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SOUTH ASIA AS A REGION IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

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ABSTRACT :

The geographical compactness and contiguity added to the common legacy of the British rule and the common religions and languages make the core countries of south Asia indistinguishable from each other. But this has not necessarily brought about any sentiment of unity in the region. The British rule acted both as a unifying and a divisive factor. While it brought the countries of south Asia together under a common empirical umbrella which also laid the seeds of differences between India and Pakistan over the two nation theory between India and Sri Lanka over the nationality of Tamil plantation workers. One significant fact, however is worth noting that in most cases it was India which perhaps more on account of its geographic situation as also on account of either anti India sentiments spread by the rulers of the neighboring countries in order to divert the attention of their people from their own incompetence to given and solve the multiple problems faced by their countries or on account of the propaganda carried out very calculative by the external powers which gives an impression that India has the designs of establishing its own hegemony in the region thereby generating a fear psychosis in the minds of India's neighbors.



KEYWORDS : Region, International Politics, Regionalism, South Asia.

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Second World War resulted in the emergence of a new world order in which one can find the emergence of the new actors of international politics. While the United Nations was created as an international actor; the bi-polar division of the world brought about two key state actors who were termed as super powers. The charter of the United Nations specifically recognized the regional arrangements to which Palmer & Perkins mentioned as one of the most interesting developments in recent international relations. The development towards regionalism and regional arrangements promoted Walter Lippmann to make this prophetic observation that the constituent members of the international order of the future are communities of states. Indeed the growth of a very large number of supranational and regional organizations has been one of the most striking developments of international relations since 1945. The concept of regionalism is being used by modern nation states partly for satisfying several individual needs and partly for securing commonly shared collective growth.

The use of the term region is very varied and a number of scholars have defined the term differently. Palmer & Perkins maintained that "In international relation a region is invariably an area of embracing the territories of three or more states. These states are bound together by the ties of common interest as well as

geography. They are not necessarily contiguous or even the same continent. AlgendroAlvarez suggests that as there is no rule to determine region. Their existence must be shown by circumstances and in practical by the arrangements made by the states to constitute the region. Regions are constituted by certain countries having affinities of race, institutions or above all political interest.

While Scheleicher defines an international region as consisting of area of a number of countries which for the least one purpose distinguished from other area. Another scholar Russett is of the opinion that definition of region must be flexible; no single conditions is either necessary or sufficient by itself it can be pointed out that regions tend to have geographical proximities similar political attitudes and as cultural homogeneity or economic independence.

Regionalism, regional agreements or even regional associations are the terms that are generally taken as synonymous. It is therefore that while studying regionalism we treat them as regional organization. The regional organization thus give birth to a regional system. Even at San Francisco conference in 1945 there was quite a debate on defining regional arrangements. The Egyptian delegation's suggestion to define regional arrangements, "Organizations of permanent nature grouping in a geographical area of several countries which by reason of their proximity community of interests or cultural, linguistic, historical on spiritual affinities make themselves jointly responsible for the peaceful settlement of any disputes which may arise between them and for the maintenance of peace and security in their region as well as for the safeguarding of their interests and the development of their economic and cultural relations."

Boutros BoutrosGhali an Egyptian scholar who later became the seventh secretary general of the United Nations also approved this definition in his book, but proposed to revise it on several particulars, notably to attribute a regional arrangements. The final aim of forming a distinct political entity" Dr. E.N. Van Klefens, former Dutch ambassador to the united states formulated this definition a regional arrangement or part is a voluntary association of sovereign states within a certain area or having common interests in that area for a joint purpose which should not be of an offensive nature in relation to that area.

The aforesaid definitions help one to understand the nature of regionalism and the regional arrangements. In the post 1945 world such arrangements have been made almost in every international region. This made Palmer & Perking to observe that the trend towards international regionalism is now acknowledged feature of international scene while it has not in any real sense pleased the arrears of sovereign state system, it has provided the impetus and the machinery for much close cooperation of states at the regional level.

