

## **An overview of SAARC and ASEAN**

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**Abstract :** *Limiting competition, preventing interstate conflict among members and fostering regional orders in Southeast Asia has been a central and continuous feature since the establishment of ASEAN. ASEAN is always imperative to sustain its credibility by providing the platform of interactions in East Asia and the rest of the world. From its inception South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation is struggling to acquire its goal in South Asia. Bilateral conflicts have overshadowed regional development as the members of SAARC cannot take up conflictual bilateral issues. All the South Asian states have to be more or less Indo-centric in both their nuances and practices. The mistrust of India and Pakistan keeps alive their rivalry at all levels-bilateral, regional and international. Because of conflicts dominating Indo-Pakistan relations, the evolution of SAARC into a regional community is still far off. To focus on ASEAN's success comparing to SAARC and reason behind this is the purpose of this paper.*

**Keywords:** *ASEAN, Comparability, Regional, SAARC, Success*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

With the changes of international situation new forms of international co-operation are taking place. To become more cohesive and to take part in the process of enhancing welfare many regions are uniting together. This brief essay looks at Association of South East Asian Nations and South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation to compare their achievements and success as regional institutions. The process of unification, political and economic has gone much further in Southeast Asia than South Asia. South Asian Association for regional Co-operation has had a shorter history than Association of Southeast Asian Nations. From the inception in 1967 ASEAN has made a very substantial progress which provides a strong contrast to SAARC.

### **II. PERSPECTIVE OF SAARC AND ASEAN**

ASEAN's primary purpose was to create an environment by which each state's survival could be ensured through the fostering of regional stability and limiting competition between them. ASEAN's memberships have become a heterogeneous patchwork and their economies vary dramatically. Singapore's GDP is 52,200(The world factbook: Singapore, 2010, cited [1] USD whereas Myanmar's GDP is \$ 1100(The world factbook: Burma,2010, cited by [1] .

The original member states and Brunei are economically more developed countries and capitalistic, free market economies whereas the CLMV states are less developed and quasi-central political economy .Myanmar, Cambodia emphasize non-interference however older members focus on co-operation and co-ordination [1]. In a given situation this differences the member's efforts to find common solutions to particular difficulties as well as make it difficult when collective action is appropriate. Despite these vast differences the ten disparate countries are together and able at most times to exhibit regional unity. To wield diplomatic clout without military might is a key feature of ASEAN's success in the international context.

South Asian Association for regional co-operation is the only forum in south Asia. Among seven member states India is the largest not only economically but also in physical size and military power. So suspicions among other SAARC members vis-à-vis India run strong. For India there is the suspicion that the smaller nations will gang up against her at an institutional forum. Moreover, any external power can always cultivate a smaller nation to gain a foothold in the region and India in particular.

In ASEAN, Indonesia is the largest in size and population not in economy. Indonesia never feared like India. The leadership that Suharto gave to ASEAN played a major role that is the main strength in keeping ASEAN together till today [2]. When ASEAN member states talk they present ASEAN as a central point .In most of cases SAARC has little meaning to its member states especially to India and Pakistan.

There are two chapters in this essay. In chapter one the discussion is based on the comparability of SAARC and ASEAN, the section two is about the success of ASEAN comparing to SAARC.

A model is a standard or example for imitation or comparison. The word model is used to represent, to show the construction or appearance something. Association of Southeast Asian Nations and South Asian Association for regional Co-operation are established in same ASIAN continent but they are individual and separate organizations. From the inception ASEAN and SAARC has had their own guiding and principles to

work and to strengthen their individual abilities. With the passage of time ASEAN has gained a lot but SAARC has not.

SAARC was established for the wellbeing of seven South Asian countries. Though there have been many summits and intergovernmental talks since the inception of the organization in 1985, SAARC have not made as much headway as was expected. With the flow of multilateralism and regionalism ASEAN is going forward SAARC is still in same position and unsuccessful. SAARC member states should follow ASEAN as a model for regionalism and for the regional prospects and prosperity.

To address and to represent anything as a model we have to focus on two key points: one is success and the other one is comparability. As a regional organization ASEAN deserves to be a model for SAARC in context of these two points.

## **A. Success**

During the time of forming ASEAN in 1967, Southeast Asia was deeply and severely fractured in many ways. Indonesia had just emerged from a massive confrontation with Malaysia and Singapore as well as its own domestic upheaval. Besides, Malaysia and Singapore had just gone through a bitter separation. The dispute between Malaysia and the Philippines over Sabah was boiling. Each country had boundary or other territorial disputes with one or more of its neighbours. Viet Nam was divided and war was going between North Viet Nam and South Viet Nam each with great power allies and supporters. Laos and Cambodia were deeply embroiled in that war. The Philippines and Thailand backed South Viet Nam and the U.S. Myanmar known as Burma had decided drastically to reduce its participation in international affairs contending with armed conflict within its borders. In Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, communist insurgents with strong support from their big power patrons created a serious security threat. In other words, the entire Southeast Asian region was struggling for survival in the cold war quagmire.

To avoid these unpromising circumstances the leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand decided to transcend their countries' differences. They raised the necessity of maintaining good relations and co-operation with its neighbor countries. Thus they prevent their disputes from eruption into conflict. Besides this, they determined to disentangle the ASEAN region from the rivalries of the big power and keep it from continuing to be an arena for open or covert big power conflict.

