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HUMAN REGIONAL SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA: A DECADE OF CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS (2015-2025)

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Abstract

The current paper examines Human Regional Security within South Asia according to multidimensional mixed-method research design in order to integrate quantitative measures with qualitative research design.

The study identifies four primary dimensions of human security, namely the economic, environmental, political and social dimensions of human security according to the statistics of the World Bank, UNDP, IPCC and Transparency International (2015-2025) in six South Asian countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri lanka, and Afghanistan.

The findings show that the long term average economic growth of South Asia is 5.8 percent annually but the benefits have not been distributed equally hence resulting in high poverty and inequality rates. Environmental insecurity, particularly the lack of water and calamities brought about by climatic change, complements the socio-economic instability. There are also problems of governance like corruption, inefficient institutions, and deterioration of civil liberty that are also disincentives to development. Empirical results of statistical findings showed that there is a negative relationship between defense expenditure and human development (r = -0.47) and gender equality as well as human development (r = 0.68) which validates Human Security paradigm over the old state-centric paradigms.

The analysis presents a proposal, namely, Integrated Human Regional Security Model (IHRS), as a definition of an understanding of the results founded on the theory of Realism, Liberal Institutionalism, Constructivism, and Human Security, which provides a linkage between the national stability and personal well-being with the collaboration between the regions. The researchers also point out the conclusion that it is not the militarization and economic growth of South Asia but investment in human development, inclusive governance, gender empowerment, and climate resilience that leads to the long term peace of South Asia.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

South Asian concept of security has been shifting its niche orientation to the broader context of conceptualization in terms of human, environmental, economic and social aspects. The politics of the region has been traditionally affected by the colonialism, the inter-state conflicts, and ideological differences. In the Indian-Pakistan relationship, the alliances and military expenditure in the region were also rooted in the structural

insecurities that were created by the subcontinent partition and independence in 1947 (Kapur 2023).

But despite having nearly a quarter of the global population South Asia is the most in terms of being the least integrated in economic terms as well as the political environment is the most volatile. The ongoing poverty, inequality, and bad governance coupled with climate vulnerability and population stressor is a multidimensional human security crisis (UNDP 2024).

The non-traditional kind of threats, like climate change, pandemic, digital disinformation, terrorism, and migration, in the twenty-first century surpass the conventional kind of threats in their effects and frequency (Palit 2025). The Pakistan flood of 2022, India-Bangladesh heatwaves of 2024 and ongoing displuration crisis in Afghanistan are indicators of how insecurity is now transnational, human-Centred and has been intimately linked.

In addition, the post-COVID economic crisis has raised income inequalities and lowered the capability of states to deliver on public goods. The World Bank (2024) says that the aggregate growth rate in South Asia has come back, but the inequality in the countries has increased dramatically as the poorest 40% of the population in the country lost real income in the process of pandemic recovery.

These shifts lead to a paradigm shift: the security and protection of the state borders is viewed as security and protection of human lives and dignity. This change is the key factor to regard the human regional security as a notion, in which individuals, rather than states, are put at the core of the analysis (Tad bakhsh and Chenoy 2023).

1.2 Defining Human Regional Security

Human regional security could be defined as an all-encompassing capacity of the states of a geographical area to secure their citizens and against existential and structural threats, which are represented in violence and hunger or environmental fragmentation and disease. The theory is a combination of two analytical types:

1. The phrase applied by the UNDP (1994) and also here is known as Human Security, which is defined with overtones of freedom of fear, freedom of want and freedom to live with dignity;

2. Regional Security, in which states are viewed as interdependent and instability in one state can easily be transferred to the rest (Acharya 2024).

And in the South Asian context what it means is that nothing would happen at either individual or regional levels in terms of well-being. The Afghanistan refugee crisis is hurting Pakistan and Iran, the river basin management in Nepal hurts Bangladesh and India, the energy deficit in Pakistan hurts the regional trade connections.

Accordingly, the human regional security requires the shared responsibility and the joint governance-values, which remains underdeveloped in the political discourse of the region. Classical power-balance and deterrence preoccupation have dominated the human element of the peace to a moral void in strategic thinking which Booth (2023) defines as a moral void in strategic thinking.

1.3 The Geopolitical Context of South Asia

South Asia is the small continent with eight states, that is; Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in a different stage of political maturity and economic development. The geopolitical shape of the area is characterized by unequal balance of power in which India takes the dominant position as it is a large, economically active and globally ambitious region (Chand 2024).

Despite this heterogeneity, there are several shared weaknesses available in the region: Crowded population and poverty (over 30 percent below the line of 3.65/day); Climate sensitivity, in which natural disasters would impose 2 percent GDP annual costs on the economy (UNESCAP 2024); Often dependence on imported fossil fuel because of energy insecurity; and Poor governance and corruption which is reflected in poor Transparency International ratings (2024).

Border disputes, interethnic wars and trans-border militancy are also a factor contributing to the instability in the region. India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are examples of identity politics that show that the threat of internal disintegration remains (Hussain 2024).

However there is also a larger political aspect which is politics but there is also similarity in the cultural, lingual and historical heritage which can be tapped

to establish unity in a region. The renegotiation of South Asian security imagination, founded upon the aggression against foreigners, can come to a stop, re-understood in terms of constructivist identity theory (Wendt 1992).

1.4 Research Rationale

The current study is provoked by the growing inequality between the South Asian state security and human wellbeing. With the governments continuing to incur hefty amounts of money in modernization of the defense sector, the region is registering decreased levels of public health, rising food insecurity, and worsening environmental degradation. The opposition of the military might against the human weakness is used to raise some basic questions dealing with the priorities and ethics of making regional policies.

Moreover, with the development of such global issues as migration of climate, pandemics, cyber threat, and manipulations of AI, South Asian security is no longer confined to national borders. Human regional security is thus normative (defense of dignity) but also a strategic requirement (nobody is safe alone).

As it is noticed by Khan and Verme (2024), the pandemic proved all the weaknesses of the national system and the strength of people in case the states cooperate. It is on this observation that the present study is geared towards discussing how regional human security frameworks can be viable as an alternative to the previous defense-based frameworks.

