

# Emergence of New Regionalism in South Asia

Gull Mohd Wani\*

## ABSTRACT

Regionalism in south Asia has different meanings than what is meant by it in other regions like European Union, African Union, Organization of American states ,etc. because south Asia is prone to many problems be it Terrorism ,Insecurity, Poverty ,Diseases, etc. besides this there is mistrust, misunderstanding between and among countries of south Asia particularly India and Pakistan which prevented the region to make any organization that could remove the conflicts between them , the SAARC is concrete example as it is in great trouble ,so now south Asia is looking for alternative regional and trans regional organizations like it become the member of BIMSTEC so to look towards South East Asia and improve their relations by trying to develop common market outside its south Asian region that could upgrade their trade and all in all their relations with the neighbors , India also joined BBIN, consider it as economic corridor which will develop north eastern states of India , By this corridor transfer of goods and services between the member countries will take place, ,In this paper we will discuss problems of SAARC and new regional organizations of south Asia and their impact on the region

## INTRODUCTION

South Asia is making many regional and sub regional organizations, the countries of south Asia being emerging economies particularly India is influencing world politics by engaging its economies with its neighbors among south Asia and south east Asian neighbors .India tries to secure its interests by making them as its platform, There is narrative prevalent that is power shift of 21<sup>st</sup> century from west to east that we are witnessing either through China, Japan, India or ASEAN nations. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century world order was maintained by the institutions regulated by the West, now we see their failure in managing crises that is in international politics. By taking these uncontrolled crises under consideration there is debate about expectation that good governance will be rising east.

South Asia is playing a good role at both regional and sub regional levels to have influence in the issues of global politics. South Asia is looking for new regionalism because it's regional organization SAARC of which India and Pakistan are members from the beginning has not made any progress since its origin. There have been many challenges which are complex in nature and hindered its functioning, though south Asia begins to look for new regionalism. The paper tries to analyze how new regionalism is growing in south Asia and how it impacts to the countries of south Asia and can they be called south Asian regional organizations without any of the member of South Asian region.

## What is Regionalism?

The concept of region differs from discipline to discipline. However, in politics, regionalism is a political ideology that focuses on the national or normative interests of a particular region, group of regions or another sub national entity. These may be delineated by political divisions, administrative divisions ,cultural boundaries ,linguistic boundaries etc we can conclude by the definition that regionalism is social construction. As Hutt puts it, all regions are socially constructed and hence politically contested. The most important aspect to understand region depends on how political actors perceive and interpret the idea of region and notion of regionalism .In international relations , regionalism is the expression of common sense of identity and purpose combined with the creation and implementation of institutions , A region is simply defined as a group of countries located in the same geographically specified area, exactly which areas constitute regions ,however remains controversial some observers for example consider Asia Pacific a single region others consider it on combination of two, while others more than two. There is the concept other than regionalism that is regionalization, in international relations regionalism is actually a set of processes that leads states to work together on regional scale. If we take regionalization from a realist perspective in international relations it is actually an outward expansion of the nation state. While regionalism can be seen as normative aspect or value, that underlie regionalization example European identity. However it is also theoretical tool for analysis of international relations, South Asia is trying to develop regionalism as other regional organization like European Union ,ASEAN, APEC, NAFTA, African Union , but has not been successful,

---

Corresponding Author: Gull Mohd Wani,  
Professor at Department of Political Science University of Kashmir

yet even through its new regional organizations. The formation of regional groupings or regional organizations has become a trend in the world of politics, particularly in developing and underdeveloped countries since the post-second world war. The aim of regionalism was not to develop economic integration but also to exploit the potential of complementariness for a better allocation of available resources to mutual comparative advantage like other developed countries.

