

**Regionalism and Regional Security in South Asia:  
An Examination of the Role and Achievements of SAARC**

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**This thesis is dedicated to my father, Mr Zahur Ahmed Choudhri, who has always been my teacher and guide. This work is also dedicated to my mother, Mrs Surriya Zahur Choudhri, for her continuous prayers for my successful future.**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aimed at evaluating the progress of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), since its establishment in 1985. This study is significant because it has gone beyond the limited appraisal of SAARC in any particular area, such as economic integration, to present a detailed appraisal of cooperation under the overarching themes of economic cooperation, environmental security, human welfare, and cooperation in security matters (e.g. anti-terrorism). A detailed case study was pertinent for the purpose of presenting a critique of the Association's functionalist approach to regionalism vis-à-vis a basic assumption that cooperation in noncontroversial areas would pave the way for meaningful cooperation in sensitive areas, such as terrorism, and ultimately lead to regional security.

As there is a plethora of literature available on SAARC, a new approach examining regionalism in South Asia was imperative. Apart from the reviewing of conceptual and empirical literature, and content analysis of official documents, this thesis is based on viewpoints from within SAARC extracted through interviews with officials and direct interactions with them while on an internship at the Secretariat. The external insights on the organisation were also collected through interviews of academics, researchers and journalists.

SAARC is making progress on the breadth of issues it addresses on its agenda. The transition from agreements to actions and frequent interactions among the member states has boosted confidence. The Association has created an informal mechanism to permit political consultations at bilateral levels on the sidelines of its official meetings. The progress of the Association is most evident in the less controversial areas of human security, such as poverty alleviation, health and safety, human resources development, and higher education.

Notwithstanding enthusiastic commitments reflected in agreements and action plans, there is a gulf between rhetoric and implementation. Assessment of SAARC's progress indicates substantial omissions in its agenda, notably in sensitive areas relating to traditional security. There are major limitations in many areas in terms of implementation and outcomes, and there is a mixed level of political commitment towards various aspects of regional cooperation. SAARC projects are still limited in scope and impact.

The lack of commitment can be explained by several factors: the lack of trust (or periodic outright hostility) between India and Pakistan; insufficient financial contribution from the poor member states; competing priorities for funds, and attention to domestic and foreign policy; a crisis culture due to natural disasters and/or conflicts; and a remarkable lack of continuity and skills in member countries' staffing of SAARC.

Considering the organisational, economic, political and structural challenges faced by SAARC, it was deemed appropriate in this thesis to draw lessons from ASEAN – the organisation which has often been cited as an ideal model for South Asian regional cooperation.

While there have been many studies on regionalism and regional security in South Asia, hitherto, no study has comprehensively addressed the correlation between the two nor explored the interaction between traditional and human security issues. This thesis proposed that greater cooperation in common human security areas has a potential to pave the way for a cooperation on issues of a 'contentious' nature, particularly terrorism. Nevertheless, the work of SAARC, particularly in the security sector, has been hindered by the India-Pakistan rivalry, and a lack of human and financial resources.

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this dissertation and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.



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## **List of Acronyms**

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADMM	ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting
AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
AOSIS	Alliance of Small Island States
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
APSC	ASEAN Political-Security Community
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASA	Association of Southeast Asia
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEANPOL	ASEAN Chiefs of National Police
ASEM	Asia-Europe Meeting
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CBMs	Confidence-building Measures
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
COE	Committee of Experts
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EAS	East Asia Summit
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organisation
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FIA	Federal Investigation Authority

G8	Group of Eight
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEC	Global Economic Crisis
GEP	Group of Eminent Persons
GLOFs	Glacial Lake Outburst Floods
GNH	Gross National Happiness
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
HDI	Human Development Index
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IGCG-R-E-F	Inter-governmental Core Group on Research-Extension-Farmer Linkages
IGEG.CC	Inter-Governmental Expert Group on Climate Change
IGG	Inter-Government Group
IGO	Inter-governmental Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate
IPA	Integrated Programme of Action
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force
ISACPA	Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
LHRLA	Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MERCOSUR	Mercado Común del Sur (Common Southern Market)
MHHDC	Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
MNF	Most Favoured Nation

MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MT	Metric Tons
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Area
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
OAS	Organisation of American States
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIC	Organisation of the Islamic Conference
OSCE	Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PPP	Public Private Partnerships
PPP	Pakistan Peoples Party
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
RCD	Regional Cooperation for Development
RCST	Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SABAH	SAARC Business Association of Home-Based Workers
SAC	SAARC Agriculture Centre
SACEP	South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme
SACODiL	SAARC Consortium of Open and Distance Learning
SACU	Southern African Customs Union
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADF	South Asian Development Fund
SAF	South Asia Forum
SAFTA	South Asian Free Trade Area
SAGQ	South Asian Growth Quadrangle
SAIC	SAARC Agriculture Information Centre
SAIC	SAARC Agriculture Information Centre
SAPTA	SAARC Preferential Trading Agreement
SARSO	South Asia Regional Standards Organisation

SAU	South Asian University
SCCI	SAARC Chambers of Commerce and Industry
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SCZMC	SAARC Coastal Zone Management Centre
SDC	SAARC Documentation Centre
SDF	SAARC Development Fund
SDGs	SAARC Development Goals
SDMC	SAARC Disaster Management Centre
SDOMD	SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk
SEANWFZ	Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone
SEATO	Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation
SEC	SAARC Energy Centre
SEWA	Self Employed Women's Association
SFB	SAARC Food Bank
SFC	SAARC Forestry Centre
SHRDC	SAARC Human Resources Development Centre
SIC	SAARC Information Centre
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SOSA	Security Organisation for South Asia
STAC	SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre
STAC	SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre
STOMD	SAARC Terrorism Offences Monitoring Desk
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
TCARD	Technical Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNASUR	Union of South American Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities

UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USF	University of the South Pacific
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organisation
ZOPFAN	Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality