

IMPACTS OF GEOPOLITICS OF INDIA ON ITS NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

India is the largest democracy in the world and is home to diverse cultures, traditions and political entities. Due to its geographical location, India's geopolitics has a considerable influence, especially towards its neighbouring nations, including China, Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh. This study takes a critical approach to understand both the positive and negative impacts of the geopolitics of India on its neighbouring nations. It identifies how to take complete advantage of the benefits while mitigating the challenges and risks. Overall, the study reveals that the geopolitics of India has both positive and negative impacts on its neighbouring countries. Therefore India must leverage its soft power to have a positive relationship with its neighbours. At the same time, it must use its hard control strategically and collaboratively to deal with the root causes of issues such as territorial disputes and terrorism. India has so much to offer to its neighbour and the world. Therefore, India needs to realise its potential and develop strategic relationships that are not only based on personal goals but also on developing an atmosphere of collaboration and cooperation for mutual growth.

Keywords: Territorial disputes, regional hegemony India, foreign policy, foreign relations, Non-Aligned Movement, Geopolitical code.

INTRODUCTION

Lord Curzon of Kedleston, former Viceroy of India during the British Raj, stated that in modern conditions, India must be the greatest power in the Asian continent; only then will it continue to have a dominant presence in the global context. For this, India must aim to take full advantage of its geographic location. The central regions of India have magnificent resources

and a multitude of men with great harbours for trading. India should continue exercising a predominant presence over the Persian and Afghani front on its west front. Further, India must be able to prohibit any Tibetan rival towards the north, while in its northeastern regions, it can pressure China. In the water, India has the potential to command the routes to Australia and the China Sea (Menon, 2021). This suggests India's long-term history and incredible potential for geopolitical influence.

Considering the growth of developing nations, the influence of India due to its geopolitics has changed over time. India lies between the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, China, Central Asia and the Middle East. Therefore, the country can use its position strategically to influence these neighbouring regions by projecting power towards them. Kumar (2020) also suggests that India can also take advantage of its central location in the Indian Ocean by becoming a hub for trade, communication and transportation. Patnaik (2016) argues that India needs to take full advantage of its position. The author further suggested that India has great reserves of human resources, which can help India become that hub. By taking advantage of its geographical location, India projects power to its neighbouring countries and improves its prestige and security among them. This also fosters a domestic climate of strategic thinking and enhances its overall presence in the Asian Continent.

According to Menon (2021), India has such strong influence for several reasons, such as its nuclear capabilities, strategic location, fast-growing economy and large population. Therefore, developing a critical understanding of its geo-political influence is crucial. Kumar (2020) stated that India is currently one of the major players in global and regional politics. Therefore it can significantly influence international relations. Further, understanding its potential for geopolitical influence can help resolve its disputes and welcome investments and business from around the world. This can also enhance regional security and stability for local communities (Patnaik, 2016). As a fast-developing economy, India has a growing economic influence, thus providing excellent opportunities for collaboration and cooperation in various sectors (Turner, 2016). Therefore, it will be interesting to see how India can take full benefit of its geopolitical influence and how likely India is to shape the emerging global order, mainly in terms of shifting power dynamics; and how well it performs in other areas such as pandemics and climate change.

Aim of the study

This research aims to identify ways India's geopolitics affects its neighbouring countries, considering the growth of its own and other developing nations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Afgun & Qureshi (2023), Many factors, such as historical legacies, strategic concerns, economic interests, and regional power dynamics, influence the intricate connections between India and its neighbouring nations. For instance, in the case of China, tensions between the two nations have been exacerbated by India's expanding influence and strategic alliance with the US. China's regional ambitions, particularly in the South China Sea, are regarded as being challenged by India's growing military capabilities and presence in the Indo-Pacific area. Furthermore, China, which sees Tibet and Taiwan as essential components of its territory, regards India's backing for them as provocative. Periodic border disputes and diplomatic standoffs between the two nations have resulted from these tensions. Similarly, India and Pakistan have had strained relations due to historical and geographical disagreements, particularly on the disputed territory of Kashmir. Rising tensions and military standoffs between the two nations are a result of India's expanding military might and "surgical strikes" on claimed terrorist bases in Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