Regionalism in international politics is essentially a political phenomenon not withstanding its usual form of economic and socio cultural cooperative interaction. It is therefore not only naive but even erroneous to ignore political strategic factors in the study of regionalism. These factors exercise almost decisive influence and to understand the phenomenon of regionalism only in economic or any other context would amount to understanding it only partially and inadequately. Even the highly technical economic groupings such as customs unions were primarily the outcome if "political and security" considerations as concluded in a very authentic study of the subject by Jacob Viner. Taking clues from Jacob Viner's study Robert Gilpin has commented: both the economic and technical substructure partially determines and interacts with the political super structure. Political values and security interest are crucial determinants of international economics relation. Politics determines the framework of economic activity and channels it on the directions which tend to serve the political objectives of dominant political groups and organization. Gilpin saw the dominance of political and strategic factors even on the regionalism of the developed world. Such dominance is much greater in the third world where regionalism is far more susceptible to the imperatives of external and internal politics. In the third world countries politics is still on the process of evolution and accordingly it is for more volatile and unstable.

Political imperatives operate in the third world regionalism at three levels. First of all there is the external stimuli which can be both positive as well as negative. The super power geo strategic doctrines have played a very crucial role on shaping the varying forms of regionalism experiences in the three world both by initiating as well as encouraging them. For instance in the case of the U.S.A from Monroe (1824) to carter (1980) doctrines third world regionalism has received a specific incentive.

At the second level political and strategic nature of the intra-regional go a long way in determining the

shape of regionalism that grows on a third world area. It is generally assumed that if this relationship is less contentious, it proves conducive for regional cooperation. Unfortunately not enough empirical studies are available to show that it is really so.

At the third level which in fact is very vital, is the state the nature of its socio economic basis and its overall institutional structure which organizes socio economic and political forces within a given country and thus influences the outcome of such policies and decisions which are critical for building or thwarting regional cooperation. The political Imperatives at all these three levels are closely interlinked and often have a mutually reinforcing relationship. The move for south regional cooperation reflects these imperative at all the three levels.

The international political system as it emerged after the Second World War was characterized by the existence of two super powers, locked in conflict with each other by unclear difference. There has been a great deal of controversy in recent years whether bi-polarity has ended or has merely changed its form by 1962-63 political observers had started pointing out that we were “emerging from a two power world and entering one where there are many powers”and were of the opinion that within ten years the system of polarization of power will cease to be recognizable that other states, will count for so much in world politics that the present two great powers will find it difficult even when cooperating top dominate them.

The rise of France and China, the development of nuclear weapons by England France and China, the economic advancement of Germany, Japan and France confirmed the impression that the era of bi polarity was ending. Now when Soviet empire has been collapsed, the impression was again confirmed. But if we examine the existing gross and perspective rate of growth we shall find that none of the middle power is in a position to challenge the authority of the super powers. The super powers, now more independent of their allies than ever still dominate the world affairs.

The globalization of the new world order of the present decade has marked a new beginning in regional cooperation. Meaning truly that they now look for in these regional groupings a solution to their political and economic problems. Though these regional groups have been there for a long time but their real role is to be seen and evaluated in the world order of the last decade of the present century and the 21st century.

More recently, South Asia is being regarded as a region in itself. There is of course no general agreement with regard to defining the area some would limit it to India, Pakistan, Nepal Bangladesh and Sri- Lanka . Other would extend it to Afghanistan in the West Afghanistan and Burma, however are included by most of the accepted definitions on west Asia and southeast Asia respectively, but they plenty of common features with the countries of south Asia to warrant their inclusion in any study of this region. Pakistan after its break up is sometimes regarded as a part of west Asia and Bangladesh of Southeast Asia, on the ground that Pakistan along with Afghanistan shares a certain commonality of interests with the other west Asian countries, while Bangladesh, facing Burma across the Assam territory is not far away from the countries of Southeast Asia.

South Asia has carried the dubious distinction of being the only region in the world without even a rudimentary regional organization for too long. This may fully be attributable to the internal contradiction for too long. This may fully be attributable to the internal contradiction of the regional- unity vs. diversity. If south Asia is perceived as one homogeneous colonial unit of the British raj, then the absence of a regional framework for cooperative interaction is surprising but digging a little deeper one uncovers heterogeneity of south Asia and is even more surprised at the progress the region has actually made towards institutionalizing regional cooperation since the initiative was taken by the late president Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh in 1980.

