A Ph.D. Synopsis

On

ASEAN- India Free Trade Agreement: Trade Indicators and Analysis of Trade Creation and Trade Diversion

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1. Introduction

From the past three decades, India has witnessed major drifts in its trade policy stance, shifting from a protectionist and a highly regulated economy to a more liberal one. The import substituting regime provided undesirable protection to the domestic industry with effective sealing out of foreign competition. Consequently, the share of Indian economy in world trade dropped from 2.53 per cent in 1947 to a mere 0.4 per cent in 1980 (GOI, TPR 1998)¹. A switch in the policy towards liberalization was initiated in the mid-1980s, which gave a required spurt to its exports. This, however, could not be sustained and Indian economy faced severe balance of payment crisis in 1991, with export growth figures quickly plummeting to mere 4 per cent from around 17 per cent registered in preceding years. The economic shock provided a much-needed impetus towards a series of major structural and macroeconomic reforms aimed primarily at easing of restrictions on exports and imports in a phased manner. With this, the stalled liberalization efforts gathered momentum, shaping into a more comprehensive and systematic opening up of the economy in 1991 and after. The reforms aimed at creating conducive environment for achieving rapid increase in exports with the ultimate goal of making trade an engine for achieving higher economic growth (GOI Annual Report, 2000). This economic impulse got reflected in India's newly envisioned 'Look East' policy which was implemented in 1991. The end of Cold War, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, fueled India's quest for re-establishing its strained relations with the Eastern neighbors (Chatterjee, 2007). The Indian foreign trade policy rapidly sorted to improve interaction with the increasingly globalizing and dynamic Asia. Essential philosophy behind this policy was to increase India's engagement with its South East and East Asian neighbors by forging closer and deeper economic integration (Chatterjee, 2007; Singh, 2010; Haokip, 2014). Interestingly, these domestic advances were a part of broader developments that were shaping the international scheme of things, further directing India's trade policy framework in tandem with the world order.

With a shift in the American strategy abandoning support for multilateralism, successful integration of Europe and its expansion, change in the economic policy of developing countries, including India, away from import substitution and continued stalemate of talks at multilateral level were some of the key forces encouraging regions of the world, other than Asia, to opt for

¹ Share of India's merchandise exports and imports in world merchandise exports and imports, in 2017, was 1.68 per cent and 2.48 per cent, respectively compared to 12.77 per cent and 10.22 per cent, respectively for China (Trade Profile, WTO, 2018).

regionalism as the new measure to foster liberalization process (Frankel et al., 1997; Jayasinghe and Sarker, 2008; Findlay and Urata, 2009; Petri and Plummer, 2016). More recently, the development of complex global value chain (GVC)² systems, made possible by technology, improved logistics, better information system, stimulated demand for further lower barriers to trade and shaped the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) landscape we face today (Petri et al., 2015). The compounding numbers of Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) notified to WTO provide formal evidence in support of their growing significance. Over a span of 40 years, from 1948-1994, GATT received notifications for 124 RTAs in all (Findlay and Urata, 2009), while since the commencement of WTO in 1995 there have been over 400 additional notifications (including goods and services) of RTAs till date with 459 RTAs in force³, of which 253 were FTAs. Their rising importance can be re-emphasized by the fact that since June 2016, all WTO members have notified participation in at least one RTA in force and continue to involve in new RTA negotiations. Besides increasing in numbers, they have evolved to be deeper and more complex in nature. The inclusion of new policy areas such as services trade, foreign investment, intellectual property, technical barriers to trade, dispute settlement and regulatory regimes, reflect more ambitious approach of these agreements and increasing globalization of the world economy (Dee and Gali, 2005). Although a latecomer, economically important Asia has emerged at the forefront of the global FTA activity. Asia's progressive regionalization alongside rapid liberalization, outward oriented development strategies, infrastructure investment and upgrading human capital has transformed the region from underdeveloped backwaters into a global factory (Kawai and Wignaraja, 2011).

