Research Paper History

Genesis and Growth of India –Singapore Relations

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KEYWORDS

This paper traces the Genesis and Growth of India –Singapore relations from the Ancient to the Modern period in three stages- Preliminary, Promising and Contemporary. The friendship between India and Singapore has deep roots. India's civilization influence had helped to shape the early history of South East Asia, and the Indians played a major role in the trade, cultural and political development of South East Asia during the days of Sri Vijaya, Majaphahi and Champs Empires. [1]

Modern Singapore was founded as a strategic foothold for the British Raj in India, and to save India's trade with East Asia. Not only were the Indian laws and administrative structures transplanted to Singapore, many Indians also made their homes in Singapore and had helped to build a new nation. Over the years, Singapore has grown into a Cosmopolitan City, and became a global hub inking various regions, including the Americas, Europe, and North East Asia, to South East Asia. The original raison d' ere was to serve as a bridge between South nd East Asia, when Singapore was founded by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819.[2]

Indian laws and administrative structures were transplanted in Singapore. Many Indians made their homes in Singapore and had helped to build nation. Over the years, Singapore has grown into a cosmopolitan city. India's decision to forge an FTA with Thailand and with ASEAN and a comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement with Singapore are the important steps in India's engagement of Southeast Asia. These agreements are strategic as they move India towards becoming once again trading partner of South East Asia.

In the early days of Singapore's independence, she looked to India for inspiration because India was a secular nation governed by the rule of law. Singapore's first generation diplomats used to follow India's lead when the she was looking for the position to take at international meetings. Each nation in South East Asia trusted India's principled stand on many issues.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was the Architect of the Foreign policy of India. He was also one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement. The name of Jawaharlal Nehru holds special significance for the Asians. His "Discovery of India" reveals his mind on establishing a Peaceful atmosphere in Asia. Nehru was a cosmopolitan, a Nationalist and an intellectual giant. He was an inspiration to the generation that had fought to free themselves from colonial rule. Along with Mahatma Gandhji, Jawaharlal Nehru taught Asians to stand up for their rights, and rediscover their heritage, dignity and self-worth.

Jawaharlal Nehru walked the more difficult path of conciliation and peace towards independence, and made difference, unlike many who turned to revolutionary violence. He had had a unique approach to solve the national and international issues. Nehru persevered and triumphed to make it easier for many of the population living in colonies to follow his footsteps, along the path he had created. India's ability to accommodate and assimilate is celebrated in her illustrious history.

The first Prime Minister of India Nehru embodied the essence of that enduring spirit. Although he had received an English education and admired the achievements of Western Civilization, Nehru was an Indian and an Asian at heart. Secure in his own Indian identity and roots, Nehru was able to enjoy the fruits of many cultures and to learn from them. Singapore seeks to do the same-combining the best of Western Culture with our Asian roots and values in many ways. During the cold war period the strategic priorities diverged between the nations. Although both India and Singapore were members of the Non-Aligned Movement, Singapore's analysis of international developments and positions differed. India forged a path of self-reliance and independence in development and foreign policy. Economically, India's leaders built a system of extensive public ownership and central planning. Singapore agility and adaptability were essential traits for survival. She looked to global markets and relied on private enterprise, especially multi-national corporations to drive her economy. Singapore's need to leap-frog the region and her export oriented economy slow moved her close the West and Japan. The relations between India and Singapore are traced from the Genesis, Evolution and Development Phases:

The pendulum had swung back the East. The strategic and economic interests of both India and Singapore have converged again. Singapore and India started moving closer together in the early 1990s, when then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao declared a " Look East" policy and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh , who was then Finance Minister, started the engine to power India's economic liberalization. India took pragmatic steps towards openness and market reform, and integration with the global economy. At the same time, Singapore was trying to grow two external wings through China and India to fly its economy.

When Atal Bihari Vajpayee and his colleagues took over the steering wheel, investors were initially concerned and wondered whether reform was deep-seated enough to survive the change. Prime Minister Vajpayee not only kept to the course but also stepped on the accelerator. He confirmed that there was no other credible option for the country to reclaim its rightful place in the world economic order. When the Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chk Tong visited India in 1994 to conclude an alliance with Atal Bihari Vajpayee to forge a strategic alliance with India based on the complementary of both strengths. The Prime Minister of Singapore was convinced that India would emerge as an economic power, even though prevailing sentiments then were skeptical. The Prime Minister of Singapore wanted to infect Singapore with "India fever". The fever, however, was subsided after a while, but Singapore never lost faith in India.[3]

Investors around the world are excited on India's excellent economic growth since then. Bilateral trade between India and Singapore approached in the present period of study to US dollars 1.5 from US dollars 2 billion in 1994. Singapore's investment in India has grown to US dollars 1.5 billion. There are nearly 1,500 Indian companies operating in Singapore.

Three lakhs Indians visited Singapore in 2009. The Prime Ministers of India and Singapore played a vital part in paving the way for the strong partnership that exists between the two countries.

India is now negotiating Free Trade Agreements with Thailand and ASEAN, a comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement –CECA with Singapore. These FTAs will bring enormous economic benefits to both sides. FTAs are not only the economic but strategic agreements. They are important steps in enhancing India's engagement with South East Asia, and strategically linking South Asia with South East Asia. Enhancing connectivity will bring the peoples of both regions closer and facilitate the spread of ideas, technology, and culture.