According to Aryal & Balashanmuganandam (2022), Tensions with India's neighbours have risen as a result of the country's expanding economic and military might. India's efforts to consolidate its power in the region, particularly in relation to border conflicts, have increased security worries for other nations. At the same time, hard power projection is important to maintain the nation's integrity and the security of its people from international threats such as terrorism. The author contends that greater attention also needs to be paid to understanding how India can settle its long-standing problems with its neighbours using its soft power. To ensure peace and development in the area, the author contends that India needs to adopt more collaborative and cooperative policies.

According to Menon (2021), The geopolitical location of India presents numerous possibilities for regional collaboration and integration. The sizeable market, advantageous position, and expanding influence of India offer a base for joint economic and strategic endeavours with its neighbours. The author does acknowledge that historical and political circumstances have contributed to the difficult relationship between India and its neighbours. India's boundaries are a dynamically difficult region, influenced by previous British colonial activities, the partition of India and Pakistan, and the wars fought by the nations. According to the author,

India's policies and actions will determine whether it fosters stability and collaboration with its neighbours or fosters hostility and tensions. In order to solve common issues and advance regional stability, the author highlights the necessity for India to engage in communication and collaboration.

Kumar (2020) states that Tensions with India's neighbours have risen as a result of the country's expanding economic and military might. India's efforts to consolidate its power in the region, particularly in relation to border conflicts, have increased security worries for other nations. The nation's measures for economic and security cooperation with its neighbours have always served as a reminder of its commitment to preserving the balance of power and regional stability. The author also highlighted India's assistance and support for its neighbours, like its counterinsurgency operations in Bhutan or its training initiatives for the National Defense Force of the Maldives. The author says that India should use its "soft power" to keep peace and help the area grow. However, demonstration of hard power is also necessary to strengthen its relationships with the countries it helps and to make sure other countries with negative influences are aware of India's military and arms potential.

Bhatia and Khan (2018), in their article *India's Neighborhood Policy: A Critical Assessment*, analysed the impact of the geopolitics of India on its neighbouring countries. The geopolitical dominance of India and its hegemonic tendency have already developed tension with neighbouring countries in terms of territorial claims, border disputes and water-sharing policies. India's initiatives to have an influence on domestic policies of its neighbouring countries, such as its initiative for supporting Mizo National front development in Myanmar or its support towards conservation of Tamil tigers in Sri Lanka, have played a role in developing the country's image as a country that doesn't respect in neighbours' sovereignty and interferes with domestic affairs. India's neighbourhood policies have been flawed by the repeated issues of regional disputes and terrorism from its neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan and China. The author suggests that India must take more appeasing initiatives on the basis of mutual understanding and respect, but it can only be possible if the efforts are mutual from its neighbours also. Only then will the country be able to rectify the hidden reasons behind territorial disputes and support regional cooperation and integration in a successful way.

Joshi (2017), who is an expert in international security and geopolitics from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), has stated that India's history has a major influence on the countries neighbouring it. For example, in the early 1970s, India contributed its support for the

independence movement in east Pakistan (now Bangladesh), has caused serious disputes with Pakistan, which led to a humanitarian crisis and long-term hatred between them. The author also noted that the relationship of India with its neighbouring countries is multifaceted, and it is affected by different factors such as territorial disputes, security concerns, cultural ties and trade. Some neighbouring countries see India as a natural leader, while some are stressed about India's apparent hegemonic goals. Talking about its domestic politics, the author stated that India's policies, such as that towards minorities, can also influence its neighbours, especially the ones having a large population of the same group. For example, Muslim countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh have always criticised India's treatment towards its Muslim population.

