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Regionalism in South Asia and EU: A Comparison

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Abstract

The formation and functioning of regionalism in South Asia and European Union has a different connotation. Although both have different backgrounds and different socio-economic and cultural ethos but it can be compared on the basis of process of formation, its functioning and the role of regional actors. The region of South Asia has a unique feature that almost all of the regional actors were once the colonies of British rule. All the nations of South Asia have almost the similar features i.e. the poverty, illiteracy, instability, underdevelopment and lack of infrastructural facilities for industrialisations and urbanisation. All nations have agrarian economy and have still traditional technology for agriculture. One more feature of South Asia is that India with its vast size and population has a dominant role in South Asian region. On the other hand European Union has different set up for its integration and regionalisation. Contrary to South Asia European Union have developed actors. There is socio-economic and cultural and political homogeneity. The integration of European Union is broadly based on economic integration of economy to counter the economic homogeneity of other economic giants of the world.

Key-Words : SAARC, SAPTA, EU, ECSC, EFTA, SAFTA.

Regionalism has been a significant phenomenon in post-second world war international relations. The decades of 1950s and 1960s witnessed the rise of many regional groups in various parts of the world – the European Economic Community in Western Europe, the Organization of African Unity in Africa; the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries in the Middle-East and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Southeast Asia. However, regionalism received a renewed impetus after the end of the cold war and with the development of globalization. End of the cold war brought about some major transformations in the world order. It accelerated the growth of interdependence and provided impetus to the process of globalization. This has led to the erosion of sovereign power of the state.

The regional integration processes in Asia and Europe have been generally considered different in nature and practice. Whereas European regionalism is seen as highly institutionalized through a set of binding treaties enforced by a massive bureaucracy, regionalism in Asia is seen as the outcome of free market forces bringing closer economic integration and interdependence. Consequently, Asian regionalism is often characterized as soft and normative regionalism, or as "pragmatic" regionalism, in contrast to the legalistic, political and civilizational regionalism in Europe.

There is a dichotomy in international relations regarding regionalism theory between rationalists and ideational approaches primarily functionalism, neo-functionalism and

neo-liberals in the first group and social constructivism and critical theories in the latter to regionalism in Asia and Europe. Whilst neo-functionalism and neo-liberals have ruled the study of European regionalism, with the exception of a recent challenge by social constructivism, Asian regionalism studies have increasingly relied on social constructivism as a theoretical framework.

Theories of integration have mainly been developed to explain European integration. Europe was the region of the world, where regional integration started in the early 1950s with the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952. Ernest Hass theorized this experience in *The Uniting of Europe* (1958). The main theoretical contribution was the concept of spillover. Later Lindberg used this concept to study the early years of the European Economic Community (EEC), which commenced its existence in 1958. These early theories are usually referred to as neo-functionalists theories. The early rich theoretical discussions about European integration came out during the 1970s and early 1980s. The European integration process got a new momentum from the mid-1980s, with the Single European Act (SEA) and the single market programme. Therefore, the inter-governmentalism was the new way to state European integration, which emphasizes on the role of member states. Andrew Moravcsik developed 'liberal inter-governmentalism' during the 1990s to explain the process of integration in Europe, suggesting the combination of a liberal theory to explain national preference formation and an inter-governmental theory of inter-state bargaining to explain substantive results. Later, he added a third stage, institutional choice, where pooling and delegation of sovereignty are mainly seen as a way to create 'credible commitments'. During 1990s, some scholars claimed that this need is a social constructivist approach to understand European integration.

The Single European Act was signed in 1986 to set up a Single European Market by 1992, by removing the obstacles to free movement of capital, goods and services, labour and the European Union was formally established by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993. Following various rounds of enlargement, the Europe came into a "deepening and widening" crisis, resulting into a realization that the existing institutions and processes no longer sufficiently supported the new larger and more diverse EU 27 and that there was an urgent need to reform of EU institutions and decision-making. The result was the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 (also known as the "reform treaty"), which introduced dual majority voting, empowered the European Parliament and developed a legal personality for the EU. It also created two new high-level positions at the top of the EU: the President of the European Council and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The EU has had a total of 6 rounds of enlargement increasing membership from 6 to 27 states. In 1973, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark joined, Greece joined in 1981, Spain and Portugal in 1986 and in 1995, the EU-15 was created when the former EFTA countries Austria, Finland and Sweden joined. The most significant enlargement round was the "Eastern Enlargement" in 2004 the Central and Eastern European states Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia, Slovakia and Poland joined. Finally, Bulgaria and Romania joined in 2007, bringing membership to the current 27 members. The EU can be seen as primarily a political project, developing common political identity and values, as well participation in regional institutions defining the region.