In time, these FTAs will form the stepping stones for an Asian economic community, which will bring together South Asia politically to see it come to fruition. Such a community will result in a strong and prosperous Asia, with India as one of the key pillars. The stars are falling into an alignment and Singapore has the chance to turn this into Asia's Century. Singapore decided not to miss the chance that was established by India. She also decided to play a crucial part to facilitate India's engagement with ASEAN and East Asia. Singapore is setting up a South Asia Institute within the National University of Singapore. Experts and researchers from India are welcomed to join the Institute and help build a bridge of understanding between Asian regions. The aim of Singapore is to strengthen the economic, Governmental, academic and cultural connections between the two countries.

Singapore's cooperation in the various sectors takes place against a backdrop of stronger political relations between Singapore and India. Singapore sees an important role for India to play to contribute to peace and stability in the world. India is a country of considerable strategic weight, geographically contiguous to South China Sea. Hence, Singapore supported India's interest in engaging ASEAN. It was Singapore's efforts led to India being designated a Full Dialogue partner of ASEAN and an annual ASEAN – India summit meeting, as well as India's membership in the ARF. [4]

Singapore achieved a milestone in India –ASEAN relations at the ninth ASEAN Summit in Bali, where Prime Minister Vajpayee signed three agreements that will further enhance India's ties with ASEAN. Of special importance is the ASEAN –India Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation with ASEAN which will pave the way for negotiations on the ASEAN –India FTA. A substantive FTA will lead to closer trade integration and benefit both sides. Trade between India and ASEAN is currently at US 10 billion dollars, and an FTA could treble this. An AESAN-India FTA will anchor the relationship and enhance the already strong economic connections between India and the ASEAN. In Bali, India had also acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, along with China. This is an excellent development that will be helpful for promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the region.[5]

Coming back to the bilateral relationship on Singapore –India relations in the defense sector, beyond enhancing the already good relationship between India and Singapore , they are developing bilateral defense relations will also have the important effect of enhancing understanding and friendship between the two defense establishments and the two armed forces. Diplomacy is a key pillar of Singapore's defense policy. Singapore and India can also increase the professional interactions so that the two militaries can usefully learn from each other. After signing a Defense Cooperation Agreement by Defense Minister Fernandes on Second March 2010 both countries hoped to see more cooperation in areas such as personnel exchanges and visits, the attendance of each other's courses and intelligence exchanges. Singapore intended to set up a Defense Policy Dialogue between the two defense ministries. Signing the Defense Cooperation Agreement will bring the bilateral relations to a higher plane, and open up opportunities for further interactions. The two armed forces have much to learn from each other. And at a time when the security challenges facing the two countries all have come more complex and they have face similar threats, cooperation in the defense sector between Singapore and India can be mutually beneficial. [6]

Looking back less than a decade – the world was quite different then. The future looked bright. The Cold War was over and there was the promise of a more stable, maybe also more gentle, new world order. South East Asia had prospered over two decades of impressive economic growth, and looked poised for more growth. Economic development had bolstered political stability, and the regional security situation was largely calm and stable. It was the first time in decades that South East Asia was free from war and conflict. Pundits were predicting that the future would be Asia's. The twenty first century was to be the Pacific Century. But South East Asia has had a hard time of it in the five years between 2005 and 2010. First, the region was battered by the 1997 financial crisis. The impact was as swift as it was dramatic. Severe economic crisis quickly led to political unrest and even political upheaval in some places. The overthrow of President Suharto in Indonesia was one such development that had far-reaching consequences-not just for his own country but also for the rest of the region. The region took on a different cast- where there used to be bright promise, the mood became one of uncertainty and some gloom.

It seemed just that Singapore and India were emerging from the economic slump and political turbulence came yet another disruptive event which threw the region out of kilter-the catastrophic attacks of September 11. That happened half the world away, but the fallout on South East Asia was immediate and painful, both in its political and socio-economic effects. And less than two years after that, Asia was once again knocked back by yet another blot out of the blue-SARS. A natural disaster, with immediate painful economic impact amplified by the concurrent war in Iraq. And the consequence of that too is still being played out. Against this backdrop, India and Singapore have a global security environment today that is dominated by two key features. The first is the weight of the United States in world affairs. The second is the ever-present threat of catastrophic terrorism. They loom large in the impact they have on the security situation in South East Asia.[7]

The primacy of the United States in the world affairs is not remarkable in that the United States has been the sole super power since the end of the Cold War. What is remarkable is how the United States is now able to act, when it chooses to, even when its traditional allies choose not to go along. This spring's in part from a deep sense of vulnerability. The September Eleventh –attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon-transformed the American psyche. These were direct attack, invulnerable. The Administration responded with a muscular external policy, the paramount interest being the preservation of the security of the American homeland and Americans in a very direct and focused way. That has shaped the United States conducts its foreign policy today and the rest of the world has to make their adjustments to that.[8]

Terrorism too, is not a new phenomenon. What changed was the harbinger of a form of terrorism that is strategic in intent, devastating in impact and global in reach. The terrorists aim to make grand political statements with their destructive acts and to inspire others to follow in their footsteps.[9] For them it is an ideological struggle. They have a fundamentally different view of how the world should look, how human society should be organized. They intend to use every means of terror and violence in their quest to prevail. Any country, group of individual which stands in their way, or which is an aberration in their worldwide, is a potential target for attack. The assertive might of the United States and global terrorism are the two trends that are at once separate, but also intertwined and mutually reinforcing. They are each other's key antagonist. But they also play off elements and trends. Against this larger backdrop, the countries in South East Asia have to grapple

with a myriad of political and economic issues- some of their own making, some quite beyond their control. The security challenges arising out of all this are complex.[10]

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