According to Chaulia (2017), a professor and dean at the Jindal School of International Affairs, the geopolitics of India has a complex impact on its neighbouring countries. According to the author, this complexity is due to the combination of hard and soft power projections, which can lead to both desired and undesired results. Talking about the soft power, the soft power of India, such as its economic and cultural relations, can bring a positive influence on its neighbouring countries. The cultural exports such as Indian cuisine, Bollywood films and artists who frequently travel between India and Pakistan are very popular and help in bridging the cultural gap between the local communities of the two countries. Talking about India's hard power, India's military activities can have a negative impact on its relations. For example, in the 1980s, India's military intervention in Sri Lanka was accused of worsening the ongoing civil war and instances of abuse of human rights. Pakistan's diplomats and military also criticised India's surgical strike on Pakistan's land. The dispute between India, Pakistan and China is ongoing due to repeated territorial breaches and terrorism.

Pant (2017), in his study "India's Neighborhood Policy: Is It Working?" explored the impact of India's geopolitics on its neighbouring nations and stated that the country's foreign policies have a stabilising effect, especially in context with China's repeated illegal infiltration in India territories. Also, India's economic engagement with other countries has always been effective in promoting regional integration and economic development. For example, India has constructed numerous highways and rail links to improve its connectivity with neighbours. Overall, the author concluded that India's efforts to reinforce its terms and relations with its neighbouring countries, especially through its soft power, have effectively created a power balance in several regions and have prevented China's domination. However, the author also highlighted the various challenges faced by the country that shape its neighbourhood policies.

The formation of such policies that only support cross-border cooperation and development has always been adversely affected by terrorism, political instability and border disputes.

Tellis (2016), a renowned strategist and scholar, stated that it is critical to understand India's operations in a geopolitical context and how it affects the country's strategic behaviour and choices towards its neighbours. Various factors determine India's geopolitical position. First, India is situated on the links between major strategic regions, such as Southeast Asia, East Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East. Therefore, this provides a special view and understanding of regional and global affairs and significantly affects these regions' power distribution. Second is India's strategic initiatives considering its history with British colonisation and the current regional disputes with China and Pakistan. Such issues have made India take necessary actions to maintain the integrity of its territory, such as asserting its local and global influence and securing its borders. Third is the country's geopolitical position, which is also defined by its demographic and economic potential. The country currently has a population of 1.4 billion and a fast-growing economy, which makes India an emerging global power. This gives India the necessary capabilities and resources to develop more dominant foreign policies and a big role in shaping global security and governance.

THE NEED FOR A NUANCED AND BALANCED APPROACH WHILE DEVELOPING FOREIGN POLICIES

The neighbours of India are Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, China and Pakistan. They all have their geopolitical interests and objectives. For example, China aims to become a globally dominant power and therefore makes efforts to expand its influence on its border with India through Road and belts initiatives, such as CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) (Ahmad and Singh, 2017). On the other hand, Pakistan aims to develop policies that support terrorism and wants to destabilise India's security and safety. India's borders are also highly vulnerable to many non-traditional security challenges, such as natural disasters, terrorism and transnational crimes.

India is home to a wide range of cultures, traditions, religions and political systems. India's neighbours greatly influence its foreign policies and strategic interests. Therefore, India plays a major role in addressing these challenges, and it must take a collaborative approach with its neighbours to deal with them. For example, India has always played a big role in helping its neighbouring countries during the humanitarian crisis and disaster relief, such as Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh (Carnegie and Gaikwad, 2022). Such efforts can go a long way in developing

trust and goodwill with these regions. India must Promote regional connectivity and economic integration through programmes like trade liberalisation, investment promotion, and infrastructure building (Smith, 2012). The Indian Government must be conscious of all the opportunities and related challenges presented by collaborating with its neighbours. These neighbours are also some of the fastest-growing economies in the world and, therefore, vital trading partners and economic development partners shortly. While drafting economic policies, India must consider that while planning for collaboration with its neighbours, certain issues in these neighbouring countries, such as economic volatility and instability, can affect India's growth also.