The emerging world economic structure and India's own march towards liberalization played a key role in shaping India's policy stance in favor of regionalism (GOI, 2017)⁴. Initially, India adopted a very cautious and guarded approach to regionalism⁵ and engaged in only few

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² GVCs refer to the international fragmentation of production i.e. where different stages of production and assembly are located in multiple countries, with each step-in process adding value to the final product (WTO, OECD). Accessed from: http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/global-value-chains

³ WTO statistics on RTAs are based on notification requirements rather than on physical number of RTAs. Thus, for an RTA that includes both goods and services, WTO counts two notifications (one for goods and the other services), even though it is physically one RTA.

⁴ http://mea.gov.in/aseanindia/20-years.htm. Accessed as on 20th January 2018

⁵ Its stand on regional groupings was that they must fully conform with and support the rules of the multilateral system (WTO, TPR 1998).

bilateral/regional arrangements mainly through Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) (GOI, Economic Survey 2005-06, 06-07). India's initial regional trade engagements were the Bangkok Agreement (1975), the Global System of Trade Preferences (GSTP, 1988), and the SAARC PTA (SAPTA, 1993). India also received preferential treatment under Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) schemes⁶. However, keeping pace with the developments all around, the earlier dormant India rigorously started pursuing its trade integration efforts as a means to foster liberalization, within the framework of multilateral rules, besides its ongoing autonomous trade reforms (GOI, TPR 2011)⁷.

Real fillip to India's RTA initiatives began in 2000s as India negotiated bilateral and regional trade agreements with several countries and groups. As on August 2018, the negotiations in various kinds of agreements⁸ are underway with 20 countries and groups together while agreements with 18 countries have already been concluded (MOC)⁹. Its major initiatives with groups include SAFTA, APTA, GSTP, BIMSTEC, AFTA, EU, MERCOSUR¹⁰ along with bilateral ties with many countries. However, of the concluded RTAs, ASEAN is the strongest contender. Ten dynamic markets of Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, form the Association of Southeast Asian nations (ASEAN). The region merits attention for a plenty of economic and strategic reasons: (i) ASEAN is the largest and the first regional trading block with which India had signed an FTA (Singh, 2010, Joseph and George, 2014) providing India with the opportunity to access wider markets (ii) The centrality of ASEAN in the Asian region has attracted the attention of our policy makers to shift their focus towards this vibrant region (iii) Stalled growth prospects with South Asian neighbors and rising threat from China provided impetus to pursue further engagements with the South-East

⁶Schemes of Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, the European Union, Hungary, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Belarus, Republic of Poland, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Switzerland, and the United States

⁷ Another push towards regionalism, on the one hand was the uncertainty of arriving at any consensus on multilateral liberalization, and on the other was the recognition that RTAs would continue to feature prominently in world trade for a long time.

⁸ These include besides FTAs, Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreements (CECA), Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs), Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

⁹ http://commerce.gov.in/InnerContent.aspx?Type=InternationalTrademenu&Id=32. Accessed from Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOC) as on August 2018.

Asian nations (iv) India's relationship with ASEAN is the foundation of the dynamic "Act East" policy, which was officially enunciated in 2014 and is a key pillar of India's foreign policy.

ASEAN India relations stepped up from sectoral dialogue partnership in 1992 to a full dialogue partnership in December 1995, elevating further to Summit level partnership in 2002 and naturally progressing into Strategic partnership in 2012. In 2003, at the second ASEAN India Summit, the ASEAN-India Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation was signed which laid sound basis for the both the parties to enter into a free trade agreement (FTA)¹¹. With this in effect, the consistent efforts toward forming an FTA with the region, however, only materialized in 2009, after six years of rigorous negotiations, and got implemented on January 1, 2010. It would be interesting to note that India and ASEAN jointly create a market of approximately 1.85 billion people with GDP of US \$ 4.5 trillion in 2017. ASEAN is India's fourth largest trading partner. India's trade with ASEAN has increased to US\$ 70 billion in 2016-17 from US\$ 65 billion in 2015-16. India's export to ASEAN has increased to US\$ 30 billion in 2016-17 from US\$ 25 billion in 2015-16 (GOI MEA, 2018)¹². Coupled with these figures, the fact that it is India's first FTA with regional block, ASEAN-India relations assume importance.

