

India and the EU: Divergence in Regional Approaches

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The present juncture, heralding the advent of a new century, and a new millennium, presents an appropriate moment for India and the European Union, two largest democratic pluralistic entities in the world, for introspection and for propounding a new agenda for cooperation in various fields within the region and outside it, in the epoch ahead. Both of them, being multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-cultural formations, face, to a large extent, almost identical challenges. Comparatively speaking, however, India bears deeper multi-religious characterisation than the EU, in that the latter's salience in this respect is considerably circumscribed by Christianity. EU's multi-religious profile may however undergo a noteworthy change as and when Turkey and other Islamic countries, such as Albania and Bosnia are admitted into it.

Till now, Turkey, though, as at present, it forms a part of the Customs Union with the EU, has been kept on the periphery, and denied admission into the deeper precincts of the integrative decision-making apparatus of the EU. During the preceding more than thirty years, Turkey has been edging closer to the EU, and now, at the present stage, it seems that it may not perhaps be possible to keep it out indefinitely, even though EU disapproves in no uncertain terms Turkey's projected position with respect to the capital punishment that it contemplates awarding to the rebel Kurd leaders, already under detention. However, as and when such a development takes place, EU would have a newly acquired image as a multi-religious collectivity. Undoubtedly, this would be a note-worthy development: for, it would gravely hit the fundamentalist streak, presently prevailing in many Islamic countries, and here Turkey is no exception. The afore-cited factor in itself presents a sound *raison d'être* for the EU to acquiesce to its admittance into its fold. Additionally, as its spill-over-effect, the "clash of civilizations", the much controverted futuristic challenge to global security, may, in howsoever small measure be also addressed.

II

India and the EU, even though inheritors of ancient civilizations are young in their present shape and outlook. Indeed, both of them are the offsprings, of the later half of the twentieth century, but with major differences in their statutory status as well as in statistical configuration. While India bears a quasi-federal status, EU even after nearly half a century of its inception, in howsoever rudimentary form is still at the formative stage, deeply immersed in its institutional growth as well as reform. Post-war Europe, for its peculiar historical reasons and for reasons of brightening up its future prospects globally became the pace-setter in regional integration. And, today, of all the regional groupings, EU rightfully projects itself as the most successful experiment on regional integration.

Yet, EU with its ambitious project and vision of bringing an end to the centuries old internecine European feuds, and also to strengthen its security against any challenge from outside, has had to be continually engaged in deepening and widening its regional canvas. Therefore, it is not, and is not likely in the near future, to grow in any miraculous way (through sudden mass attitudinal change of widely different ethnic, racial and linguistic communities in the Union) into any known classical mode of federal or confederal governance. However, as until now, it could at best be described, as *de Gaulle* had willed, in realistic terms as *l' Europe des patries*. But, this in no way suggests under-valuation of the European accomplishment. Rather, it has to be commended on its having metamorphosed the conflict-afflicted continent into a peace zone, and an expanding one, so that many a member state even from the erstwhile hostile bloc are to be welcomed into its ambit in the not too distant future. Perhaps, it has to be acknowledged that in many ways, it has succeeded in forging greater and deeper solidarity among its member states than what is seen even among the components of the US.

III

Multi-speed Europe

It is indeed through gradualist-dialectical approach that the EU has traversed long and arduous distance in reaching the present stage of mature regionalised status. Together, it represents “a consolidated area of diplomacy”; together, it constitutes an important pillar of global economic and technological triad; and, then, together, it has since overcome the fragmentation of European market and institutionalised a single enlarged market, with four freedoms operative (in movement of capital, goods, services and labour), if not in all, but in most member states: This is after all multi-speed Europe. To illustrate *Schengen Accord* comprises of 13 member states, EMU with common currency Euro comprises of 11 member states. Now, in the final phase, debate is on, on the modalities of framing common foreign and security policy. As such, with its magnetic pull, EU has proven to be an expanding political process, increasing its membership from six to nine, to ten, to twelve, and then to fifteen, and, now, can look ahead to opening up its doors to ten new aspirants from the now defunct Soviet Bloc.