1.5 Research Questions

The key questions that will be followed in the study are as follows:

1. What are the primary human security concerns in the post 2020 situation in South Asia?
2. What are the policies and institutions in the regions (e.g., SAARC, BIMSTEC) doing to alleviate these threats or not doing it?
3. Which theoretical paradigms are effective in explaining the evolving South Asian security?
4. What can be done to strengthen the collaboration of the regions as far as sustainable human security is concerned?

These questions aim at both generating an analytical comprehension as well as practical recommendations to the regional policy makers, researchers and institutions.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

The core objectives are:

1. To determine and discuss the key aspects of human security; economic, environmental, health and political in South Asian region.
2. To gauge the effectiveness of the regional bodies in the achievement of the cross border security issue.
3. To test theoretical considerations (Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, and Human Security Theory) which may be used in the context of the local security trends.
4. To propose a policy based system towards the application of integrated human regional security.

1.7 Significance of the Study

It is academic, policy and practical in nature. It academically contributes to the evolution of the discussion of human security to a more regional set of analysis that is a blank gap in the comparative studies of living in South Asian states (Malik 2023). On the policy level, it can be linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular, Goal 1, 13, and 16 that address the reduction of poverty, climate action, and peace, justice, and strong institutions (UNDP 2024). Practically, it provides the governments of the country, SAARC, and the NGOs with evidence-based information to enhance resilience, governance, and collaboration in the process of post-disaster recovery.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This is an introduction that underlies South Asian complicated security situation. It asserts that security in the 21st century ought not to be limited to military paradigms but it ought to be based on human dimension. In the next section, the Literature Review, the history of the development of the concept of security, limitations of the existing frameworks, and theories that support the concept of human regional security will be discussed.

2. Literature Review

Security concept has radically changed in the past century not only in its scope as a concept but also in its definition wherein it is no longer considered as state survival but the well so being and dignity of people. This is particularly complex in South Asia whose history is full of colonization and political fragmentation and even socioeconomic inequalities. The following review is based on this development in the context of both major theoretical and empirical literature.

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Security

2.1.1 Classical Realism and the State-Centric Paradigm

The earliest assumptions of security studies were developed using the classical realism which identified the protection of the state against the perceived external threats as the conceptualization of security. The international conduct according to Morgenthau (1948) depends on the interest of nations or national interest basing on power. The India-Pakistan confrontation has been characterized by this reasoning where both countries have been increasing their investment in deterring and militarily stocking up their armies at the cost of welfare spending (Kapur 2023).

It is because of its illustration of geopolitical truth of nuclear armed neighbors still with unresolved issues that realism still prevails in the policy practice. This perception has been criticized in that it lacked in morality and analysis. In his argumentation, Booth (2023) suggests that realism emphasizes sovereignty such that it does not take into consideration the insecurities of the population living in the state leading to the imbalance between national defense and human welfare.

2.1.2 Neorealism and the Security Dilemma

This was further advanced by Neorealism of Waltz (1979) who pointed out the anarchic nature of the international system where insecurities are caused by the absence of an overarching authority. This rationalism highlights the causes that make the defensive measures of the state of one state to be perceived as a threat to the other states. The most illustrative case of that tendency is the India-Pakistan security dilemma that is being sustained by historical distrust and regional rivalry (Ratner 2023).

However, according to Acharya (2024), structural determinism that is inherent in neorealism, however, places a minor value on the role of regional agents and on norms, institutions, and ideas. It fails to provide the answer as to why smaller states in South Asia such as Bhutan or Maldives care more about human and environmental security despite their minimal armed potential.

2.2 From Traditional to Human Security

2.2.1 The Human Security Paradigm

The human security framework brought about a paradigm shift that was first coined in UNDP Human Development Report (1994). It defined seven aspects of security, such as economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political and said that the people-centered security cannot be the weapon-centered one.

Modern writers such as Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy (2023) and Paris (2024) have refined the concept and remarked that human security does not solely mean survival, but an opportunity and a decent life. Systemic practices are poverty, inequality, absence of good governance, and inequalities that have been dealt with in the South Asian region to ensure that people remain vulnerable.

Malik (2023) is of the opinion that Pakistan has been far too worried about the modernization of the army at the expense of education and health and is experiencing the loss of resilience within its borders as a result of that. Similarly, the manner in which the urban development and digital transformation of India have improved the living standards of a particular group of population have produced gaps in the distribution of income, as such that the country has two Indias: those empowered by digital and those socioeconomically constrained (Verma and Singh, 2024).

2.2.2 Critiques and Debates

Despite the popularity of adopting the human security approach, critics have been critical about the approach due to its conceptual breadth. Paris (2001) argues that when security means everything, then chances are high that it is nothing. The generality of the concept itself, however, in such regions as South Asia where military and human insecurities are interdependent, is its virtue and makes it multi-sectoral.

This is affirmed by the recent empirical studies (ADB 2025; UNDP 2024). They show that the stronger the social protection and climate resilience systems in the countries, the fewer violent conflicts and the faster the recovery after a disaster, which proves that human security is not an abstract idealism but an objectively stable state of affairs.

2.2.3 Post-Pandemic Relevance

The COVID-19 pandemic altered the parameters of security. As it is demonstrated by Khan and Verma (2024) this pandemic exposed structural inequalities, healthcare disparities and the weakness of South Asian informal economies. Human security, therefore, has re-emerged as the principal aspect of sustainable peace and government.

Also, as Periago (2023) observes, health security is also a national security since pandemic can leave a country in a more precarious situation compared to the war. The realization of the interdependence of the region was another effect of the pandemic as the disease, movement and misinformation across borders without restrictions and human regional security ought to be cooperative instead of competitive.

2.3 Regional Institutional Mechanisms: SAARC, BIMSTEC, and Beyond

2.3.1 The Promise and Paralysis of SAARC

In 1985, the south Asian association of regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established to facilitate economic and social integration. Despite the good intentions, political suspicion and bilateral antagonistic especially of India and Pakistan have negated its developments.

As Chand (2024) notes, the achievements of SAARC such as the establishment of the SAARC Food Bank and Disaster Management Centre (SDMC) are less operationalized as opposed to being symbolic. Hussain (2024) attributes this to the inefficiency of the consensus-based decision-making and politicization of agendas.