Post the establishment of an FTA, it is important to take stock of its trade and welfare effects. The economic assessment that follows the implementation of an FTA is a major part of its monitoring process (Cheong, 2010). No definite consensus on the effect of FTA has made its impact assessment, majorly, an empirical issue. There are various aspects to analyzing the trade effects of an FTA, for instance, its utilization rate, coverage rate and so on, however, the Vinerarian concepts of Trade Creation (TC) and Trade Diversion (TD) remain at the heart of any such analysis. The extent of TC or TD that a free trade block leads to, is indicative of the static welfare effects of actual patterns of regionalization (Haveman and Hummels 1998). It is important to measure these effects for effective policy making primarily because TD poses a risk and renders the agreement economically inefficient (Robertson and Estevadeordal 2009). Following suite, this study also focuses on the estimation of these core aspects while evaluating the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement.

¹¹ http://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/2015/November/asean-india/Overview%20 ASEAN-India%20 Dialogue%20Relations%20-%20November%202015.pdf.

http://mea.gov.in/aseanindia/20-years.htm. Assessed from Ministry of Commerce and Industry as on August, 2018.

2. Statement of Problem

The signing of AIFTA raised sharp apprehensions regarding adverse effects that the agreement is expected to have on domestic producers and the trading community, among the academia and policy makers. Profound concerns were raised highlighting the serious worries on the impact on Indian economy with cheaper imports flooding the Indian markets and making producers, especially farmers, vulnerable as around 89 per cent of trade between two dynamic regions was to be liberalized (Pal and Dasgupta 2008, 2009; Raju 2010; Harilal, 2010; Nagoor and Kumar, 2010; Francis, 2011; Kallumal and Ratna, 2013; Joseph and George, 2014). The FTA proposed to gradually eliminate/ reduce tariffs on around 4000 tariff lines over a staggered period covering agriculture, marine and manufactured products, with a negative list excluded from any kind of reduction. By 2017, tariffs on all the products under Normal Track 1 and 2 have been removed. The low tariffs in most of the ASEAN nations compared to India's, raised skepticism of the benefits that would accrue to India with the implementation of the FTA.

Trade trends on the other hand, reveal a scenario contrasting to the raised concerns. The ASEAN-India trade has been observed to grow at a much slower rate in the post-FTA period in comparison to the pre-FTA statistics. Total trade grew at a rate of around 23 per cent, on an average, for the period 2000-09, in contrast to a growth rate of mere 9 per cent experienced in the post-FTA era (2010-17). Given these diverging views, the present study attempts at empirically analyzing the effect on trade flows in the light of prior evidence provided by various studies. Further, the asymmetric impacts on various industries motivates the analysis to be carried out separately for selected industries. It would be pertinent to mention here that studies dealing with assessment of AIFTA have largely provided *ex-ante* evidences with the focus of most being on specific agricultural sectors. The studies providing *ex-post* evidence have been very few with no definite consensus on the impact that the agreement has had on Indian industries. Evidently, there appears to be a dearth of studies addressing the Trade Creation and Trade Diversion issues and hence the gains and losses accrued to various economic sectors of the country.

In the light of inconclusive evidence, it becomes imperative to analyze the economic and welfare impacts that this agreement would have on the Indian trade flows. The present study attempts to fill the void and provides empirical evidence following the latest advancements in the methods in analyzing trade policy empirically using the gravity model of international trade. Our assessments

can have far reaching implications in defining the future policy discourse as it is extremely important to identify sectors which are positively impacted and are capable of balancing out the negatively impacted ones. Policies need to be formulated to promote sectors capable of huge gains and minimize losses from adversely impacted sectors. The study, thus, intends to enhance our understanding of the ongoing FTA activity and in the process provide lessons for India's future endeavors.

