Much interest has been evinced on export-import research in India in recent years. A spate of studies have recently been undertaken by many individuals and quite a good number of institutions on various aspects of India's trade relations with a wide variety of countries. The present study was undertaken as a 'stock-taking' to gain some perspectives on what has so far been accomplished and what needs to be done with respect to South East Asia. In the beginning, I was somewhat obsessed with the difficulties which I had to encounter for the purpose. Firstly, there has been no precise or commonly accepted geographical boundary of South East Asia. Both geographers and historians have, more or less, a loose or vague idea of South East Asia in the Asian map. This difficulty has been overcome by adopting, for all practical purposes, a classification of South East Asia that includes Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, South Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines.
Secondly, the region had been neither politically nor economically compact. The political experience of the region has been very much varied over the years. Burma, Malaysia and Singapore were under British control and the Indo-Chinese region was under the French rule. While Indonesia was long under Dutch control, the Philippines was under the Americans. Because of their colonial position, the economic and commercial life of these countries were closely co-ordinated with those of the ruling countries.

The study of India's trade with the countries of this region would be most meaningful when the trade relation is examined as between sovereign states. However, countries in this region became independent in different years. The Union of Burma came into formal existence on January 4, 1948 while Singapore became independent as late as August 9, 1965. In Thailand, there was no foreign rule. Indonesia became a free country on December 27, 1949 and the Philippines came into existence as an independent state on July 4, 1946. Malaysia got freedom on September 16, 1963.
Under these circumstances, the problem of dating the study is somewhat complicated. The presentation of statistical data since 1947 is perhaps inconceivable because the whole of Indo-China, by that time, was a unified region under the French administration. In January, 1955, Cambodia (now, the Khmer Republic) became financially and economically independent of France and the other two former Associate States, Vietnam and Laos. The Geneva conference of July, 1954, which led virtually to the withdrawal of foreign forces, may be said to mark the beginning of political independence. For Vietnam as a whole, the Treaties of Independence and Association were signed by the representatives of the French and the Vietnamese Governments on June 4, 1954 although supreme authority in the military field remained with the French until the departure of the last French Commander-chief in April, 1956. Despite the final declaration of the Geneva Conference on July 21, 1954 that elections should take place in combined Vietnam in July, 1956, Vietnam still remains, in effect, divided.

The bifurcation of Vietnam into North and South and the non-representation of North Vietnam in the ECAFE create problems of statistical significance.
While the UNO have not collected detailed statistics on North Vietnam, India has also not systematically maintained trade figures in relation to North Vietnam. The Annual Statement of the Foreign Sea & Airborne Trade of India for the five fiscal years ending 31st March, 1958 (Vols 1 & 2) gives trade data for the period, 1947-48 to 1951-52. However, the classification of South East Asian countries, as adopted here, ran as follows: Burma, Singapore, Malay Federation, Sumatra, Java & Madura, British Borneo, Thailand, French Indo-China and the Philippines. Next in the series, the Annual Statement of the Foreign Trade of India for the four fiscal years ending March, 1956 and the nine months, April to December, 1956 (Vols 1 & 2) left the classification unchanged, while the loose units of Indonesia except British Borneo disappeared therefrom. The relevant data have not, on the other hand, been compiled for the three different countries, namely, S. Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia which were parts of the French Indo-China well until the end of 1956.

Hence, for the sake of maintaining strict and meaningful comparability, data have been presented in the present work since 1957 in most cases. While the DQCI & S (Director-General of Commercial Intelligence & Statistics), Calcutta, is the primary source of India's foreign trade data, data compiled by the ECAFE (Economic Commission for Asia and
the Par East), Bangkok, as well as by the E.I.U (Economist Intelligence Unit), London, have been taken into account. In editing relevant data, utmost care has been taken to maintain strict accuracy and adequacy.

The present work has been divided into nine chapters. Chapter I sketches South East Asia's political and economic background while analysing the process of industrialisation in South East Asia as well as the changing patterns in India's foreign trade. It has been hinted in the same chapter that India's trade with the region would be minimal because of the latter's age-long political and commercial ties with the developed countries. Chapter II has depicted South East Asian economies as models of export economies whose export trade is dominated by a few primary items only. It has been shown that imports are restricted mainly to industrial items and the external trade of these South East Asian countries is, to a large extent, monopolised by the industrialised countries.

Chapter III has briefly examined India's trade with individual countries of South East Asia; Chapter IV reviews India's exports, both traditional and non-traditional, to South East Asia. While the fourth chapter pointed to the decline of traditional exports as against the rise of non-traditional items, there has been a critical review of
India's imports from South East Asia in Chapter V.

In chapter VI, joint ventures with South East Asian countries have been suggested as a possible means for trade expansion whereas the importance of bilateral agreements on trade and payments has been emphasised in Chapter VII. Chapter VIII has slightly touched on the difficult subject of forming a common market within the ECAFE zone, as a possible strategy for expanding India's trade with the South East Asian countries while Chapter IX endorses the general conclusions of the study.

One word of apology. Although Cambodia has been renamed as the Khmer Republic, I have retained its earlier name 'Cambodia' all throughout the thesis. Likewise, I have retained the old name 'Ceylon' (despite its new name Sri Lanka) for whatever references to the country.

In course of writing this thesis, I availed myself of the services of various libraries and research institutes in India. Special mention may be made of the Commercial Library of the DGCI & S as well as of the National Library in Calcutta. The libraries of the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, the National Council of Applied Economic Research and the Delhi School Economics and Sociology were extremely helpful. I feel thankful to the management of all these libraries of national importance.
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