its first summit within five years of the acceptance of the idea of regional cooperation within the region.⁴³

Despite these advantages it is really strange to see the slow progress of SAARC. It seems that SAARC is still in the take-off stage. India's leading defence specialist K. Subramanian, points out that is those part of the world where regional cooperation has taken roots "It is based primarily on a political or security consensus."⁴⁴ In such a situation SAARC is a unique experiment as

42 Suryanarayan V., "SAARC and ASEAN: A comparative Perspective" in *Regional Organizations .A Third World Perspective* edited by Rama S. Melkaote, Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, 1990, p. 188.

43 Ibid., p. 189.

44 Subramanian K., 'Regional Cooperation in South Asia', *IDSJ Journal*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1. July-September 1985, pp.1-9.

the component units come together not for any security or political concerns but to develop economic, cultural and technological cooperation first. There cooperation is based on the assumption that political and security cooperation will eventually follow.

Another Indian Scholar Dr. Mohammad Ayoob who worked out a balance sheet of success and failure of regional cooperation in different part of the world also made a remarkable statement in this direction. He said that there is a growing identity of approach and convergence of interests in four critical areas where the idea of regional cooperation has succeeded. These four critical Area are :

1. Similarity of threat perceptions, both internal and external, which leads not only to identity of threat perceptions, but also to security cooperation in critical areas.
2. Identical political systems which lead to common political/ideological perceptions.
3. Common foreign policy stances on crucial global issues provided for a convergence of strategic perceptions; and an unwritten understanding on the role of pivotal power Indonesia in the case of ASEAN which provides internal cohesion and lessening of intra-state tensions in the region.⁴⁵

All these factors in varying degrees are present in ASEAN and contributed to its smooth functioning. In South Asia, the situation is entirely different. Wherever it is in the nature of the political system, perceptions of

45 Mohaammad Ayoob, "The Primacy of the Political: South Asian Regional Cooperation in Cooperative Perspective", *South Asian Survey*. Vol. XXV, No.4, April 1985, pp. 443-57.

internal or external security threat, foreign policy orientation or the role of the dominant power (India in the case of South Asia) there are wide differences of opinion among the member countries.

SUBREGIONALISM IN SAARC AND ASEAN

Subregionalism is another parameter to check the progress of regional organizations. Subregionalism as what ASEAN and East Asian experiences told us is a cross border arrangement between and among areas of different nation states, “bound by proximity, to promote direct investment and trade, so as to take advantage of different factor endowments in each area.”⁴⁶ In its basic form it exploits complementarities ‘to gain a competitive edge in export promotion.’⁴⁷ The idea is to exploit the economic complementarities “for efficient development of a common natural resource and/or production of goods targeted mainly at the global market”⁴⁸ and not at each other. Subregionalism thus represents both a manufacturing and export platform aimed at external market, and includes service sector and labour mobility for the most efficient exploitation of common natural resources and to ensure a faster track of development so as to serve the economic advantage of all the component players.⁴⁹

46 Toh Thian Sen, “*Regionalism, Subregionalism and Regionalization*” In Lim Cheng Yah (ed). *Economic Policy Management in Singapore*. Singapore. Addison Wesley Publishing Company, p. 1996.

47 Min Tang and Myo Thant (1994), *Growth Triangles: Conceptual Issue and operational Problems* Economic Staff Paper, No.54. Manila: Economic and Development Resource Centre, The Asian Development Bank.

48 Chia Siow Yue (30 November-2 December 1993), “Motivating Forces in Subregional Economic Zones,” Paper Presented at the Pacific Forum CSIS Conference on ‘Economic Interdependence and challenges to the Nation-State: The Emergence of national Economic Territories in Asia-Pacific’. Honolulu.