3. Objectives of the Study

The central question that the study tries to address is have the changes in trade flows been biased towards the trade within India and members of ASEAN and whether this has taken place at the cost of non-members. In pursuit of answering the above-mentioned concern, the study lays out the specific objectives to be studied in the context of the AIFTA. The objectives laid out are as follow:

- 1) To analyze the composition, direction, pattern and flow of trade between India and ASEAN before and after signing of FTA;
- 2) To identify competitive and complementary product categories at HS 2- digit and HS 4- digit/to explore areas of trade complementarities and competition between trade structures of India and ASEAN;
- 3) To assess the trade creation and the trade diversion effects at aggregate and disaggregated levels (HS 2-Digit and HS 4-Digit), using gravity model.

4. Summary of findings

The thesis is structured in seven chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the topic in context of relevant policy framework, describes the tariff reduction commitments offered by India to imports from ASEAN members, provides statement of problem and highlights the need to carry out the study, defines objectives relevant to the central theme, briefs on data sources and methodology along with listing of the major limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 presents an extensive review of literature which specifically deals with evaluating the trade creation and trade diversion effects of various RTAs involving different regions of the world and further goes on to survey works relevant to ASEAN- India FTA, identifying gaps in the current

available literature. To place recent enquiry in a broader canvas, the study discusses the historical origins of regionalism and in process brings out the various debates that have occupied center stage among policymakers on the effects of RTA proliferation.

Chapter 3 lays out the methodology adopted to attain the afore mentioned objectives. A simple assessment of existing state of trade flows using statistical tools like averages is carried out further elaborating upon the indices specific to regional trade. It also spells the method adopted to identify sectors/ industries of relevance at 2-digit and 4-digit. Finally, the chapter elaborates upon the gravity model utilized in the study to isolate the trade creating and trade diverting effects emanating from the FTA. It also presents a brief history of theoretical and methodological developments of the gravity model for application in international trade and specifies various models put to test at the aggregate level.

Chapter 4 aims to identify extent of intra-regional trade between India and ASEAN, structure and composition by examining the pattern of India's merchandise trade with ASEAN for the period 2000-2017 and with reference to pre and post AIFTA implementation trends.

Chapter 5 monitors the progress on regional cooperation using various indices specific to regional trade. The indices analysed at the aggregate level are (i) Trade Intensity Index (ii) Trade Complementarity Index, while sectoral level indices include (i) Index of Revealed Comparative Advantage (ii) Export Specialization and (iii) Regional Orientation Index. The indices have been discussed from India's perspective with a focus on exports for the major commodities selected previously. Trade intensities and complementarities at aggregate level portray a favorable picture of ASEAN India trade and exhibit scope for trade expansion. Sectoral indices estimated with respect to the selected AEAN economies show that not all sectors/ industries with specialization advantages to India reveal an orientation towards the respective countries or vice versa. This helped identify sectors/ industries with future trade expansion with each ASEAN member. The industries displaying both advantages and orientation or only export specialization towards ASEAN, not already in the top exported commodities towards the same, were identified as those holding potential for trade enlargement.

