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www

✓ 13) Achievements And Role of SAARC Dr. R. K. Kale, Beed. (M.S.)	54
14) Dynamics of the Indian Public Policy Dr. Shyamsundar P. Waghmare, Parbhani (MS)	58
15) ROLE OF TEACHERS TO IMPROVE STUDENT'S COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH.... DR. ANURADHA TIWARI, Lucknow (UP)	61
16) Treatment of Love & Betrayal in the plays of Shakespeare Dr. S. K. Singh, Desaijanj, Gadchiroli	66
17) A Correlation study between Emotional intelligence & creative Teaching among..... Dr Sanjay Shalakrao Shinde	70
18) CONSIDERING SCIENCE MOLECULES IN SCI-FI & SCI-FI FILM FOCUSING "SURROGATE".... Mostafizur Molla	72
19) Attitude and Perception of Indian teenagers on the vulgar content of Pop Songs Dr. Nagraj Halliyavar, Dharwad, Karnataka	77
20) SELF EFFICACY AS THE PREDICTOR OF ACHIEVEMENT Dr. Naresh Kumar, Moga, Punjab	81
21) Influence of gender and locale on Sportsman Personality among College Students Dr. Nimbalkar M.R., Baramati (Pune)	88
22) A STUDY ON CUSTOMER AWARENESS & SATISFACTION LEVEL TOWARDS ATM SERVICES OF ICICI BANK Archana Patil	91
23) Effect of Yoga exercises on Attitude towards participation In sports Dr. Savita B. Phalke, NigdiPradhikaran, Pune	95
24) Information Literacy Skills of the Research Scholars in the University of Burdwan : Mr. Debabrata Ray, Burdwan, West Bengal	100
25) Socio economic conditions of the beneficiaries of Basava Vasathi Yojana in..... Mamatha S.—Dr. Y. Gangadhara Reddy, Tamilnadu	108

Achievements And Role of SAARC

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Introduction:

The lingering legacies of South Asia's colonial past; uncontrolled human and other movements across sensitive, porous unsettled borders; ethnic and religious differences; intra-regional economic disparities and resultant bilateral disputes were some factors delaying establishment of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) until 1985. Its Charter ruled out "bilateral and contentious issues" from its agenda as a protective clause. The present scenario world is witnessing changes in terms of global and regional fundamentals. There is no denying the fact that the importance of peace and development through effective regional and global integration has become an important factor of these times.¹ The strength and development of the states today is not measured in terms of military and defence capacity but in terms of how a state is able to promote trade relations, investments and economic integration within the region and globally as well.² We see the impact of this importance of regionalism in South Asian in the emergence of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional cooperation). Wealth of human and material resources coupled with other common features like geographical proximity, historical backgrounds, and commonality of social and political norms of development led towards the formation of South Asian grouping known as SAARC. It is important

to note that the main idea behind SAARC formation was the promotion of political, economic and social interaction, common vision for using region's potential and interdependence to counter threats. Though unsuccessful in some fields, the overall assessment of SAARC performance shows not very negative trends but emphasizes the need to collaborate further by resolving all outstanding disputes among the member countries and to create understanding on stable basis. It is important to assess the origin, evolution and achievements of SAARC.

Establishment of SAARC

SAARC was not established overnight. It took almost five years from the first floating of an idea of such an organization in 1980 by Zia-ur-Rehman; the then President of Bangladesh. Preparatory meetings were held before the first Summit in Dhaka in 1985. In May 1980, the formal letter was sent to all the South Asian countries in which the formation of a regional group (SAARC) was proposed. On 25 November 1980, a document by the name of "Bangladesh Working Paper" was sent to all countries of the region. The Foreign Secretaries met in 1981 in Colombo Sri-Lanka and Foreign Ministers met in 1983 in New Delhi and identified areas of regional cooperation. The Heads of States and governments, at the Dhaka Summit, expressed their determination to cooperate regionally in the spirit of friendship, trust and mutual Understanding (Umar,1988; "SAARC areas of cooperation" 2014). This declaration is known as "Dhaka Declaration" and was issued on December 08, 1985. The Charter of SAARC was adopted and principles of cooperation were finalized ("Dhaka Declaration" 1985). Its seven founding members were Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh while Afghanistan joined the organization in 2007.³ Observer states include USA, Australia, China, Japan, South Korea, Myanmar, Mauritius, Iran and European Union. Meetings of heads of state are usually held on annual basis and