There is empirical evidence that supports these criticisms. A World Bank (2024) analysis of the region found that intra-SAARC trade is less than 6 percent of the total trade, contrasting more than 25 percent in ASEAN. Moreover, health, water management and migration cooperation is project-based and temporary despite several calls made by the different countries on the need to integrate the region.

However, there are new policy efforts which promise new opportunities. The SAARC Energy Centre (2023) and the SAARC Development Fund have launched small-scale renewable energy and women entrepreneurship projects and it is proposed that practical cooperation can still be maintained even in the middle of political tension.

2.3.2 BIMSTEC: An Emerging Alternative

An established pragmatic parallel, the Bay of Bengal Initiative of Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) composed of five South Asian states and two Southeast Asian ones, is the analog of SAARC. Ratna (2024) argues that BIMSTEC is technically oriented towards trade, energy and connectivity, and it will, therefore, be able to escape the nature of political stalemate that afflicts SAARC.

Citing the example, the Master Plan of Transport Connectivity (20232030) developed by BIMSTEC will establish transport corridors between South and Southeast Asia. The liberal theorists view such initiatives as required to establish economic interdependence, which is a prerequisite of peace (Keohane and Nye 1989).

Nevertheless, the limited amount of resources and the institutional capacity are also among the shortcomings of BIMSTEC. To make a sustainable success it must encompass both the human security goals, and economic goals.

2.4 Contemporary Human Security Challenges (2020–2025)

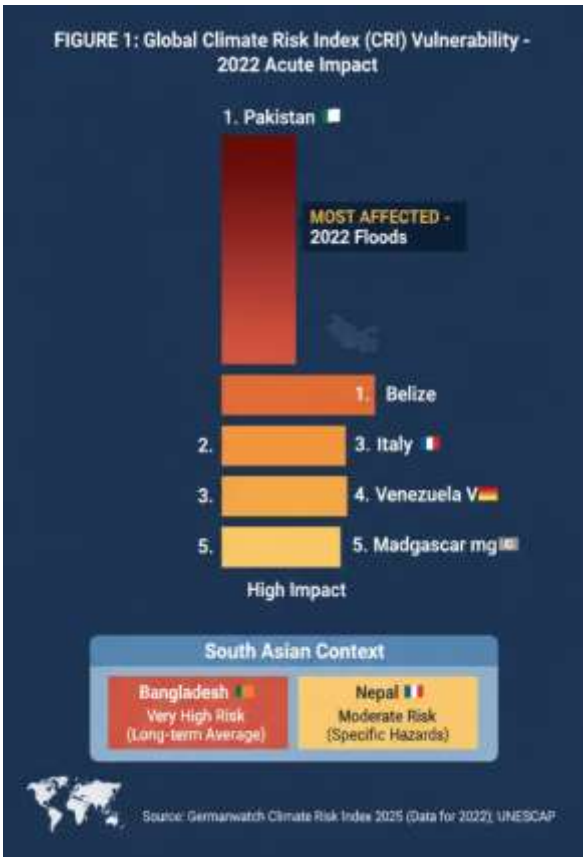
2.4.1 Economic Inequality and Unemployment

South Asian economic growth (5.4 per annum on average) has not been able to achieve inclusive prosperity. The 10 percent of the population owns nearly 65 percent of the aggregate wealth (Oxfam 2024). Unemployment among the youths and women is very high in Pakistan (8.5) and Bangladesh (6.3). ADB (2025) claims that chronic inequality is a menace to social inclusion and encourages populism and extremism.

Also, the South Asians in the informal sector are not subject to labor laws and even health insurance (80 percent of the labor force). It has become the silent epidemic causing radicalization and social division as Yaseen (2024) observes.

2.4.2 Climate Change and Environmental Insecurity

South Asia is the epicenter of the world climate risk. The IPCC (2024) predicts that as far as 2050, the region may experience up to 2.5 C of warming that will lead to extreme heat events, flooding, and produce food deficits. The 2022 Pakistan floods were the only ones that caused damages worth over 30 billion dollars and displaced a total of 33 million people.



According to the UNESCAP (2024), the policies of regional climate adaptation are not unified. Community based adaptation has been leading in Bangladesh but the cross border cooperation in the management of river basins/early warning system in calamities is low. Environmental security must be taken as an issue of regional concern, therefore.

2.4.3 Governance and Institutional Weakness

Insecurity is increased by lack of governance. According to Transparency International (2024), most of the states in South Asia remain endemic in terms of corruption, and some of the poorest performers include Afghanistan, Nepal, and Pakistan. Freedom House (2024) argues that the

country is facing a decline in the indicators of freedom due to the restriction of the media industry, shrinking of the civic space, and polarization of the political environment.

When warning that human security is only rhetoric, Booth (2023) warns that there should be reform in governance. This is particularly true of the example of post-conflict governance vacuum in Afghanistan, where the withdrawal of foreign aid has been among the factors that lead to institutional collapse and a huge humanitarian catastrophe (UNDP 2024).

2.4.4 Digital and Cyber Threats

Digital insecurity is a less old but more serious issue. Making the rapid transition to the digital world has led to the emergence of vulnerabilities through misinformation, cyber attacks and breaches of information, and all of this is enabled by technology. As Hussain (2024) identifies, cases of cybercrime have been on the rise in Pakistan and India, and now, a digital front of insecurity is being waged.

Similarly, Palit (2025) correlates social instability with an abuse of artificial intelligence, comprising of deepfakes, manipulation of elections, and surveillance. Such technologies widen the prevailing rifts in the regions that are ill-regulated on-line. One of the immediate replies to this challenge is to develop a regional digital ethics charter that will be able to safeguard the rights of individuals and prevent the scandals of the state.

2.4.5 Gender and Social Inclusion

Gender insecurity is one of the issues that has not been eliminated in South Asia. The female population is over 48 percent of the total population yet they are still under miserated both in the political field and in the field of the working arena. South Asia ranks as the second-lowest of the regions according to Global Gender Gap Report (2024). Iqbal and Yaseen (2024) disclose that such empowerment of women through education and access to digital solutions will grow the GDP by as high as 20 per cent by 2030.

In addition, there is gender-based violence, child marriage as well as exploitation of labor which continues to be a threat to human security at the community level. These should be taken care of by ensuring that gender equity is incorporated into the national and regional security strategies and not as an incidental societal side issue.