The early and recent attempts at building regional cooperation in south Asia need to be viewed within the framework of regionalism in south Asia in general and Asia in particular, The early talk of Asian regionalism come from JAPAN and many in India and outside where influenced by Japanese slogan of *ASIA FOR ASIANS*. Regional cooperation of south Asia has been cited as problem case, the dominant strategic feature have been tension between India and Pakistan , the organization that cover whole of South Asian countries is SAARC has made a slow progress . Regionalism of South Asia is becoming a decisive variable in International relations since 1990s, South Asian countries particularly India and Pakistan are showing high economic growth and also they are de facto nuclear states thus radically changing south Asian profile. Since 1990s South Asian regionalism caught attention because of its strategic importance, so to take a benefit from it, it is going for another kind of regionalization either within region example BBIN or beyond region like BIMSTEC .This inter-region channel of regionalization is considered a first step towards strengthening regional identity.

### **SAARC is in Trouble**

There is a need for new regionalism in south Asia , at a same time it is growing because its earlier regional organization did not bring a very successful story neither in terms of removing conflict and controversies on the number of disputes be it ethnic violence of India and Sri Lanka , border dispute India and Pakistan etc , nor benefitting the region in terms of economic welfare to the people of the region , or developing common market among themselves as other regional organizations has developed like European Union ,thus all south Asian countries associate themselves with alternative organizations outside SAARC.

SAARC; Established in 1985 the South Asian association of regional cooperation. It is a regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical unit of nations in South Asia. It comprises 3% of world's area, 3.8% of global economy in 2015 , and Covering at least 1.5 billion people across India ,Pakistan ,Bangladesh, Nepal ,Sri Lanka Bhutan ,Maldives and Afghanistan, SAARC is one of the largest regional organizations in the world .But its achievements so far have been so minimal that even its constituents have become lackadaisical in their attitudes towards it. The aim of SAARC was to promote the welfare of its people , accelerate economic growth ,social progress and cultural develop, and strengthen collective self-, organization also aims to contribute mutual trust and understanding among the member countries ,But it has failed to attain its objectives from its inception treated by the member states with suspicion .India a giant power in south Asia perceived it that it is policy of its neighbors to unite against India and considered its founder biased towards west ,No doubt India also now tried to strengthen intra \_regional connectivity but Pakistan is not cooperating the recent example is South Asian Satellite which was launched by prime minister MODI in Nepal on 5 may 2014 ,the satellite will provide a full range of applications and services in the fields of telecommunication and broadcasting applications, namely Television, Direct to Home service (DTH) , all countries joined except Pakistan ,which hinders many initiatives to be implemented ,another example is of SAFTA which was established to promote trade but it is yet to be implemented ,trade continues to meager by 5%. There are certain problems in the SAARC which are highlighted in the following lines.

### **Economic impediments in south Asia**

Half of the world' s poor continue to live in South Asia , although it constitutes only three percent of the Worlds area ,Trade among SAARC states has remained limited despite the fact that all are located within a close proximity of one another and are all part of the world trade organization ( WTO), intra-regional trade among SAARC states is way below potential and does not involve goods vital to economics of SOUTH ASIA states . Smaller states in the region are haunted by the fear of Indian goods sweeping their markets. Only 3.2 percent of Bangladesh's trade is with the region and only Sri Lanka has a free Trade agreement with India .Pakistan does not even give the WTO mandated MOST FAVOURED NATION status to India but came up with a dissimilar but globally popular Non-discriminatory market access (NDMA) agreement .The reason Pakistan has chosen to adopt the NDMA with India is due to political mistrust and history of border dispute .Smuggling continues to overshadow legal trade between India and Pakistan .Despite the telecommunication connectivity, intra trade and investments flow are far less compared with east and south east Asia.

### **Political impediments in South Asia:**

Despite an extra ordinary degree of cultural affinity in south Asia, it is also a region mired in mutual distrust .Bilateral disputes among member states have undermined regional efforts to promote trade and economic cooperation .India's predominant power position in South Asia has allowed conflicts between India and its neighbors to undermine organizational units. Due to political tensions among the member states, SAARC has not a glorious record and has had only 17 summit level meetings in the last 26 years where it was meant to have one each year .Territorial disputes and other political issues have had few meetings either postponed or cancelled .

