

Some points for East Asian Summit arising out of Asian Economic Community discussions held in New Delhi 18th, 19th nov 2005
Devaki Jain – 20th November 2005

As we initiate the process of coming together as an Asian Economic Community, we need to ask ourselves two questions:

1. Where do we get our common identity?
2. In what way can we learn from other regional attempts, and provide our own unique contribution to the global political economy models or such established paradigms of growth?

There is a search in all our countries for that kind of growth which does not exclude, especially those who are at the lowest rung of the economic ladder.

My vision is of an Asian model of regionalism which has built in safeguards for equity – a humane growth path, which not only aims at wide spread human well being, but safeguards, enables it to happen along the way.

As we enter into a broader and deeper cooperation, one aspect of trade-led growth – and regional FTA's which further spur trade, are its impact on employment. We need to be aware of all aspects of this: how many; who gains? – i.e. who is able to assess the job opportunities offered by this growth and the reverse, who loses? We need to underline not only the numbers but on which terms.

Initial investigations reveal that women are some of the major gainers (sometimes even at the cost of replacing male labour) due to the kind of products and the production techniques used. However, country experiences both in Asia and in Latin America reveal the flipside, namely that the conditions of the work are poor and without legal protection. We need to be aware of these wrinkles while forging our alliances.

As for building on our regional identity, there are many vigorous social movements flowing across Asia. For example, workers in Asia have always had strong cross border associations. The women of Asia have not only been the most visible in political leadership compared to any other, amongst all regions; but they are in world demand because of their skills and diligence as workers. They are also strongly linked in regional networks and movements for social and economic rights and cultural values. South Asia has experiences of seamless trading even amongst the small entrepreneurs.

We must build our collective identity in these modern currents of regional identity, as they are the economic sinews of our region.