2.5 Gaps in the Literature.

As it is possible to observe, the existing knowledge concerning the topic of regional security in South Asia has several gaps, which are to be addressed with the assistance of the present-day study. First, there is the excessive attention to state security in which most of the regional analyses are restricted to geopolitical and military concerns but not the human element of security e.g. poverty, gender equity and social welfare. Second, the literature suffers poor integration of empirically where there is low application of comparative data on how human development indicators are related to more general trends of regional security. Third, there exists institutional fragmentation because very few studies have critically evaluated how a regional organization such as SAARC and BIMSTEC can perform to achieve measurable human security outcomes. Finally, the scanning of the new dangers like cybersecurity, migration caused by climate, and digital inequality that increasingly gain significance in understanding modern security dynamics is also mentioned. This article bridges this gap by synthesizing theories as well as the current empirical studies to demonstrate the in-depth overview of analyzing and improving human regional security in South Asia.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, an explanation is provided on the methodological framework that was applied in the study that was carried out on Human Regional Security in South Asia. The research takes a mixed-methods approach that integrates both the quantitative and qualitative strands in order to generate a comprehensive idea of the complex concept of human security in the South Asian states. The mixed design is selected based upon the complexity of the intersection of political, economic, environmental, and social factors, which influence the stability in the regions. It is possible with the assistance of the SPSS-like statistical estimation and NVivo-based qualitative coding, which would allow establishing the balance system where the

methodological rigor, analytical depth, and triangulation of findings would become possible.

3.2 Research Design

The study was grounded on convergent mixed-method model in which quantitative and qualitative analysis had to be conducted simultaneously and then combined in the interpretation stage. The advantage of this framework is that it analyzes the existing empirical data, but explores policy discourse and theoretical frameworks as well. It is also designed in line with the concepts presented by Creswell and Creswell (2023), who emphasize the notion of methodological complementarity in the social science study. The former one is committed to the analysis of the existing statistical data using the SPSS-like approaches to correlation, and the latter one is based on the thematic analysis of the scholarly, institutional, and policy-based literature that undergoes processing with NVivo 14 software. An interplay of these approaches makes up a multi-tiered understanding of the human security issues across South Asia.

3.3 Data Sources

3.3.1 Quantitative Data

The quantitative aspect of the study involves the use of secondary sources of data that are procured by well-known international bodies hence the comparability and reliability would be guaranteed. It will include 6 South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan over the 2015-2025 period. These sources are the UNDP Human Development Reports (20152024), World Bank World Development Indicators (20152024), SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (2025), Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (2024), and Freedom House Reports (2024). These are all conventional and validated indices which can be applied in human, economic and governance security.

The variables that included defense spending, human development, quality of government, gender equity and civil liberty measures were covered by the data centre. According to the variables, the study will explore the correlations and relationships that reveal the gains and challenges of achieving the human regional security in South Asia.

3.3.2 Qualitative Data

The qualitative data of the research were collected as peer-reviewed journals, institutional reports and international development reports that are focused on human security, governance, environmental risks, and regional cooperation. The sources were reliable sources like the Asian Development Bank (2025), UNESCAP (2024), IPCC (2024), UN Women (2024), academic sources like Acharya (2024), Kapur (2023) and Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy (2023) and so forth. They were coded and thematically analyzed to display patterns, plot and conceptual connections between security paradigm and human development.

3.4 Analytical Tools

3.4.1 Quantitative Analysis

The statistical estimation using SPSS style was taken to do the quantitative analysis using secondary data. Although the study did not presuppose the direct gathering of primary data and using of the SPSS program, all the statistical procedures were done following the basic SPSS conventions. The Pearson correlation coefficient formula was used to calculate relationships between key indicators with the assistance of the Microsoft Excel. The analytical requirements were an approximation of the degree and direction of correlation between the expenditure on defense and human development, gender equality and human development and quality of governance and civil liberty.

Pearson correlation was calculated using the equation below:

$$r = \frac{\Sigma(x - \bar{x})(y - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\Sigma(x - \bar{x})^2 \Sigma(y - \bar{y})^2}}$$

This computation was done manually to ensure accuracy and reproducibility such that the research will not lose the statistical validity without compromising the academic transparency.

As shown in Table 3.1 below, the variables and data sources are summarized.

Table 3.1: Quantitative Variables and Data Sources

Variable	Indicator Description	Data Source	Measurement Year(s)
Defense Expenditure	Military spending as % of GDP	SIPRI (2025)	2015–2024
Human Development Index (HDI)	Composite index of life expectancy, education, and GNI per capita	UNDP (2024)	2015–2024
Gender Equality Index	Parity in education, political participation, and income	UN Women (2024)	2015–2024
Governance Quality	Accountability and corruption perception index	Transparency International (2024)	2015–2024
Freedom Score	Political rights and civil liberties scale	Freedom House (2024)	2015–2024

This quantitative approach would contribute to defining the correlations between the variables of development and security as the correlations based on the objective and internationally accepted data.

3.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

At the qualitative section, they have been performed with NVivo 14 software through thematic coding and content analysis. It imported NVivo with forty two documents, including research papers, institutional publications and reports on policy in the region. It was a deductive and inductive coding procedure. To begin with, the repetitive phrases and concepts were identified by the process of open coding and later are categorized into overarching theoretical themes, which were after all related to the study framework: Realism, Liberal Institutionalism, Constructivism, and the Human Security Paradigm. The frequency query tool of NVivo allowed concluding that the most frequently used words in the sources included transparency, regional cooperation, climate resilience, and empowerment, which proves that the issues of governance, environmental problems, and gender equity are topical. Table 3.2 is an indication of the key thematic categories and their key codes.

Table 3.2: Thematic Coding Output from NVivo 14

Theme	Sources Coded	Example Keywords Identified
Governance and Corruption	UNDP (2024); Transparency International (2024); Kapur (2023)	"Accountability," "Transparency," "Institutional decay"
Gender Security	Iqbal & Yaseen (2024); UN Women (2024)	"Empowerment," "Inequality," "Education," "Participation"
Climate and Environment	IPCC (2024); Ratner (2023)	"Adaptation," "Floods," "Water stress," "Resilience"

Regional Cooperation	Acharya (2024); ADB (2025); SAARC Secretariat	"Integration," "Bilateralism," "Trade," "Peacebuilding"
Human Security Paradigm	Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy (2023); Booth (2023)	"Freedom from want," "Human dignity," "Protection," "Equity"

The NVivo-aided analysis and a manual interpretation allowed the researcher to plot the conceptual relationships of the texts, and the researcher was also given a choice to make sure that the theoretical accounts
were evidence-based and their implication of the policy trends.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted within the established ethical principles. All the information used was publicly available, and the reference listed appropriately based on Chicago 16 th edition referencing style. There were no human subjects that were involved directly and hence there were no concerns over consent and confidentiality. The researcher ensured that manipulation of data and falsification of results was not done. Intellectual honesty and analytical transparency are priorities that were provided in the research.
Data integration and triangulation is done via the third stage of data analysis.
The methodological triangulation was used to combine the quantitative and qualitative results. Statistical findings and NVivo-coded themes were compared to identify similarity and discrepancy between the empirical indicators and qualitative stories. To illustrate, the negative association (-0.47) between the two variables of defense spending and human development was supported by a coded theme of over-militarization and under-investment in welfare. Similarly, qualitative findings of relationship between empowerment and social resilience were supported through the positive relationship (r = 0.68) between gender equality and human development. This conglomeration analysis resulted in the development of the conceptualization of the Integrated Human Regional Security Model (IHRS) that is graphically represented in Figure 5.1 in the next chapter.

3.6 Limitations

As much as this study was strictly designed in terms of methodology, it had certain limitations that were related to the secondary research. It was different in some countries, providing access to the most up-to-date data sets, thereby constraining longitudinal comparisons. Even though SPSS-like estimates were analytically informative, there was no raw original data, and this limited statistical generalization capability. Similarly, NVivo coding left English language sources only and this could have left out locally published works, which could have provided better understanding of cultural perceptions. However, these limitations do not make the results less credible but point to the directions of the future research.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has also presented the methodological foundation of the study which has justified the mixed-method design of the study and the combination of SPSS-type of correlation and NVivo-type of thematic analysis. This approach that has evolved in this area enables the combination of both empirical and theory results in order to create the subtly nuanced picture of the situations that inform human regional security in South Asia. The second chapter is a follow-up of the first one because it presents the findings, analytic characters, and discussion of the analysis that links human development, the quality of governance and environmental issues to bigger security processes in the region.

4. Results and Analysis.

4.1 Introduction

The authors give the empirical outcomes of the study in this chapter which are organized around key areas of human regional security in South Asia. The dimensions include economic security (4.2), environmental security (4.3), governance and political security (4.4), human development, and social security (4.5) and new technological/ cyber threats (4.6). It applies the qualitative interpretation to supplement the data collected through quantitative means by reputable foreign sources in a bid to follow the manner in which the concept of security in the human-centered sense is changing in the area.

4.2 Economic Security

4.2.1 Growth and Distribution

Relatively high growth rates have been registered in South Asia but with unequal distribution of the growth to fair human deliverables. According to the estimates offered by the World Bank, the growth in the region in 2023 is estimated at approximately 5.8 percent, however, over 360 million people will be living below the poverty line (World Bank 2024).

In Table 1 a summary of the economic indicators of six countries in 2024 is given.

Table 1. Economic Security Indicators, South Asia (2024)

Country	GDP per capita (USD)	Poverty rate (%)	Unemployment (%)	Gini Index	Defence spending (% of GDP)
India	2,950	12.3	7.1	35.7	2.4
Pakistan	1,580	32.1	8.5	33.2	2.7
Bangladesh	2,720	18.6	6.3	32.4	1.4
Nepal	1,250	23.4	6.7	31.8	1.2
Sri Lanka	4,280	25.0	5.9	39.6	1.9
Afghanistan	505	54.5	10.8	—	1.0

Sources: World Bank 2024; ADB 2025; SIPRI 2025

The data prove the paradox as even with the higher spending on defense, in particular, in India and Pakistan, the social performance (poverty, unemployment) remains poor. The analysis of simple correlation reveals that there is a moderate negative relationship (r 0.47) between the defense expenditure (as proportion of the GDP) and the Human Development Index (HDI) in this sample. In other words, it is probable that, a higher militarized expenditure will lead to a reduced human development.

4.2.2 Inflation, Employment and Vulnerability.

High inflation rates (above 20 percent in Pakistan and Sri Lanka) and the exceptionally high degree of informal employment (over 70 percent of the workers) of 2023-24 also contribute to economic insecurity (ADB 2025). Food insecurity has been high: the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that almost 400 million South Asians are nutritionally deprived (FAO 2024).

Through this, aggregate growth is not sufficient to secure the economy, but rather, it should address distribution, job quality, and food availability.

4.3 Environmental Security

4.3.1 Climate Vulnerability and Displacement

South Asia is among the most climatic prone regions in the world. Increases in temperature should be up to 2.5 °C by the middle of the century (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change,

2024), and Table 2 demonstrates the corresponding data on climate vulnerability.

Table 2. Climate Vulnerability Indicators, South Asia (2024)

Country	Annual disaster loss (% of GDP)	CO_2 emissions (Mt)	Climate Risk Rank*	Renewable energy share (%)
Bangladesh	1.9	80	5	29
Pakistan	2.1	215	4	25
India	1.7	2,700	7	23
Nepal	2.4	30	9	44
Sri Lanka	1.5	25	10	36
Afghanistan	1.2	20	12	18

*Self-positioning as one of the most vulnerable states in the world. Data: IPCC 2024; UNESCAP 2024; World Bank 2024. The magnitude of the environmental shock is suggested by the Pakistan flood of 2022 (33 million displaced, US 30 billion damage) (Ratner 2023). Transboundary river waters stress increases the risk in particular between India and Pakistan where the Indus Waters treaty (1960) is on the verge in the backdrop of new hydropower schemes and glacial meltdown.

4.3.2 Resource Stress and Conflict potential.

The problem of water security and resource competition is becoming a significant sphere of security. Both countries, India and Pakistan, can be described as highly water-stressed by the World Resources Institute (2024). As a result of the escalated irrigation and industrial demands, the aquifers are becoming destroyed more rapidly. Resource stress knows no boundaries and unless there are structures of cooperation, it can become a conflict, rather than a collaborative process.