The south Asia is among the last to attempt the politics, or more precisely the economics of co-operation is not without logic. Whatever happens or fails to happen in the contest of south Asian co-operation is inextricably woven into the matrix of indo Pakistani relations. Since independence in 1947, the politics of India and Pakistan can unhesitatingly be characterized as the politics of conflict, for which the absence of any co-operative machinery was more welcome than its presence.

Lord Curzon’s fortress India, with a mountain wall on the north and the sea on the other two sides, approximates the south Asia of today, the seven nation states of India, Pakistan Bangladesh Nepal Sri-Lanka, Bhutan and the Maldives. in the constellation India may be described as the dominant major power Pakistan as a

significant and reasonably cohesive middle power, Bangladesh as a weak and dependent middle power, Sri Lanka and Nepal as weak small powers and Bhutan and Maldives as mini states. "The region's nearly one billion people 20% of the world's population live on just 3.1% of the world's land area and are among the poorest and the most underfed, with the highest infant mortality and least public expenditure per capital on health and education.

Another peculiarity of the region is that all other states are contiguous to India or in close proximity to it but none shares a border with any other south Asian nation. India the core country in South Asia has 72% of its population and generates 78% of its G.N.P socio- culturally south Asia is both homogenous and heterogeneous. The colonial heritage endowed it with political and administrative systems and an extensive communication network. But culturally ideologically and ethnically the region is very diverse. India alone has 14 official languages, 80 principal dialects and 550 sub-dialects 6 major religions and immense ethnic diversity.

The Indian sub-continent is a term that certainly recognizes the dominant position of India in both area and population, but since the partition of Indian empire is apt to give offence to Pakistanis and to Bangladesh. South Asia then may be unfamiliar and not ambiguous but it is neutral and inoffensive.

CONCLUSION

The people of south Asia differ greatly between themselves. The reasons for this are rooted in the history of their original and ancient civilizations and of external impact, especially by Europeans. The consequences of social differences, whether of religion or of caste or of some other sources of division are to be treated into recent and contemporary politics? The difficulties of achieving and preserving national boundaries are of course all too familiar in the post-colonial world. But in south Asia, especially but not exclusively in its larger countries difficulties have had a particular cogency, and have from time to time excited the attention of the world at large as when for example communal violence has erupted in India or when India and Pakistan went to war on the emergence of independent Bangladesh.

South Asia in fact provides instances of that kind of less developed economy (China is another) with generally severe pressure of population and low standard of living. Since data on South Asia are both more reliable and more available than those for China and since there is a relatively free interchange of research workers between south Asia and other parts of the world they have proved highly attractive for the study of development, both south Asian and foreign. Some of the latter have rightly or wrongly been especially interested in government policy and planning in south Asia in general and in India in particular as a democratic alternative to the methods that have been pursued in China. One can also see foreign aid policies with all their mixed motives at work in South Asia.

Turning to international relations the most spectacular and news worthy event since independence have so far been internal to the sub-continent in the shape of recurring conflict between the two main successors to the British Indian empire India and Pakistan but India has also had a border dispute with and suffered invasion from China, and has tended to be friendly to Russia while Pakistan has built up links with Islamic countries of the middle east with China and of course with the United States. India and at times Sri Lanka have been prominent in the non-aligned movement with its declared aim of steering clear of involvement with the super powers. More specific has been the aim of converting the Indian Ocean into a lake of peace from which super power rivalries would be excluded. South Asia with its internal and external hostilities and its space relations is bound to be drawn more and more into world affairs.

One may also add that the political systems in the region vary. Even political instability during the last fifty years can also be witnessed in almost every country of the region. The foreign policy objectives and methods of these countries have taken different shapes. The non-alignment though may be considered to be a guiding principle of all the south Asian countries today, but their perceptions have also been different and changing. India is the only country that fought actual wars with two of her neighbors on as many as four occasions and though actual battles have not been fought there are many disputes or differences of opinion on many issues with other neighbors.

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