India –Pakistan conflict is at the heart of SAARC dysfunctionality. Pakistan has traditionally insisted that the dispute over Kashmir needs to be resolved before it can agree to move forward economic cooperation with India. Islamabad has refused to grant India the MFN status as required by its WTO membership .The two countries have fought four bloody wars since partition, the last one being the Kargil war in May 1999 .This was followed by a military confrontation for over seven months in 2001-2002 in the aftermath of an attack on the Indian parliament in December 2001.The terrorists trained in Pakistan launched attacks on Mumbai in November 2008, leading to the freeze in indo Pak ties. India said recently that citing continuing support to cross-border terrorism from Pakistan, India said on Saturday it was difficult to proceed with the SAARC under current circumstances. India has adopted other way that is to improve its relations with other neighbors of South Asian states. The former PM of a country I. K GUJRAL enunciated a doctrine the Gujral doctrine which talked about India trying its best to overcome the suspicions of other regional states by being generous and giving unilateral concessions to its smaller neighbors. And as a result, India signed 30-year water sharing treaty with Bangladesh and a trade and transit treaty with Nepal.

A sub regional grouping also evolved under SAARC including Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and India. Other more effective alternatives to SAARC have also emerged. The Bay of Bengal initiative for multi sect oral technical and economic cooperation BIMSTEC, originally involving Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, was established in 1992. Bhutan and Myanmar joined in subsequent years making this forum almost a buffer zone between the more effective ASEAN and SAARC itself. In conclusion we can say that SAARC was from its inception treated by the member states with suspension, the aim of SAARC was to bring its members in the common platform on the pattern of European union and to make it economic and political bloc. No tangible economic and Political benefits have been realized by SAARC, with analysts terming its performance as a case of retarded regionalism, South Asia is the least integrated region in the world.

In short, for member countries, SAARC was an unwanted child not only when it was conceived but after its birth and adolescence as well .In the last 33 years ,SAARC has held 18 summits and many have been either postponed or cancelled due to various issues .The cancellation and postponement of regular meetings embody the persistence of this indifference today as well. Many SAARC members have been looking towards new regional organizations that exclude Pakistan, such as BIMSTEC and BBIN, member countries have been significantly more proactive in BIMSTEC and BBIN and find themselves more optimistic of regional progress through these initiatives.

## **BIMSTEC AND ITS IMPACT ON SOUTH ASIAN REGIONALISM**

The Bay of Bengal for multi sect oral technical and economic cooperation BIMSTEC is an inter-regional organization of seven nations of south Asia and southeast Asia, housing 1.5 billion people and having a combined gross domestic product of \$2.5 trillion 2014. The BIMSTEC member states Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan, and Nepal are among the countries dependent on the Bay of Bengal. On June 6, 1997, a new inter regional grouping was formed in Bangkok under the name BISTEC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand economic cooperation). On 22 December 1997 Myanmar became a full member resulting in the renaming of the grouping to BIMSTEC. In 1998, Nepal became an observer. In February 2004, Nepal and Bhutan became full members. On July 31, 2004, in the first summit the grouping was renamed as BISTEC or Bay of Bengal initiative for multi sect oral technical and economic cooperation.

The idea of BIMSTEC, a grouping of seven nations around the Bay of Bengal, is a compelling one. Owing to the failure of SAARC an earlier attempt to forge sub-regional integration in south Asia, hopes are being pinned on BIMSTEC to succeed in not only bringing closer its south Asia members but also bridging the region to south east Asia BIMSTEC was formed in Bangkok in 1999, Twelve years has passed since the first summit in 2004 times are changing for regional grouping .India invited the leaders of countries associated with BIMSTEC to the 8<sup>th</sup> summit of BRICS summit in GOA in October 2016, in the hope that the conference will boost ties between the two groupings .The summit resulted in the decision to expedite a free trade area FTA between the member states albeit with limited ambition. The BIMSTEC come into existence because of slow progress of SAARC which consists, India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Tensions between India and Pakistan have constantly derailed cooperation within the neighborhood, For one Pakistan continues to deny India as most favored nation status, very recently the rising threat of cross border terrorism led

to the postponement of the 19<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit that was to be held in Pakistan in November 2016. This followed the September attack on an India military base in Uri in Jammu and Kashmir. In addition, there are also bitter relations between India and Sri Lanka on ethnic violence and between India and Bangladesh there is water dispute, issue of migration etc. SAARC as a regional organization has failed to address them.