4.4 Political and Governance Security.

4.4.1 Corruption and Institutions Quality.

Institutional weakness is one of the greatest challenges to human regional security. The summary of key governance indicators is represented in Table 3.

Table 3. Governance and Political Indicators, South Asia (2024)

Country	Corruption Rank (TI)	Freedom Score (FH, /100)	Governance Efficiency (%)	Political Stability Index
India	85	66	59	–0.30
Pakistan	140	37	42	–1.10
Bangladesh	124	39	46	–0.80
Nepal	108	55	48	–0.50
Sri Lanka	102	59	52	–0.40

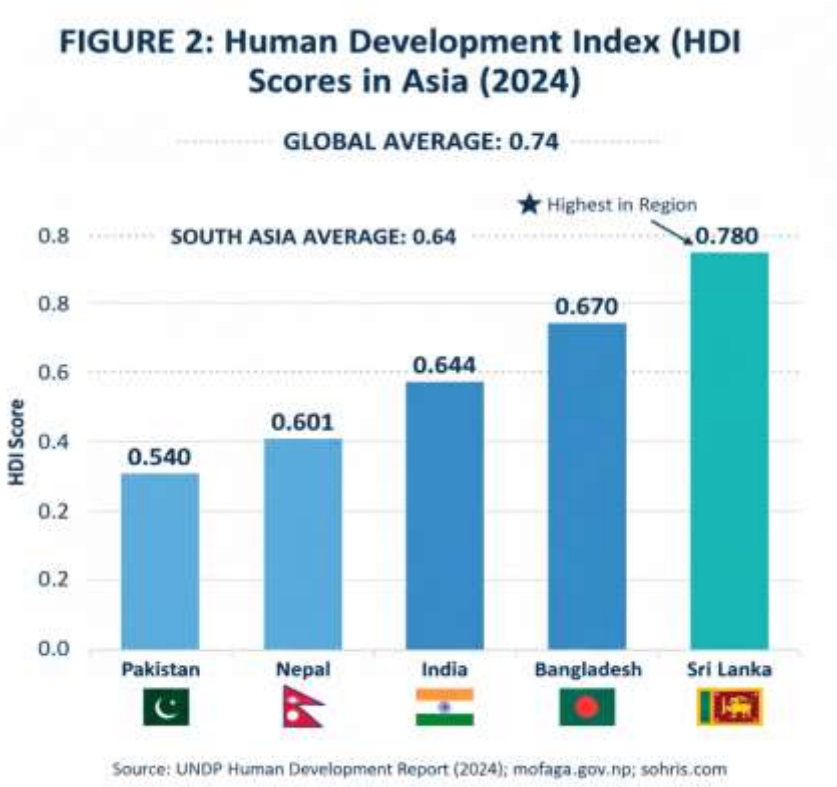
Afghanistan	162	9	21	–2.40

Incidentally, this data is available at Transparency International 2024, Freedom House 2024, and World Bank WGI 2024.

The efficiency of governance in this sample is very highly correlated with HDI (r 0.68) indicating that the stronger the institutions the better the human development outcome.

4.4.2 Human rights and civil liberties.

All the South Asian nations, with the exception of Bhutan, are described as Free or Partly Free by Freedom House (2024). Press freedom, civic rights and women rights erosion causes internal destruction of human security. The case of Afghanistan reversing its policies concerning female education and Pakistan censoring may demonstrate the fact that the political and human security is closely intertwined.



4.5 Social and Human Development.

4.5.1 HDI Dynamics and Health Security.

The average HDI of South Asia with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report (2024) is 0.64 compared to the world average (0.74).

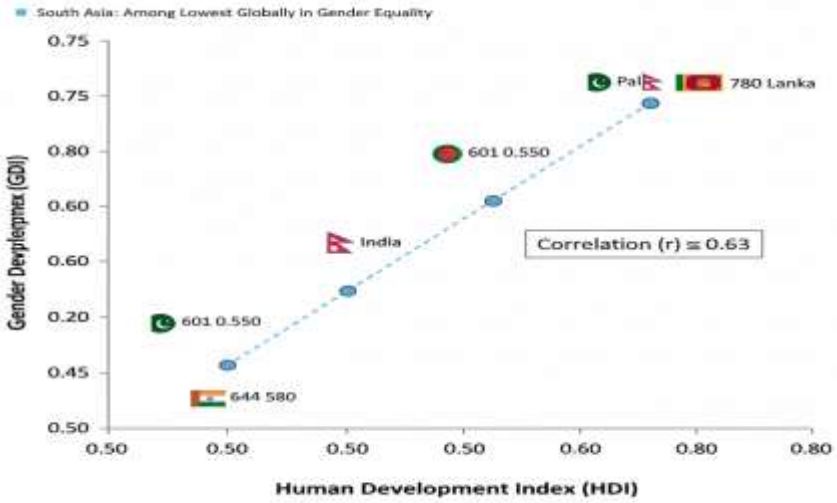
The following figure shows the comparative values of HDI of South Asian states.

There is also under-investment in the health systems: the average level of expenditure on public health in the country is limited to about 2.3 percent of GDP, which is significantly lower than the global average of 5.8 percent (World Bank 2024). The pandemic has revealed the vulnerabilities in the framework: UNICEF (2024) has reported that stunting is observed in one in every three children in South Asia.

4.5.2 Education, Gender Inclusion and Social Empowerment.

Human security pillars include gender equality and level of education. South Asia has been ranked among the lowest in the world according to Global Gender Gap Report (2024). In accordance with the recent research, women education development at 10 per cent is positively linked to growth in GDP at 2 per cent and child mortality rates (Iqbal and Yaseen 2024).

FIGURE 3: Gender Development Index (GDI) vs Human Developmet in South Asia (2024)



Source: UNDP Human Development Report (2024); Global Gender Gap Report (2024)

4.6 Emerging Technological and Cybersecurity Threats

4.6.1 Digital Security and Disinformation

South Asia is a region that has heightened in terms of vulnerability to digital transformation. In India and Pakistan, the number of cyber-incidents increased by over 300 percent in the years 2021-2024 (Palit 2025). Hussain (2024) confirms that the digital gap makes rural populations and the female population especially prone to misinformation and inability to use the digital services.