The process of regionalization started in South Asia with the formation of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) in 1985. After this regional cooperation, the member countries expected that regional integration would complement and not substitute other forms of bilateral or multilateral co-operation. The modern region of South Asia comprises

(304)

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Key-Words : SAARC, SAPTA, EU, ECSC, EFTA, SAFTA.

Regionalism has been a significant phenomenon in post-second world war international relations. The decades of 1950s and 1960s witnessed the rise of many regional groups in various parts of the world – the European Economic Community in Western Europe, the Organization of African Unity in Africa; the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries in the Middle-East and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Southeast Asia. However, regionalism received a renewed impetus after the end of the cold war and with the development of globalization. End of the cold war brought about some major transformations in the world order. It accelerated the growth of interdependence and provided impetus to the process of globalization. This has led to the erosion of sovereign power of the state.

The regional integration processes in Asia and Europe have been generally considered different in nature and practice. Whereas European regionalism is seen as highly institutionalized through a set of binding treaties enforced by a massive bureaucracy, regionalism in Asia is seen as the outcome of free market forces bringing closer economic integration and interdependence. Consequently, Asian regionalism is often characterized as soft and normative regionalism, or as "pragmatic" regionalism, in contrast to the legalistic, political and civilizational regionalism in Europe.

There is a dichotomy in international relations regarding regionalism theory between rationalists and ideational approaches primarily functionalism, neo-functionalism and

of the Indian subcontinent. This roughly includes the territory between China in the north and the India Ocean in the south; and Iran in the West and Myanmar in the east.

South Asia receded into insular post-colonial state-system in the 1950s. The new states were protective of their sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as the "independence" to make foreign policies. The states in the region were unable to evolve common approach to regional or global international issues. This was due to many factors. First, South Asian countries did not have a common perception of, or a common approach to, the cold war and the superpower rivalry. Secondly, there was an absence of commonly perceived extra-regional threat to them. Indeed, most regional states perceived of India as an important threat. The perception of threat from India is a result of a combination of India's soft as well as hard power. Thirdly, conflict between India-Pakistan, the two main powers of the region, has made evolution of regional approach nearly impossible. Fourthly, India's South Asia policy, despite its rhetoric of multilateralism in global international affairs, has always followed bilateralism in its relations with South Asian neighbors. Besides, India was also worried not to allow any leverage to outside powers in regional affairs. As a consequence of all these factors, there was no impetus for regionalisation in post-colonial South Asia. The region was not only a late starter, but also a reluctant starter in regionalisation.

The idea of regional co-operation in the South Asian region originated around 1980. Unlike in Hettne's understanding of the third stage of regionalisation, namely, regional society; no trans-border networks – state or non-state – had emerged prior to the formation of the regional organization in South Asia. In fact, such networks began to emerge only after the formation of the inter-governmental regional organization, i.e., SAARC.

The concept of regional co-operation in South Asia is based on the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence and non-interference in the internal affairs of the other member-states. Moreover, it is expected that regional co-operation would complement and not supplement other forms of bilateral or multilateral co-operation.

Promotion of intra-regional trade was one of the important aims of SAARC. With this intention, the initiative towards forming SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) was proposed in December 1991. An Agreement creating the SAPTA was signed on 11 April 1993 during the Seventh SAARC Summit in Dhaka. SAPTA is a framework of rules providing for step-by-step liberalisation of intra-regional trade. It envisages periodic rounds of trade negotiations for exchange of trade concessions on tariff as well as non-tariff measures. So far, four rounds of trade negotiations have been concluded under SAPTA covering over 5000 commodities. Each round contributed to an incremental trend in the product coverage and the deepening of tariff concessions over previous rounds. SAPTA was envisaged primarily as the first step towards the transition to a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA). The subsequent aim is the formation of a customs union as well as common market and economic union.

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