With an unusual characteristic in its make up, EU has shown its open-mindedness, and has fostered horizontally-structured interdependence among its member states, replacing time-worn mutually antagonistic and self-aggrandizing nationalistic demeanour with good-neighbourliness. As a result, there has appeared over the years statutorily determined collective self-reliance, with jointly shaped up mechanisms of crisis management which do not arouse apprehension of treading on the national identity of its components. With growing mutual trust and self-confidence, EU is moving slowly and steadily to attain in the next few years its own autonomous security build-up, both strategic and conventional so that it would no longer be a “paper tiger”. It would be optimally equipped with its own means of defence so as to firm up its equation with the US on the management of peace and security in their own regions as also elsewhere.

Elsewhere, needs to be underscored, for, when Europe is fully equipped with its own autonomous defence, a question may then arise as to how will its strategic moves be checkmated and or kept within the perimeters of defence; after all, most of the offensive wars had, in the past been

unleashed in the name of defence. South Asia must ever remember a well-known adage that eternal vigilance is the price of hard-earned liberty.

Strengths and Weaknesses

EU is however conscious of its structural weaknesses and collateral strengths. As at present, EU, with its total population of 375 m (which is a little more than one third of India's, but nearly one and half times that of the US, and three times that of Japan) has emerged as the largest trading bloc in the world. It has a combined GDP of \$8,258 billion in 1995, which is higher than the GDP of the US's \$6.9 trillion and more than one and half times that of Japan's \$5.1 trillion, and 25 times that of India's \$325 billion. One noteworthy feature of the EU is, which is not the case with any other political entity, or regional grouping identically positioned, that it is continuously expanding and growing demographically as well as resource-wise.

For example, in industrial technology, particularly in the engineering inventions, EU has an edge over the US and Japan; but then there is the realization that their world class industries are located in the 'Fordist'/'Smokestack' sectors, where, too, they find it difficult to compete with pressures stemming from the East Asian Tigers. Also, over the years, there has been a psychologically dampening perception that Europe lags behind the US in biotechnology, genetic engineering and advanced materials, and is behind the Japanese in micro-electronics. Through its on-going fifth framework programme, EU endeavours to overcome this deficit by concentrating on telematics, industrial and nuclear technologies, biotechnology, non nuclear energy, transport, environment, as well as in several other areas. Besides, it contributes significantly to the strengthening of the EUREKA set up in 1983 at the French initiative in response to the US-SDI. Interestingly, while the latter has faded out with the end of the cold war, EUREKA continues to be a thriving enterprise. Even if lagging behind the US and Japan in several high tech areas, EU has been continuously in race with these industrial giants, and is in a state of dialogue with all the world regional groupings.

South Asia in Comparison: Inter-war Europe!

In contradiction to EU's somewhat positivistic evolution into its present uniquely regionalised status, post-independence India did not have smooth-sailing in shaping up its destiny within South Asia. On the eve of its independence it broke up into two states, more or less on religious grounds, the so-called "two nation theory", which suffered demise on the break-up of Pakistan and the resultant emergence of Bangladesh on linguistic differential. Now the Indian sub-continent has three independent states, which over the preceding decades have been striving to find roots for their national identities. Nation state and national identity, with apprehensions of intra-sub-continental challenges, have remained unendingly the themes for political debate. Kashmir question has stuck into the morass, with conceivably no way out: this has impeded progress in regional cooperation in South Asia. Both India and Pakistan have now acquired nuclear weapons, though the major five nuclear weapon powers have not yet given them recognition. But this is meaningless in the regional context for the parameters of action-reaction in South Asia are of widely different variety.