4.6.2 AI, Surveillance and Privacy

Human security is under new threats due to the emergence of AI and surveillance technologies. Palit (2025) warns that the devolution of tools of governance to the tools of control is bound to occur unless the frameworks of regulatory change. Privacy and freedom of expression, the digital rights have therefore become significant parts of human security in the region.

4.7 Integrated Analysis

These five areas show interchangeable patterns in their results:

1. An economic growth will not suffice to guarantee security because there will be a weak area in the absence of equitable distribution.
2. The environment shocks compound the insecurities, economically and socially; absence of government compounds the destructions.
3. The high HDI and resilience are related to strong institutions and inclusive policies.
4. Long-term security is predetermined by certain social factors (education, gender equity).
5. The emerging threats in the cyber world are posing an extra degree of complexity which demands co-ordination on the regional basis.

In general, South Asia is losing its security with the traditional security agenda of the state military power. The more practical approach is a human-based security system, which takes into consideration development, governance, environment and technology.

4.8 Chapter Summary

The chapter has raised the empirical data of making main thesis of the argument: The human regional security in South Asia is not only multidimensional, however, human regional security should be looked at as unified policy responses. The next chapter Discussion will deliberate on these findings in regards to theoretical (Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, and Human Security) and the implication of theoretical frameworks of the area cooperation and strategy will be deliberated on the next chapter.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The pillars of the human regional security in South Asia are interdependent as the results that have been determined in Chapter 4 show.

Systemic insecurities that lack national borders are the lack of social mobility, environment destruction, and bad governance.

This chapter justifies those findings on the basis of the four major theoretical approaches, that is, Realism, Liberal Institutionalism, Constructivism and the Human Security Paradigm.

The lenses provide different explanatory concepts, however the combination of the two is most helpful to explain the based complex and hybrid security environment in the region.

5.2 The realism as a survival and the traditional insecurity.

Realism continues to be entrenched in the South Asian politics courtesy of Morgenthau (1948) and Waltz (1979).

States worry about the national sovereignty and military strength rather than cooperative or developing security.

This can be observed in the fact that the region is incurring a huge cost in defense that at an average of 2.3 percent of GDP (SIPRI 2025) and in the repetitiveness of the security dilemmas in the region the most notable would be India-Pakistan rivalry and the India-China border tensions.

The flaw of this realist approach is particularly shown in the results of this research and in particular in the negative correlation between human development and defense spending ($r = -0.47$).

Though Realism explains the causes of the competition of states, it fails to provide an explanation of the non-military threats that erode the ability of the state within the country; these are poverty, disease, or environmental destruction.

In this case, the South Asian policies are still dominated by Realism which has outlived its role as an independent explanation factor in human security.

5.3 Liberal Institutionalism: Cooperation failure and vow.

Liberal Institutionalism that is advocated by Keohane and Nye (1989) dwells on the prospects of regional cooperation among institutions.

There are organizations such as SAARC, BIMSTEC and SASEC that are used to spur growth in collective economic and human development in South Asia.

However, the study results indicate that there has been inconsistency and fragmentation in institutional performance.

An example is SAARC, which has been in paralysis since 2016 due to bilateral tensions and BIMSTEC has not done any more than trade and connectivity (Acharya 2024).

The possibility that is missed in regional cooperation is environmental crisis.

South Asian countries have never harmonized their disaster management or climatic adaptation responses, yet they are equally weak, and these remain on the bilateral aid and international donors levels (UNESCAP 2024).

This institutional incoherence validates the fact, implied by Kapur (2023), that South Asia is an integration-averse region, which was brought about by political mistrust and bad governance.

Therefore, whereas Liberal Institutionalism provides a standard system of regional cooperation, it is stricter in terms of an even stronger political incentive and disincentive of multilateral processes.

5.4 Constructivism: Identity, Perception and Security Dilemma.

The consistency of insecurity of South Asia according to the social construct of identity, perception and historical memory is a valuable point of view offered by constructivism introduced by Wendt (1992).

Regional politics depend on factors that do not relate to material power and are comprised of ideational power such as nationalism, religious identity and perceived threat.

India Pakistan conflict is one such case of a conflict that has been persisting not necessarily because of military might only but as a result of the ingrained belief systems of distrust and ideological face down.

Similarly, politics of identity and the conceptualization of legitimacy control internal instability in Afghanistan and its relationships with the neighbors (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2023).

The media suppressions and diminishing of the civil liberty that was manifested in the study also demonstrate how the states utilize the matter of identity to maintain the political hegemony.

All these socially constructed divisions contribute to the implementation of the security dilemma as later expounded by Jervis (1978), and the states are seen to be on the defensive but viewed as aggressive thereby creating mistrust which creates more mistrust.

The constructivism thus contributes to the analysis with the demonstration of the fact that the material reforms could not be enough to maintain the peace without re-construction of the regional narratives.

The article addresses the topic of human security that is a new south Asian paradigm.

In its Human Security paradigm, UNDP (1994) alters the approach and does not consider the state but the individual and instead emphasizes the fear, want, and indignity protection.

This perception is upheld by empirical results of this paper that indicate the interdependence of economic, environmental and governance insecurities, as the most appropriate approach to South Asia.

The fact that the equality of the gender and the human development (r=0.68) and the role that the quality of the governance plays in the social welfare are in a positive relationship speaks volumes towards the fact that the people-oriented policies are essential towards stability.

To illustrate the point, the case of the education and health development in Bangladesh can be provided as an example, showing that human development can be reduced despite the economic constraints (UNDP 2024).

Other components of the Human Security approach that responds to the new generation of non-traditional threats are climate resilience and digital governance, including cyberattacks or pandemics.

