PREFACE

The process of regional cooperation has assumed a new significance in today’s interdependent world. The latest trend in the world is to link nations into regions and the regions with the rest of the world. This could be seen in the establishment of regional blocs and initiation of preferential trade policies. Be it the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), European Union (EU), North America Free Trade Area (NAFTA) or South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), no country can afford limiting its economic activities. The emergence of regional blocs and efforts being made to make them successful has become the order of the day. Moreover, states today face many problems such as transnational organized crime, including terrorism and drug trafficking, environmental pollution, poverty, socio-economic deprivation that needs coordinated multinational effort if they have to be overcome. A regional approach will not only promote beneficial cooperation in diverse fields of activity but provide an institutional framework for peaceful resolution of conflicts among member states.

The present work, therefore, describes and examines issues in regional economic cooperation and their inter-relationship both in theory and practice, through a comparative study of ASEAN and SAARC regional organisations. Taking a comprehensive view of regional economic cooperation, it analyses and evaluates how ASEAN and SAARC have contributed to regional economic development in Southeast and South Asia respectively. Intra-regional relationship among the member countries has
been examined with the broader parameters of the changing international scenario.

The study is primarily based on, among others, the primary documents pertaining to the above-mentioned regional economic blocs. The approach to this study is qualitative, historical, analytical and speculative. The whole work is divided into five main chapters.

The plan of the work is as under: In Chapter One, an exhaustive introduction of region, regionalism and different facets of regional economic cooperation have been analysed empirically and conceptually. It identifies that regional cooperation is a multilateral efforts acknowledging the interdependence of members and this effort succeeds when member countries develop a common sense of well being both at the political and social level.

Chapter Two and Three, delves into the details of the Southeast Asia and South Asia as a region and regional entity, and all the concerned countries are introduced in geographical, historical, political, economic and demographic respects. Moreover, from a strictly chronological point of view, the evolution of the ASEAN and SAARC has been discussed. It, then, focuses on the following aspects of ASEAN and SAARC as regional bodies: Regional policies adopted by the two organisations to promote regional economic cooperation; perceptions of individual member states towards regional organization; their approach to economic and other regional problems; and, influence of extra regional factors on regional economic development and cooperation.
Chapter Four is an interpolative and comparative study of the ASEAN and the SAARC. It explains the domestic, political and economic dynamics of the two regions. The differences and commonalities of the two organisations have been dealt with at length. Special attention has been given on the strategies, factors and variables, which make the ASEAN being recognized as an economic giant. It further examines the current level of economic interaction among the South Asian countries, constraints facing the region in economic cooperation and highlights the potential for economic interdependence in the region.

In the concluding chapter, a modest attempt has been made to suggest answers to the problems/questions raised above. Underlining the importance of the state and other entities in the growth of regional cooperation, it suggests some areas, where policy cooperation among the South Asian governments is possible, in order to promote relatively more pragmatic regional economic interdependence.

At the end of the work, some important documents have been added which have been crucial in the formation and working of the ASEAN and the SAARC as a regional organisations.