The events of recent months have brought South Asia into the international limelight with literally a bang! This has been accompanied by a vigorously renewed interest in studies pertaining to patterns of co-operation and conflict among the major South Asian countries. Although initiated four years previously, my doctoral research also attempts to analyse South Asia by way of determining the levels of order, welfare and legitimacy as also the prospects of peace in this part of the world. I chose South Asia as my research topic primarily because it seemed both logical and convenient to study the subcontinent while being a resident of its most prominent state -India. It enabled better access to research material and a greater awareness of daily happenings as well as of academic activities related to the subject matter. Being based in India also provided additional concern and impetus for delving into the dynamics of South Asia and the adjoining Southeast Asian countries. Moreover, a three-level research plan had been initiated at the Masters level of my studies. Thus, research undertaken for a dissertation on certain social, economic and political realities of India at the M.A. level proved to be an added advantage. It provided insights into the order, welfare and legitimacy concerns of India over a period of forty-five years. This was elaborated upon at the M.Phil. level to deal with interactions between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh from both the global agenda, and the order, welfare and legitimacy perspectives. Consequently both the M.A. and the M.Phil. dissertations helped provide a particularly strong foundation as well as a rational continuity to this doctoral thesis. At the same time, I must also admit that given the nature of my research topic, it was quite difficult to bring my dissertation to a firm conclusion. South Asia is indeed such a dynamic and rapidly changing part of the world that one must keep abreast of developments therein on a daily basis. As a corollary, one can also never be sure of what might happen tomorrow! Keeping this mind, I decided to include occurrences in South (and Southeast) Asia until the end of August 1998 in my analysis. Moreover I would also request readers to bear in mind the extended nature of my research investigations and the fact that my doctoral dissertation was penned in several phases at academic institutions in two different countries.

Here I would also like to explain that not only was this doctoral research carried out by me over a period of four years (September 1994-August 1998), it also involved a two-year tenure (from October 1996 till September 1998) at the South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg in Germany. The latter was made possible following the award of a German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) Ph.D. fellowship by means of which I could avail of academic guidance from two professors, one in India and another in Germany. Having initiated my research under the supervision of Professor Dilip Mohite at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, I could subsequently proceed to the South Asia Institute at Heidelberg to further refine certain premises of my dissertation under the co-supervision of Professor Subrata Mitra. The surprisingly vast literature available at the South Asia Institute and the international scholastic exposure that I received during the tenure of my German fellowship, also helped to enhance my overall understanding of South Asian politics.
My dissertation, per se, also seeks to answer several queries pertaining to South Asia. Firstly, it attempts to define a "region" on the basis of certain specific indicators which confirm the existence or otherwise, of a region. It also touches upon various regional co-operation efforts across the globe, with special reference to the SAARC and ASEAN initiatives. Thereafter, it examines South Asia's prospects of being categorised as a "region". More specifically, it answers whether over a given period of time (that is, in the post-Cold war era), South Asia has been able to identify (more or less closely) with the given definition of a "region". Furthermore, whether the South Asian countries can be credited with any remarkable achievements in the field of economic and political integration or co-operation. Having answered this, the research moves on to a related aspect of explaining South Asia's role in the present international scenario. This has been made possible by determining (as far as possible) South Asia's role and significance in the "post-Cold War global agenda". This agenda comprises certain universally acknowledged priorities that have been primarily identified by major international actors, keeping in view the changes and consequent demands of the global environment. Thus, contemporary global priorities include a host of issues such as social compatibility, upholding human rights, environmental protection, economic development, promoting liberal democracy, arms control and disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and so on. Given the range and sheer relevance of these issues, it is imperative for each and every part of the world to identify with them. India and the countries comprising South Asia as a whole, are no exceptions to this fact. At the same time, it is felt that certain basic pre-requisites such as a minimal level of socio-economic and political stability must be met with, before any region can hope to assimilate into the global agenda, and simultaneously, attract global interest in its activities. From this perspective, the research also evaluates the degree of order, welfare and legitimacy in the South Asian countries. Moreover, the research seeks to highlight the causes and consequences of the degree of compatibility that South Asia exhibits with the contemporary global priorities. In order to do so, the Southeast Asian countries (particularly the ASEAN members) have been used as the occasional point of reference, and subsequent comparison. Such an endeavour is also expected to provide valuable lessons for the deficient party.