LEVERAGING UPON SOFT POWER FOR STRONGER ECONOMIC TIES WITH ITS NEIGHBOURS

India has long been renowned for its soft power, or the ability to draw people in through its ideals, culture, and appeal. The people of the neighbouring nations have always admired India's rich history and diversified culture. By leveraging its soft power, India can promote Indian culture, music, dance, and art forms abroad; India can host cultural festivals, exhibitions, and other events. Trade and investment can be promoted as well as interpersonal relationships can be strengthened. India can also encourage cultural diplomacy (Ahmad and Singh, 2017). Due to its rich cultural heritage, India can help foster international goodwill and increase tourism by using cultural diplomacy. Ayurveda and Yoga are two of India's well-known ancient medical techniques. India can use its soft power to encourage these behaviours among its neighbours. India can establish Ayurveda and Yoga centres in various nations and provide instruction and training to the residents of such nations. This could enhance India's reputation and encourage wellness travel.

India can conduct educational programs to support literacy rates in neighbouring nations. The country may use its soft power to give its surrounding nations' students access to education and training. India can also provide scholarships for students from its neighbours to study there, as well as technical training and capacity-building initiatives. India's film and entertainment industry has also long been a favourite within the nations around it. This affinity can be promoted in these nations using India's soft power (Kaura, 2016). India is required to Refrain from being pushy and taking unilateral activities that can cause conflict and instability in the area and take a more supportive and peace-making diplomatic stance, for which promoting its entertainment industry of international relationship building can be very beneficial

(Bhattacharya, 2019). India may promote Indian movies, music, and entertainment in these nations by organising cultural events like film festivals. This can foster economic links and people-to-people contacts.

NEED TO ENGAGE IN BOTH COMPETITION AND COOPERATION WITH ITS NEIGHBOURS

India must compete and cooperate with its neighbours to maintain its security and prosperity as a regional force. While competition is vital to protect India's interests and advance its strategic objectives, collaboration is required to develop mutual trust, maintain regional stability, and tackle shared difficulties. India should build its interactions with its neighbours on a nuanced strategy that strikes a balance between the two. India's neighbours provide security risks, including China's assertive border actions and Pakistan's financial backing for terrorist organisations. India's interaction with its neighbours must include competition, particularly when it comes to security (Kaura, 2016). India must contend with these nations to maintain its geographical integrity, defend its security interests, and affirm its status as a regional power. To tackle the security concerns posed by its neighbours, India must strengthen its military capabilities, create a strategic infrastructure, and form alliances with like-minded nations.

Cooperation is also crucial to fostering stability and addressing shared difficulties in the region. India and its neighbours face similar economic, social, and environmental issues. Poverty, illness, natural catastrophes, and climate change are a few of these issues. India can overcome these obstacles by collaborating closely with its neighbours and utilising their resources and experience. This will develop a more open-minded, collaborative strategy for handling regional issues that take into account the interests and worries of all the region's nations (Abraham, 2014). India can work with its neighbours to develop regional connectivity, encourage commerce and investment, and construct infrastructure (Chacko, 2016). India can also work together with neighbouring countries to deal with non-traditional security issues such as cybercrimes and illegal border breaches.

IMPACT OF PERCEPTION OF INDIA DUE TO ITS PROJECTION OF POWER

India's attempts to position itself as a regional power have fostered a sense of dominance and mistrust among its neighbours. India currently holds a dominant position in the region due to

its size, population, economy, and military prowess. India has followed a strategy of strategic engagement with its neighbours, which involves enhancing its military prowess, creating strategic infrastructure, and forming alliances with nations that share its views (Chacko, 2016). Its neighbours are now worried about Indian dominance and expansionism as a result of this approach. Historical and territorial disagreements have harmed India's relationships with its neighbours. India frequently engages with its neighbours on a transactional basis, motivated more by strategic considerations than by a sense of mutual respect and shared values. India's endeavours to encourage regional connection and integration have been seen by its neighbours as measures to increase its power and hegemony in the area (Aliberti, 2018).