49 Op. cit, Kalam Abul, p. 142.

ASEAN made several efforts in order to increase sub-regional cooperation. First of all, ASEAN sought to widen the area of its cooperative endeavour both within and beyond South-east Asia as well as for sustained economic growth of its member states. To this end, it has adopted a policy of developing four pattern of relationships with non-members, “Dialogue partners” with some countries, “observer status” relationship, and, finally, “Sectoral Dialogue Partner” relationship with some countries.⁵⁰

ASEAN’s another effort was toward widening the area of activity which has been reflected in the region wise growing economic organization of Asia-Pacific economic Co-operation (APEC), as well as in the co-operative dialogue in the form of an annual meeting between ASEAN itself and the European Union (ASEM). There is also the security dialogue initiated by it which is called as ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). It involves 18 members from within and beyond the Asia-Pacific region. By virtue of being a Dialogue Partner, India which is the only South Asian country to become an ASEAN Dialogue Partner automatically become a member of the ARF.⁵¹

ASEAN’s efforts in the field of sub-regionalism add one more star to the success of ASEAN. As far as South Asia is concerned it is a recent phenomenon. It is still on the media and conference table or at best found manifestation in the official launching of a sub-regional entity, whereas Southeast Asia with all its modified structuralism and economic complementarities witnessed a long period of sub-regional growth.

50 Ibid., p. 140

51 Op. cit., Kalam Abul, p. 140

Though SAARC persists a high profile annual summitry almost every year. But as far as sub-regionalism is concerned SAARC adopted a “go slow” approach. Since 1985, 16 Summit have taken place under the auspices of the SAARC. After performing for more than two decades, some achievements have taken place in so far as regional cohesion is concerned but that also not comparable to ASEAN. In spite of various commonalities of the SAARC members, inter-regional trade is as little as 3% of their global trade. The existence of tariff as well as non-tariff barriers has greatly impeded trade relations among the SAARC countries. Moreover, except Sri Lanka the import policy is quite restrictive and has not been rationalized by the member states.⁵²

South Asia thus ever over a two decades after the creation of SAARC continues to have the image of high profile and low performance.⁵³ Where as ASEAN by adopting a notion of “interdependent development” mobilized its collective strength and has already developed itself as a truly “merchandise trade oriented society.”⁵⁴ ASEAN’s success story in regional endeavour has become a matter of envy and inspiration. ASEAN through a “low key” fashion of diplomacy has moved speedily toward both integrative endeavour and faster growth.

PROGRESS OF SAARC AND ASEAN

Both ASEAN and SAARC are young organizations in comparison to European Economic community which is a successful organization. SAARC is

52 Chakraborti Tridib, SAARC Expands its wings: Insinuations in the New Global order, world Focus 341 May 2008, SAARC Indo-Centric Foreign affairs Monthly Journal, p. 202.

53 Khatri Sridhar, “SAARC and ASEAN: A Comparative study.” A paper presented at a Seminar on SAARC: Retrospect and prospect sponsored by the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu Oct. 19-20, 1987.

54 Hasan, Ashraful and Zius Shams (May 1993), “Interdependent Development: Bangladesh SAARC and ASEAN,” South Asian Perspective, No.2.

only an infant., Therefore, it is difficult to measure their progress in very concrete terms. It is even more difficult to measure their progress with each other. Because both have their own particular difficulties and environments.

As different aspects of both the organizations has been discussed we reach to the conclusion that there are some similarities and differences give rise to the success and failure of these organizations. The similar aspects of both the organizations include the time spent in completing the machinery of cooperation. They spent more time in machinery of cooperation than implementing programmes of cooperation. Both organization structurally as well as programmatically invested more in the politico-security aspects and very little in the military aspect.

The activities of both organizations have been a mix of political and non-political aspects. Although SAARC and ASEAN wholly keeps political activities out of its formal agenda. But still all meetings of SAARC to some or far extent includes political aspects. On the other hand ASEAN clearly allows for its political role but much of its activities and structure concerned with economic cooperation.

Both ASEAN and SAARC face the problem of disparity. Though ASEAN has not been bedeviled by it as much as SAARC. The problem arising from the fact that the biggest members country is much bigger than most of the other member countries put together. Both organization have somewhat similar dispute. Sabah is a bone of contention between Malaysia and the Philippines as Kashmir between India and Pakistan.⁵⁵

55 . Chopra Pran, op.cit., p. 15.