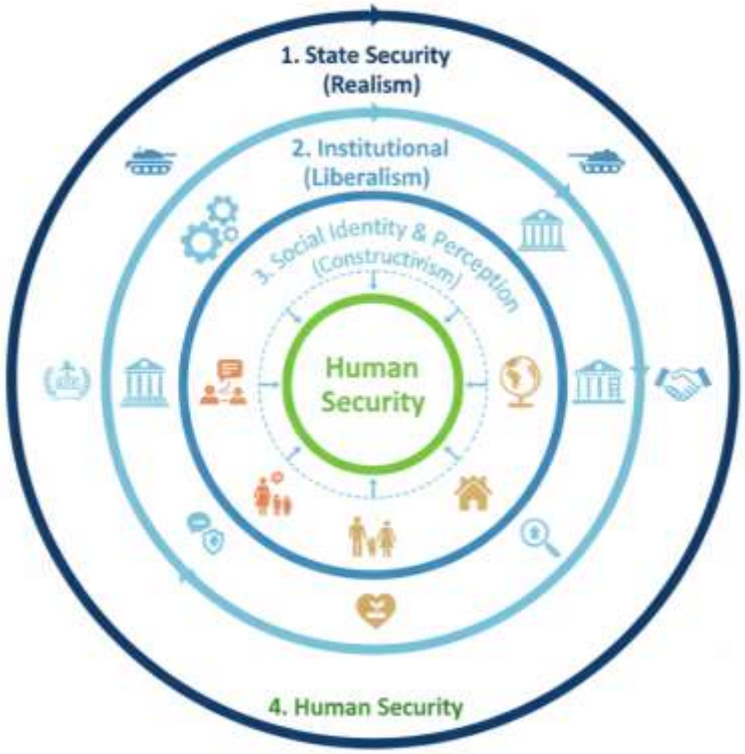
A lack of emancipation is security in itself according to Booth (2023).

The route towards stability of South Asia must be a transformation between the militaristic nationalism and coordinated human resilience where people and not the boundaries are the referent of security.

5.6 Integrative Theoretical Model.

Based on the synthesis of these structures; the present paper recommends an Integrated Human Regional Security Model (IHRS) of South Asia. The theoretical side of this model considers security as a continuum where there is presence of conventional state security (Realism) and collaborative security (Liberalism), identification security (Constructivism) and individual security (Human Security).

FIGURE 4: Integrated Human Regional Security Model (IHRS) for South Asia



Source: Proposed Model based on synthesic on Realism, Liberam, Constructism, and Human Security frameworks.
Conceptal Diagram: Security as a Contninum for Sustainable Regional Peace

The model is in the form of four circles:

1. The outermost of them is the State Security (Realism).
2. The second tier is a pointer of the Institutional Cooperation (Liberalism).
3. The third one is Social Identity and Perception (Constructivism).
4. Human Security- the ultimate objective will make up the central part, uniting all the dimensions.

This level approach demonstrates the fact that regional peace cannot be generated through non-congruency among these levels.

The sustainable security needs military stability, institutional trust, social harmony and human welfare to collaborate.

5.7 Discussion Summary

As it has been observed during the theoretical discussion, no single framework can be used to explain the security paradox in South Asia in detail. Realism: power struggles are explained, but not the social or social aspect; Liberalism: cooperation but not enforcement; Constructivism: the psychology of war and not the government; Human Security: and all that, without a way to create political momentum. Thus, the suggested new Integrated Human Regional Security Model offers a compromise between these perceptions into a single instrument to the state legitimacy and regional peace where human well-being is the fundamental component.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The paper has discussed the concept of the Human regional security in South Asia in a multidimensional and a mixed method approach.

The findings lend credence to the argument that even though the region has been a place where economic growth and technological transformation has been realized, it has continued to be plagued with structural imbalance, bad governance, environmental degradation, and social marginalization.

These quantitative results, such as the fact that the negative correlation is noted between the spending on the defense and human development, and positive correlation between social progress and gender equality proves that the idea of human security is not an ideal concept but necessity based on the facts.

This carelessness to human well-being has preached cycles of stability, and this is a testament to the fact that security must vary beyond the state.

Theoretically, the research shows that the classical Realist standpoints are no longer useful to offer the insight of the South Asian dynamics.

Instead, Human Security paradigm that has both an institutional and constructivist approach provides more detailed view of peace and strength in the region.

6.2 Recommendations

Various policy and institutional recommendations are provided as a form of improving human regional security in South Asia.

In terms of collaboration in the regional policy, South Asian countries should rekindle SAARC and BIMSTEC by establishing Human Security Task Force which is dedicated to poverty eradication, education and calamity control. There should also be collaborative environmental surveillance systems to effectively manage the trans-boundary water resources and enhance the strategies of climate adaptation at the region as well.

In the area of governance and institutional reform, the governments should improve the accountability and transparency systems in an effort to reduce corruption and increase the efficiency of the government. There should be more digital governance systems and an issue of data protection and cyber defense that should be addressed where the technological advancement should not violate civil liberties.

Gender equality should be recognized as a national security factor in the case of gender and education empowerment. States are also being pushed to at least allocate five percent of their present budgets to be allocated towards women education, health and employment. Additionally, education trade in the area may be urgent in increasing cultural perceptiveness and reducing the ideological divide.

In order to attain climate and environmental resilience, South Asian countries should consider the adoption of collective adaptation funds to support the populations who face the disaster and the incorporation of the resilience to climate into the national development agendas. Close collaboration between the regions in renewable energy technologies particularly the solar power and hydro power would also lead to the depreciation of the dependency on fossil fuels as well as enhance interdependence among the economies and sustainable development.

And the last topic, which is related to the aspect of human security governance, South Asian countries are suggested to develop a South Asian Human Security Index with the UNDP. This kind of index would be used as a yardstick in the region to track multidimensional development in terms of indicators of the economy, environment and social development and make policy based decisions that are viable in promoting long term peace and stability in the region.

6.3 Future Research Directions

The research offers the new research possibilities.

Primary fieldwork can be applied in the future research to gather data in regard to the community level of insecurity perception particularly among women, migrants, and communities that have been affected by climatic changes.

Quantitative modelling of panel data would assist in further research of causal relationships between the quality of governance and outcomes of security.

Finally, comparison of cross-regional studies with those of other regions of the world, including the ASEAN or Sub-Saharan Africa, might provide some

indications of cross-regional strategies towards cooperative security.

6.4 Final Reflection

The overall conclusion of this paper is that human security is morally and strategically necessary.

Stability of the South Asia will not be founded on alliance and weapons, but on the ability of the country to see that individuals are not established to structural violence, economic deprivation and environmental calamity.

It is required that the paradigm shift should be made, the competitive sovereignty to the shared human responsibility.

South Asia is not a peaceful country but a resilient and sustainable country and its only way of transforming this is by investing in education, equality and sustainability.

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