In a way, the present fragmentation of the sub-continent into mutually hostile artefacts reminds one of the fragmentations of Europe following the end of the First World War. In the post-War

Europe, jingoistic nationalism lay behind *Fascism and Nazism*: as a result, peace and stability were shattered, and “dark ages in all their cruelty and squalor” seem to have returned in the ugly shape of Second World War. After the war wrought cataclysmic destruction in Europe, “sovereign remedy” to the fragmentation came loud and clear from Sir Winston Churchill:

It is to recreate the European family as much of it as we can, and provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom. We must build a kind of United States of Europe... All that is needed is the resolve of hundreds of millions of men and women to do right instead of wrong and gain as their reward blessing instead of cursing.

The foregoing statement bears relevance in equal vehemence in the case of South Asia today. Only that we have to look for some visionary and saner souls like Jean Monnet and Winston Churchill (perhaps, Mahbub-ul-Haq could have been the one, if Destiny had not snatched him away so early!) who could suggest some such sovereign remedy to over a billion of people in this region in somewhat simplified form: United we stand and divide we fall.

Previous history of the sub-continent bears witness to this accused paradigm. In South Asia, jingoistic nationalism dyed deep into religious fundamentalism has been imperilling peace and stability in the sub-continent for more than half a century, and not the European Union as it is on the strident move towards attaining new complexion in the decade ahead.

In passing, it may have to be noted that India, under its Constitution, extends to all the religious, linguistic and racial communities, equal rights and opportunities, notwithstanding aberrations here and there, which appear to have become inevitable owing to the environment within and partly environment around it. In the other one break-away state viz.; Pakistan presently under military dictatorship, such a democratic pluralistic norm remains a distant dream, even in theoretical terms. Such a glaring lag could possibly have been addressed through genuine regional cooperation. Apropos, EU's example is commendable: as seen earlier, it has enabled its member states to have set aside their traditional animosities and learnt to live in a mutually beneficial productive peaceful co-existence.

V

South Asia Wasting its Power

In the global frame, EU has emerged as a multi-faceted instrument of power. While its outer projection may primarily be economic, it plays its role eminently as a collectivity in various international fora. This factor makes it imperative for the other world regions to coalesce together and deepen their regional cooperation. South Asia entered into this phase belatedly. Understandably, changing political regimes in various South Asian member states, bear responsibility not only for regional security and political stability, but also socio-economic development in each country so that this region, which constitutes nearly one-fifth of the global populace, plays its role meaningfully in shaping up the post-cold war international system as one of the regional building blocs.

This may turn out to a wishful thinking only if the political imperatives and global exigencies are not grasped well in time by those at the helm of affairs in the member states of the region. Report

on “Human Development in South Asia 1999 – The Crisis of Governance” laments over the fact that South Asia is one of the most militarised regions in the world and it is also one of the poorest. It further adds that “over a ten-year period, a projected, \$15 billion may be spent by the two adversaries on the production and maintenance of these instruments of war. This should be enough to educate, properly nourish, and provide health care to almost 37.5 million neglected children in South Asia. In passing it may have to be mentioned that in this year’s budget, India has increased its allocation to defence by 28 percent. Pakistan has also followed suit in actual terms. With the result there is not only the added mistrust between the two adversarial neighbours, but also the basic needs of the teeming millions would remain unattended.

How is it so and why does it happen begs question. Unfortunately, recent occurrences in India and Pakistan emit negative signals. The foregoing report further states that “never before have two hostile nuclear powers with per capita income less than \$500 a year shared contiguous border”. But then they are twins and in their inter se relationship, at the sub-conscious level, they suffer from insecurity complex. It is this factor alone, to a very large extent that has notably contributed once again to the ascendance of the military factor in Pakistan. Does it not then mean that this insecurity complex, in-built into the smaller state status in the region, needs to be mitigated so as to create an environment conducive for regional peace and security leading to the firming up of the regional institutionalised edifice. But this would be possible only when democratic pluralistic norm prevails in major South Asian countries. This is earlier said than done. The above-cited Report states candidly that “the general failure of South Asian states to deliver good political governance has cost them their legitimacy in the eyes of ordinary citizens. This has spilled over into disenchantment with democracy itself.”