### **1) ASEAN's Progress:**

ASEAN's primary purpose was to create an environment by which each state's survival could be ensured through the fostering of regional stability and limiting competition between them. It is always imperative to sustain its credibility by providing the platform of interactions in East Asia and the rest of the world [3]. With the entry of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam (CLMV) ASEAN's pace is now a function of the differences. The original member states and Brunei are economically more developed countries and capitalistic, free market economies whereas the CLMV states are less developed and quasi-central political economy. Myanmar, Cambodia emphasize non-interference however older members focus on co-operation and co-ordination. In a given situation this differences the member's efforts to find common solutions to particular difficulties as well as make it difficult when collective action is appropriate. Despite these vast differences the ten disparate countries are together and able at most times to exhibit regional unity. To wield diplomatic clout without military might is a key feature of ASEAN's success in the international context.

Over the two decades, 1968-88 most of the intrastate conflicts have been successfully resolved. If it is not resolved than it has been reduced to manageable levels. The problem between the Thai state and the Malay-Muslims of that country's southernmost states ceased to be the divisive issue within Thailand that it was before the establishment of ASEAN and its early days. ASEAN membership has enabled Thailand and Malaysia to reach understanding over this issue [4].

In the Philippines republic the Moro's of Mindanao have been engaged in a prolonged and violent separatist campaign. This was the only intra-state conflict which was unresolved. The basis of a settlement was negotiated between the two parties in 1976. Thereafter it took nearly twenty years and much conflict before the first phase of the settlement was implemented. Both in negotiating it and in its implementation ASEAN members helped greatly [5]. Besides the official dealings the ASEAN governments have been pushing for greater awareness and involvement. For this purpose governments are trying for people-to-people participation, including Track Two diplomacy and the development of civil society. Limiting competition, preventing inter-state conflict among member states as

### **2) India-Pakistan's Neighbourhood Policy:**

South Asian Association for Regional co-operation is the only forum for co-operation in South Asia. In the name of modernity South Asia is heading towards massive weaponisation, majoritarianism and stereotyped perceptions. In the name of national interest, state sovereignty and development they are moving away from the

real concerns and context of the region. It has resulted in backwardness, underdevelopment and division instead of regional progress, prosperity and harmony.

India in physical size, the scale of the economy, population and military strength is a single state. India accounts for nearly three-fourths of the total GNP and population of the SAARC region, and nearly 60 per cent of its total international trade [6]. India is a continent in itself rather than merely one of the countries and overwhelmingly dominant one in SAARC. The closest approximation to India's position in SAARC and South Asia is Indonesia in ASEAN but this is in physical and military strength rather than economic power or a combination of France and Germany within the European Community

India did not make any proposal for institutional co-operation while advocating regional co-operation. The main reason was anticipating suspicion or resistance from its neighbors, particularly Pakistan. The disparity in size, demography, resources and levels of development between India and all its immediate neighbors led to this approach. It was with caution that India viewed the proposal for South Asian regional co-operation put forward by the late president Zia-ur-Rahman of Bangladesh in January 1980. There was the perception that in view of the perennial tensions between India and Pakistan and the distance which characterized India's relations with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, Zia-ur-Rahman's proposal would be a purely cosmetic exercise [7]. If the forum created, it would be a regional platform for 'India bashing' for putting collective pressure on India on matters of individual concern to each of the other participant countries. Despite being the most socio-economically endowed country in the region non participation would have laid India open to the accusation of scuttling an innovative proposal for regional co-operation. Taking all factors into consideration, India ultimately joined the negotiations for the creation of SAARC.

Because of these perspectives SAARC was never welcomed by India. Till 1991 India's approach was to steer SAARC towards projects and programs which were practical, feasible and devoid of political controversies. SAARC expanding its activities to areas which would create political problems or which would encourage extraneous non-regional interference and presence in regional affairs was opposed by India.

Since the partition of the subcontinent Pakistan has sought to establish for itself a West Asian, Arab Persian Muslim Identity in terms of political ethos. Its attempts to associate with the Gulf regional grouping and its more recent intensified efforts to consolidate the 'Eco' with Iran and Turkey [8]. It indicates that Pakistan's participation in the SAARC is due mainly to Indo-phobic political considerations instead of a desire for concrete regional co-operation.

## **B. Comparability**

It means side by side examination of two or more alternatives, processes to determine if they have common-ground or similarities to permit a meaningful comparative analysis (Business dictionary). According to this definition we can keep ASEAN and SAARC side by side to compare some of their common grounds.

In SAARC member states India is the physically largest as well as economic and military power house. So, the suspicions among the other SAARC members vis-à-vis India run strong. From Indian perspectives there is the suspicion that the smaller nations will gang up against her. Any external power can always cultivate a smaller nation to gain in the region and India in particular. These suspicions are the stark reality in South Asia.

Without political leadership regional groupings will fall apart that happened in Bangkok Agreement [9]. The leadership that Suharto gave to ASEAN played a major role that is the main strength in keeping ASEAN together till today.

With the "Gujral Doctrine" coming into place SAARC received leadership from India under Prime Minister Gujral [10]. After that SAARC is back to square without leadership. India considers itself as a global player but Pakistan has refused to accept the pivotal role of India in South Asia. For challenging India's role Pakistan has received encouragement from external forces. India has been reluctant to give leadership to SAARC process because of these factors.

ASEAN was partially setup to establish good relations with their neighbor countries and they are successful. SAARC members can learn from ASEAN from that perspective. When ASEAN member states talk they present ASEAN as a central point. In most of cases SAARC has little meaning to its member states especially to India and Pakistan.

## **III. CONCLUSION**

From regional stability and security ASEAN is now moving to regional economic integration and co-operation which is another step of their success. Neither in terms of economic co-operation nor in terms of promotion of peace and understanding there have been no signs of regional co-operation in SAARC. Because of India and Pakistan's suspicion and mistrust of each other SAARC continues to stagnate and will never be as successful as ASEAN.

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