BIMSTEC in this context is considered a highly innovative strategy that seeks to work around the currently problematical nature of regional integration in South Asia, what BIMSTEC promises is SAARC minus Pakistan with Myanmar and Thailand as extra members, Afghanistan and Maldives could also join. BIMSTEC is a bridge between south Asia and southeast Asia. India's membership to BIMSTEC is essential for progress of the region. The main aim of BIMSTEC is technological and economic cooperation among the member countries that border the Bay of Bengal. At the BIMSTEC outreach summit in Goa, 14 sectors were identified which would be given priority that is terrorism, disaster management, climate change, energy and cooperation, in agriculture. The Goa meeting promised to take the grouping forward with India's leadership, especially when regionalism is facing challenges in the neighborhood environment.

The objective of such an alliance building is to harness shared and accelerated growth through cooperation where members have common interests, like by mitigate onslaught of globalization and by making proper utilization of resources and geographical advantages. BIMSTEC is a sector driven cooperative organization. It is actually the failure of SAARC which pushed south Asian members to go for alternative organization BIMSTEC. In recent years BIMSTEC has gained popularity in South Asia and has become platform for regional cooperation, It connects the SAARC and ASEAN nations with minus Afghanistan, Pakistan, from SAARC and plus MYANMAR and Thailand from ASEAN nations, what is new in BIMSTEC is cordial relations, good understanding among member countries which was missing in SAARC. The aim of India to become the member of BIMSTEC was to strengthen its relations with ASEAN nations so to make implementation of "Look East Policy" which is now becoming "Act East Policy". A key reason for India to reach out to its BIMSTEC neighbors has been stagnation of the SAARC which limited both the scope of India's growing economic aspirations as well as the role it could play in improving regional governance, and BIMSTEC will also help Thailand to implement its "Look west Policy", smaller countries will also be benefitted. South Asian nations can have closer cooperation with the economically prospering region of Southeast Asia through BIMSTEC.

Consistency of summits to ensure regularity of decision making.

Capacity of secretariat to be improved in terms of manpower and money power.

Countries to develop common platforms for dispute resolution.

Now we can say that BIMSTEC is new hope for south Asian and other southeast Asian countries to improve their relations by addressing their common issues and strengthen their economic relations so to make progressive development. In last we can say BIMSTEC adds new chapter in the regionalism in south Asia.

#### **BBIN: ITS IMPACT ON SOUTH ASIAN REGIONALISM.**

The BBIN initiative is a sub-regional architecture of countries in eastern south Asia, a sub region of south Asia. It meets through official representation of member states to formulate, implement and review quadrilateral agreements across areas such as water resources management, connectivity of power, transport. If we take the structure of SAARC into consideration, we will disaggregate it into three sub regions comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal, a southern sub region comprising of India, Maldives and Sri Lanka (IMS) and western sub region made up by Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan (AIP).

The BBIN is an initiative in the way of New regionalism by the south Asian countries, who are operating through inter-governmental joint working groups (JWG) comprising senior officials of the member states under the aegis of their respective foreign affairs ministers/agencies of the government. Till now two JOINT WORKING GROUPS have been established one is JWG on trade, transit, and connectivity and other on water resources and management and power/hydro power trade and grid connectivity. Bangladesh convened the first meeting in Dhaka, which was attended by official from Bangladesh convened the first meeting in DHAKA, which was attended by officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, and India. Nepal could not join, its main task was to identify cross-border initiatives that could be undertaken between member countries of BBIN towards attaining economics synergy through putting in place arterial channels of trade. Another priority identified was also to provide the connectivity

embodied by seamless electric grid. BBIN is a sub-regional organization outside SAARC to pave the way for increased Trade and cross investments among these member countries. BBIN according to Selim Raihan, Professor of economics at DHAKA University said, should work for wider integration of goods and services trade ,which SAARC failed to deliver and BBIN can be effective regional platform which can deliver ,