SAARC needs firming up

In other words, there is the large question as to how people’s confidence could be restored and also sustained in the functioning of democratic institutions in this region. Much depends upon the role of the political class in each of the South Asian states in how they address the socio-economic facets of governance within their areas of competence. Yet, there is another question in regard to regional cooperation in South Asia, and this has to be answered by those in power has to whether India, under its present political dispensation, has, somehow unwittingly set into recess all the prerequisites to the firming up of the regional sub-system.

Before the present political regime took over in India, more than two years ago, noteworthy steps had since been taken towards upgrading SAPTA into SAFTA, and there was also a consideration being given towards transforming SAARC into South Asian Community. Debate was also on among the leading Indian and other South Asian politicologues on how South Asian common security along the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) lines could be institutionalised and also to impart political salience to the SAARC institutional fabric, by setting up SAARC Commission that could possibly be led by a leading South Asian political luminary as has been the case with the European Community, since its inception. In one of the seminars held in early 1998, an eminent political personage from Pakistan had stated that Mahbub Ul Haq at one stage had suggested that I.K. Gujral, India’s former Prime Minister, was best suited for such a high position in SAARC. Moin ul Qureshi from Pakistan and Rehman Sobhan from Bangladesh were other names, best suited for this purpose.

VII

Pakistan's chronic insecurity complex and the Kashmir issue

Understandably, the democratic mode of governance in South Asia has not been easy, and has been fraught with manifold constraints. Yet, for the success of the South Asian regional enterprise, India, as the largest member-state, has to adhere continuously and be seen practising pluralistic tenet as it inheres its statutory fabric.

Any deviation from it is bound to arouse small power fear within the region, with adverse implications for the South Asian enterprise. And in fact, this is what has happened. The National Democratic Alliance, presently in power in India, is formally committed to democratic pluralism, but then the leading political force within it, with its well pronounced "hidden agenda", seems to be weak on it. This explains in a way how the former political regime led by Nawaz Sharif that had come to power on "peace with India" plank, sought to introduce the Quranic Shariat as the supreme law of the land. However, since October 1999, General Pervez Musharraf, the principal architect of the Kargil episode, succeeded in toppling the democratically elected Nawaz Sharif government in Pakistan. He has no soft corner for regionalism in South Asia.

One wonders now with the benefit of hindsight if India had extended some two years earlier, noteworthy economic assistance under the auspices of SAARC to Pakistan to enable it to overcome its economic turmoil, perhaps the present tragic developments in that country with far reaching consequences for the region could have been averted. Nawaz Sharif's "peace with India" plank, so it seems was not acceptable to General Pervez Musharraf. Therefore, he masterminded the Kargil aggression. And for its eventual failure, he blamed it on Nawaz Sharif, pushed him out of power and took over as the Chief Executive of Pakistan. He bears no democratic legitimacy to rule over Pakistan. May be, in somewhat far-fetched way, his coup bears similarity with General Franco's in Spain in 1936. Whatever the charges of corruption or economic mismanagement against the Nawaz Sharif government, whether genuine or otherwise, could have been investigated under the rule of the law, as provided for in the Pakistan's legal texts, and certainly no individual in any capacity has the right to usurp power, and then impose his diktat through the anti terrorist courts, whatever their institutional shape or legal form.

International community, not merely the EU and US, but also other democratic nations in other regions of the world have decried directly or indirectly the military take-over in Pakistan. Indeed, 14 Supreme/High Court judges in Pakistan refused to take oath under the Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) proclaimed by the new military regime in that country. Efficient administration and economic management, howsoever important they may be, in any mode of governance, must not compromise on people's democratic right to self-governance.