The research methodology adopted for this doctoral dissertation includes the historical-analytical as well as the case-study methods. Furthermore, there are two units of analysis: the state and the region. The dependent variables include the levels of order, welfare and legitimacy in each state under scrutiny as also the degree of willingness (and commonality of interests) among states to co-operate and form a "region". The independent variables are the contemporary global priorities.

The following hypothesis evolved out of an extensive literature review:

A set of countries in close geographical proximity with each other, can be categorised as a "region" when, first and foremost, they share a certain commonality of interests. These interests could incorporate a whole gamut of social, economic, political, cultural, historical and other factors. South Asia is still in the process of evolving as a "region" because an adequate degree of complementarity of interests among the countries in this geographical area has not been achieved as yet. To state it somewhat differently, there has been very little regional co-operation in South Asia, some of the main reasons being the relative inability of the SAARC to sustain and promote co-operative efforts, long-standing inter-state political differences and the actual occurrence of wars, continued interference of, and vulnerability to extra-regional actors, inadequate information and infrastructure facilities, and independent and largely uncoordinated economic policies pursued by each country in the subcontinent.
Further, South Asia inheres inadequate levels of order, welfare and legitimacy owing to the persistence of various intra- and inter-state conflicts (as explained on the basis of Kolodziej's theory). The converse also holds true. Unlike many other trouble spots of the world, the threat to South Asia is basically from within! Given this anomaly, the rest of the world views South Asian countries with reservation, even pessimism. Consequently, South Asia's prospects of adhering with the global agenda (such as certain economic and security issues) and playing a significant role in contemporary world politics are rather low. As most experts opine, without an integrated economic, technological and military strategy, none of the South Asian countries can hope to become salient global players. The recent nuclear developments in the subcontinent (under the aegis of "misguided patriotism") have complicated this scenario manifold.

This situation can be rectified to some extent by learning from the relatively more fruitful experience in this regard, of the neighbouring Southeast Asian countries, particularly from their efforts in making ASEAN a success. (Although ASEAN is often seen as a primarily political organisation, much of its work involves promoting economic co-operation among member states in trade, investment, energy, finance, banking and currency stabilisation). Indeed, despite the recent tryst with liberalisation and free market policies, South Asia continues to project relatively stagnant and inward-looking economies when compared to most of the Southeast Asian countries (the latter also facing tremendous financial crises since mid-1997 but are said to have weathered the storm with characteristic flair and dignity). Furthermore unlike South Asia, most of the Southeast Asian conflicts have been resolved within the regional parameters even as the ASEAN members have repeatedly portrayed themselves as a cohesive body (at least) while voicing dissent over common extra-regional threats and concerns.

Given these observations, perhaps the need of the hour is a total overhauling of the South Asian systems, keeping in view the realities of the rapidly changing post-Cold War era. This fundamentally necessitates renewed and greater efforts on part of South Asian countries to evolve into a "complete region" followed by the promotion of regional co-operation through action rather than rhetoric.

In order to test this hypothesis, the research has been divided as:

Chapter 1 : Introduction
1.1. Statement of the problem
1.2. Major premises of the research
1.3. Literature review
1.4. Theoretical framework
1.5. Hypothesis
1.6. Chapterization plan

Chapter 2 : Contemporary Economic Priorities
2.1. The main issues concerning the world today
2.2. South Asia's compatibility with these issues
2.3. Areas of overlap and common concern with Southeast Asia

Chapter 3 : Contemporary Security Priorities
3.1. The main issues concerning the world today
3.2. South Asia's compatibility with these issues
3.3. Areas of overlap and common concern with Southeast Asia

Chapter 4 : Analysis
4.1. Analysis of the economic patterns in South and Southeast Asia
4.2. Analysis of the security patterns in South and Southeast Asia

Chapter 5 : Conclusion.