BBIN countries have agreed for passenger vehicle movement in sub region under BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement which was signed in June 2015. The agreement will permit member states to ply their vehicles in each other's territory for transport and personal vehicle. The Asian development bank is providing technical advisory and financial support to BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement as assistance to south Asia sub regional economic cooperation (SASEC). The MVA under the BBIN holds great prospects for the member nations. It is sure to cut down informal trade, that includes thriving smuggling business leading to great loss of revenues and boost formal trade. Reduction of tariff ,so long tried for improving trade volumes, has not shown encouraging results .The need of the hour is removal of non-tariff barriers, improved connectivity and strengthening of intra sub-regional institutions. India proposed a SAARC Motor Vehicle Agreement in 18th SAARC summit in Kathmandu in 2014 but Pakistan objected so agreement could not be reached though India tried to pursue it from another regional organization BBIN. BBIN initiative clearly reflect the Prime Ministers Modi's desire to integrate the South Asian economy. Besides BBIN India is looking for new-regionalism with Sri-Lanka and Maldives and is also waiting for Afghanistan and Pakistan on western sub-regional. BBIN is the economic corridor which could rightfully be considered as the first step towards concrete sub regional cooperation, which would open investment and facilitate their channels for carrying trade. These channels will also enable people to people interface.

### Conclusion

By analyzing the situation that is emerging in South Asia we can conclude that the newregionalism in the form of BIMSTEC and BBIN become the another option for the region to improve their neighborhood relations and solve regional disputes which the South Asia has failed to solve through previous organization SAARC .Formation of other regional organization like BIMSTEC and BBIN does not include whole of south Asian members as SAARC does , but are becoming attractive alternations to SAARC . There can be revival of SAARC if the main actors of South Asia become ready to remove the conflicts that have prevented the organization to work on the pattern of European Union one of the successful regional organization,. SAARC's emphasis on the principle of unanimity for decision making and exclusion of contentious bilateral issues from deliberations makes the organization fragile and vulnerable. Thus, South Asia began to move other inter-regional and sub-regional organizations. These new organizations has not yet bring noticeable change. but it is expected that they will work on the principles on which they are based as they were not born on the same kind of dilemma in which SAARC was born.

### References

1. "Impact and Benefits of Power trading in South Asia Growth Quadrangle (pdf) south Asia Regional Initiative for energy cooperation and Development,
2. "India explores scope for power trade with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal," Economic times 31 jan.2015.
3. Best Edward, Christiansen Thomas "Regionalism in international AFFAIRS"
4. Chauduary, Anasua Basu Ray (2006): SAARC at the crossroads, the fate of regional cooperation in South Asia, New Delhi Samkriti,
5. Gangly, Sumit (2002): conflict Unending: India –Pakistan Tensions Since 1947, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
6. Inayat, Mavara' "the south Asian association for regional cooperation " In Bailes Alyson S.K 2007 REGIONALISM IN SOUTH ASIAN DIPLOMACY, SIPRI
7. Jain, Sonu "Regional cooperation in South Asia, India perspectives pdf World Bank"
8. Khan Tariq Ambassador and Srivastava Madhumita DR and BALAJI; BBIN: Paradigm change in South Asia (May 2016)
9. Kumar Amit Dr BBIN: Sub regionalism in SAARC "Indian Council of World Affairs"
10. Kumar Amit. BBIN; SUB REGIONALISM IN SAARC (Pdf). Indian council of world Affairs.
11. Mohan Chandra N., BIMSTEC: An idea whose Time has come? Pdf Orf issue Brief Nov. 2016.

12. Regional organizations and conflict management: ASAEN and SAARC, working paper 33 (regional and global axis of conflict).

13. the full text of SAARC charter is available at <http://saarc-sdmc.nic.in/pdf/charter> pdf.