

Shaping the Concept of Region with Ideas: New Ideational Paradigm for Regional Integration in South Asia

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The term “region” is highly challenged and an evolving concept in International Relations. More significantly the term “region” has been subject to a wider array of conceptual shifts over time. Therefore, the contemporary understanding of region requires more pluralistic and fluid approach since the conventional understanding of region is challenged by many conceptual formations and reformations in the present day. Owing to this fact that, the term ‘region’ can be conceptually defined in much broader manner going beyond the conventional model of territorially fixed understanding. Moreover, today, regions are constructed by imaginative cultural and social forces rather than physical boundaries. Therefore conventional understanding of region as a “geographical unit” demarcated by physical boundaries has become more obsolete.

Hence the contemporary understanding of region distinctly look for answers for several fundamental questions and perhaps more: Are regions confined to only geographical spaces? What are the new material and ideational dimensions leading to formation of regions? What is the significance of roles played by norms and shared ideas? Answering these questions by adopting an archival based methodology, this study argues that the idea of region has been extensively deviated from its conventional model of geographical understanding and mostly it has lost its spatial significance.

In this context, this study intends to examine how this conceptual shift can be applied in the scope of South Asia. Further this study explores how ideational factors such as different identities, people to people contact and multiple cultural positions of the people pertinent to the regional integration process in South Asia operate. Similarly this study draws many recommendations to SAARC organization in order to accelerate its regional integration process appealing to these new conceptual lenses. More importantly, the study provides a bottom-up approach to SAARC organization through a set of theoretical insights gained from the Positioning Theory. Finally the paper concludes that ideational factors are more significant to the

process of regional integration in South Asia in order to make it more relevant and beneficial to the people in the region.

Key words: *Ideational Factors; Positioning Theory; Region; Regional Integration.*

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