As far as the differences between both the organizations are concerned it includes that SAARC has kept political subjects both intra and extra-regional away from its formal agenda. Whereas ASEAN has taken definite and declared positions on some major political issues of the region, such as those defined in the ASEAN Declaration on the Neutralization of South-east Asia, signed at Kuala Lumpur in 1971, the Appeal on Democratic Kampuchea signed at Jakarta in June 1984, and the Mechanisms for the resolution of disputes provided for in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia signed at Bali in February 1976.⁵⁶

The two associations differ from each other in the pace and pattern of their progress. While SAARC has steadily picked up momentum from the time of its founding in 1983, ASEAN has had considerable ups and down. It took almost 10 years for ASEAN to hold its first summit, whereas SAARC had its first summit just after 02 years of its formation.

ASEAN has spawned a much larger number of interchanges between associations of commercial, financial and other business organizations in the member countries than SAARC has. There has been a lot of interchange in SAARC between academics and academic institutions, but much less between commercial and business interests though government level meetings under the SAARC umbrella now average twice a week.

SAARC Needs Some Orientations

Taken into account the comparison between European Union and SAARC and comparison between SAARC and ASEAN. SAARC placed at the

56 Ibid., p. 16.

third position with its slow progress. Whereas EU placed at first position and ASEAN at second. But if we say that SAARC is a total failure then it is too early to reach at this conclusion.

Every association has to play a certain political role, social role and economic role with respect to the specific context in which it has arisen. Thus only after assessing these multiple roles one can reach to any conclusion. Further the ground situation within which regional associations work differ from region to region. Therefore the comparison of SAARC's performance with other regional associations will have to be done with caution.

The success or failure of the regional association can be understood with regard to the expectations of the member countries. In case of SAARC all the member countries are not of same size or same economic condition. All of them were entering into unexplored territory and were thus adopting a cautious approach. Most important there agendas were not strictly limited to regional cooperation. The SAARCs' importance lies for the countries individually in enhancing their national prestige managing their bilateral relations and having a regional identity. SAARC helps in these identities which have their own symbolic importance as well as practical utility. Thus SAARC has shown a sign of success⁵⁷.

As there are several social issues in which SAARC played a positive role. The economic areas of cooperation have not shown much success but

57 Murthy Padmaja, "Relevance of SAARC", *IDSJ Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 9, Dec. 1999. p. 1793.

SAARC has widened its area of interaction and presently is experimenting with sub-regional co-operation.

Thus the success or failure of the regional association cannot be measured in a vacuum. While writing the report card of SAARC one should be very clear that the answer cannot be categorically 'pass' or 'fail'. That would be a very narrow way of looking at things. Any regional organization in world has a mixed bag of results. There are certain areas in which they have achieved success. And there are some others in which they failed to take of. And in some issues new mechanism of co-operation are being developed.⁵⁸

It is very clear that despite the slow progress of SAARC it cannot be called as failure. The phase of success which is enjoying by EU and ASEAN is not sudden. They also faced problems at their initial stages. Their member states are also economically strong. And they do not have much regional issues. They are elder than SAARC also. Where as SAARC is an association of such member states which either have regional and bilateral issues with one another or are economically backward. Thus comparison of SAARC with EU and ASEAN is not a correct way to give its progress report. As both EU and ASEAN are differ from SAARC in age as well as experience. Their long experience and age played an important role in their success. If EU and ASEAN make such progress with a long period of time. May be SAARC will achieve such heights with the coming period of time because it is young in comparison to EU and ASEAN. Infact SAARC should be compliment for its

58 Ibid. p. 1794.

achievement it has made till now. Because whatever it achieved is really difficult for any other organization which is full of tensions and war fares. Although EU and ASEAN hold first and second position consecutively. But SAARC is also not a third divisioner. There is a long way to go. And SAARC's efforts show that may be with time it will also have remarkable achievements.