In the not too distant past, military dictatorships and or other autocratic regimes in Europe or elsewhere, proved in course of time to be obnoxious notwithstanding their flashy projections in the early phase of their take-over, which could delude even eminent personages like Rabindra Nath Tagore in the later 1920s. In any case, they were no better than monarchical despots. They used oppressive methods to suppress dissent, and obstructed democratic process of change. Corrupt

practices and economic mismanagement have unfortunately become in the present times a global phenomenon and they have to be addressed through democratic procedures. In the case of the EU itself, early 1999 the entire European Commission led by Jacques Santer had to go, and a new Commission, set in place through democratic means.

General Musharraf's take over in Pakistan demonstrates in no small measure his pretension that he is above law, and bears no accountability for his political misdemeanour. Unfortunately, within Pakistan, no one can question effectively the military supremo, somewhat in the same way, as it is well known, in the Soviet Union, nobody dared to raise issues with Stalin, Khrushchev and subsequently Brezhnev. As such General Musharraf's regime in itself is not without a security threat in South Asia. His military mind bears no political articulation. His tactics are intimidatory. As he says, Kashmir question could be a flash point for nuclear collision in South Asia. Clearly, no democratic regime could have negotiations with him on any issue, much less the Kashmir question, which is a complex issue, and could perhaps find a mutually agreeable answer through regional cooperation, particularly in the security domain. In any case, so does it seem that President Bill Clinton's visit to South Asia and the follow-up diplomatic interaction with the government authorities in the adversarial countries in this region seem to have a sobering effect.

This could in a way be seen in Hizbul Mujahideen's initiative at its offer of three-month cease-fire, which was welcomed by India as well as by the APHC (Hurriyat). But unfortunately, this was later withdrawn in a huff by the HM itself, for India did not agree to the inclusion of Pakistan in the proposed unconditional negotiations on Kashmir. India rightly insisted that Pakistan must end all cross-border terrorism before any meaningful dialogue with it could begin. This did not seem to be acceptable, neither to Pakistan nor to the HM. Other terrorist organisations like Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Harkat-ul-Ansar and a few others which have significant foreign input had continued their carnage, thereby vitiating the environment for any meaningful dialogue between the two adversarial neighbours on how to arrive at some mutually agreeable solution to this complex issue.

VIII

Conclusion

The foregoing explanation given in regard to the complexities involved in South Asian Security deserve EU's attention. This may perhaps in a small way help EU to understand better India's position in regard to the NPT and CTBT. Perhaps, EU may have to co-ordinate its own position with the US, as the American Senate has rejected the CTBT. With this rejection in the US itself, India's task at evolving consensus on the modalities for according approval to it seems to have become further confounded.

While EU and the US insist on including provisions on Human Rights and environment protection in international economic agreements, there is the need for the EU to consider earnestly about democratisation of the global system. Incidentally in the EU Asian strategy, greater focus is on East and South East Asia, with South Asia bearing only peripheral consideration. Of this deficit, evidence is seen in the structural make-up of the ASEM, Asia-Europe dialogue; ASEM-I took place in 1996 in Bangkok, and ASEM-II in 1998 in London. India and other South Asian countries

were conspicuous only by their absence in this dialogue as if they were not Asians. India's absence from ASEM becomes particularly marked, considering that China, Japan, South Korea and many South East Asian nations figured prominently in the Asian team. In the meantime, however, at ASEAN's initiative, India has become a dialogue partner in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The ASEM Vision Group, which met last year, did nothing to rectify the discrepancy. Furthermore, EU may also address itself to the regional asymmetry in the UN security Council, which is not only undemocratic, but is also productive of regional imbalance.

This has to be rectified at least partly through concerted Euro Asian endeavours by facilitating India's admittance into this club. Yet, this may not meet the ends of justice. This supremely important institution, responsible for global peace must appear to be democratic in form as well as in spirit. To attain this objective, one member at least from Africa and Latin America, may also have to be included in it to lend it the luster of a truly representative body at the global level.