Chapter 6 establishes the effectiveness of AIFTA at aggregate and disaggregated levels. Major findings reveal that India's trade flows are largely explained by the traditional gravity variables, with the incomes of trading partners positively and significantly influencing India's trade and increase in distance between the two reducing trade significantly. This was validated by positive impact of adjacent borders on India's trade, at aggregate level. However, mixed results were reported at deeper levels of aggregation. Of the variables proxying for cultural similarities, common colonial ties positively impacted India's trade while the effect of common official language was negative. The opposite was true for most of the sectors at 2-digit and 4-digit. Regarding policy variables, the study found that ASEAN- India FTA had no significant trade creating or trade diverting impact on Indian trade with south- east Asian countries. In sharp contrast, the implementation of FTA for seems to have increased trade covering a larger portion of India's trade with ASEAN as both the levels. An important implication emanating from this finding is the significant role of factors, other than the formation of a free trade pact influencing India's trade with the ten- nation bloc. The insignificant role of policy variables can be interpreted in two ways: (i) the limited role tariffs play in influencing India's trade with ASEAN implying that factors other than tariffs drive the exports (imports) from India, for instance GDP, NTMs etc. (ii) the purpose of forming the agreement seems to be more strategic than economic. However, as noted by some studies, India's low tariff liberalization rate could be a reason for insignificant impact of tariff reductions for members in general, and India in particular. At 2-digit, the sectors with insignificant impact are also substantial. However, sectors for which FTA negatively impacted trade flow was low compared to the other two categories. The industries experiencing pure trade creation effects occupied a share of 25 per cent in India's exports to ASEAN and 8.8 per cent in its imports from ASEAN. We can conclude that FTA has had a greater impact of export flows than on imports.

Chapter 7 presents summary, conclusions and relevant policy recommendations emerging from the study.

5. Policy Implications

As more trade is led by trade creation rather than trade diversion, and the overall trade scenario that emerges from the rising trade intensities and complementarities, point towards a need to enhance trade relationship with south- east Asian neighbours. This should be done with appropriate

sector specific investment promotion rather than simply providing incentives. Further, there is the need to encourage business community to take the FTA route by organizing awareness programs as initiated by Department of Commerce and Industry, GOI in 2015-16, and capitalize on the benefits, thus extended, to the most. Border was found to be a deterrent to India's trade in most of the commodities analysed. This raises the concern over connectivity issues, besides strategic ones. Further, there appears to be the need to speed up the processes tackling connectivity constraints, with building up of facilitating infrastructure for better flow of trade and commerce across region. Appropriate relevance needs to be accorded to the North- east region by placing it as the centre linking two dynamic regions and not as the periphery of India. The study identifies products with competitive edge with respect to each country analysed. Appropriate steps need to be taken to ensure wider access for these in respective markets.

Increase in shipments, especially of capital goods and industrial supplies, has been a positive impact as they indirectly contribute to enhancing productive capacity. It is of immense importance for India to be an important link in these networks. India is a labour abundant country and it should be able to capitalize upon its resources for better integration and must capitalise on the opportunity provided by AIFTA. In this context, it is important to constructively cooperate efforts with ASEAN rather than looking at it as a potential threat. Import increase, especially of intermediates should be seen with a positive approach as these are indicative of India's increased integration in the regional production networks. It is of immense importance for India to be an important link in these networks. India is a labour abundant country and it should be able to capitalize upon its resources for better integration and must avail the opportunity provided by AIFTA. In this context, it is important to constructively cooperate efforts with ASEAN rather than looking at it as a potential threat. Since, with the commencement of FTA some sectors are bound to lose while others gain, it is the responsibility of the government to re-distribute the gains to those who are at a loss. India's future endeavours must be channelled towards achieving the goal of increased and sustained trade growth, ASEAN emerges as an important partner with huge potential yet to be tapped.

6. Directions for future research

It is suggested that secondary study be supplemented with primary information generated through personal interviews with the heads of the firms involved in exporting activities with the south- east

Asian region. This will help in gaining an insight into the actual utilization of benefits provided through the free trade pact and additionally highlight the challenges the firms face in taking the FTA route for accessing these markets. Future studies may also focus on utilizing the actual tariff values, in the gravity framework, rather than proxy. This may help understand the impact tariffs reductions on trade flows, more precisely. Inclusion of sectoral GDPs, different measures of distance, variables defining NTMs, analysis at 6-digit could also be taken up in future studies. This study is purely static, however dynamic analysis would provide useful insights on impact of trade flows on India. The study can further be extended beyond analysing the impact of FTA on trade flows, to include the estimation of trade costs, effect on welfare, developmental needs and so on, as the focus in future investigations. The role of regional production networks and global value chains in enhancing the trade through FTAs is another area of future research with profound implications for the Indian economy.

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