India's domestic politics have also had an impact on how it interacts with its neighbours. Due to domestic conflicts and political instability, India's neighbours need to know its aims and legitimacy. India's neighbours have frequently charged that India interferes with their domestic affairs and backs separatist movements. The result has been a need for more confidence and trust among India's neighbours. India can take part in discussions and talks with its neighbours to resolve issues, including security, border conflicts, and regional stability (Dodds, 2014). India must interact with its neighbours in a way that respects their territorial integrity and sovereignty and is based on shared principles (Carnegie and Gaikwad, 2022). India must communicate and negotiate with its neighbours to resolve their geographical and historical differences. India must encourage interpersonal interactions and cultural diplomacy to foster mutual respect and understanding among its neighbours.

ROLE OF INDIA'S SECURITY AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH ITS NEIGHBOURS

India's collaboration has helped the peace and power balance in the area with its neighbours on security issues. India and its neighbours have collaborated on bilateral and international defence projects, including joint military drills, sharing intelligence, and efforts towards countering terrorism. India has also helped its neighbours improve their defence capability by offering military training and support (Aliberti, 2018). This has aided in fostering neighbourly trust and confidence as well as regional security. India's interactions with its neighbours have also assisted in balancing the region's impact of outside forces. India has collaborated closely with similar-minded nations like Japan, the US, and Australia to advance regional stability and reduce China's dominance in the area. Throughout the area, India's strategic alliances with these nations have aided in promoting a balance of power and preventing the rise of any dominant

force. Further, these efforts can be strengthened by building trust and mutual understanding among neighbouring countries through diplomatic initiatives, people-to-people exchanges, and regional cooperation to foster a more stable and prosperous region (Sempa, 2017). Economic cooperation initiatives from India have been essential in promoting the region's balance of power and stability via programs like the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. India has also sought to integrate economically and link with its neighbours (BIMSTEC) (Aliberti, 2018). India has also put money into projects to connect and improve infrastructure in the countries around it. This has helped the region's economy stay stable and grow.

DISCUSSION

Despite the number of research on the impact of the geopolitical location of India on its neighbouring countries, there are still several gaps in the existing studies. First is the need for a more toned and critical analysis of India's relations with its neighbours, mainly with China and Pakistan. Second is the need for more research on the role of India's soft power, its movement in influencing its geopolitics image and cultural diplomacy. Third is the need for comprehensive studies on the country's strategic relations with other countries, mainly Russia and the US. Fourth is the need for more studies on the impact of the geopolitics of India on global governance and upcoming terms of international order. Kumar (2020) suggests there is also a need for more studies on how domestic factors of India, such as major internal powers, public opinion and domestic politics, affect its international policies.

CONCLUSION

Given the complexity and diversity of India's impact on its neighbours, the country must take a nuanced and fair stance in the area. India can encourage positive change in the region, enhance regional integration, and promote stability by utilising its soft power and forging greater economic links. India must take into account the intricate geopolitical dynamics of the area when formulating its foreign policies. According to the study's findings, India's geopolitical situation presents both opportunities and difficulties. India's strategic position and rising power present huge hazards and problems and significant potential for regional and global security. India needs a clear and cohesive strategic vision, effective diplomacy, and the ability to cooperate and compete with other superpowers in order to overcome these obstacles. By achieving this, India can successfully balance its obligations and interests as a rising global force.

Every author in the literature study recommended that India take a more inclusive and collaborative approach to its neighbourhood policy to promote trust and improve regional security and development. India's hegemonic behaviour and geopolitical dominance have led to tensions between it and its smaller neighbours. Indian efforts to position itself as a regional force, according to the authors, have caused a sense of dominance and a lack of trust among its neighbours. India can resolve its neighbours' worries, promote collaboration and mutual trust, and avoid actions that might escalate regional tensions and conflicts to keep their trust. India can contribute positively to fostering regional stability and prosperity by doing this.

The study also clarified the advantages and disadvantages of its exercise of power. While India's security and economic cooperation with its neighbours can improve relations with those nations, its efforts to counteract China's influence in the region necessitate the use of force. Its geopolitical influence in the area stabilises India's neighbours. India's security and economic cooperation with its neighbours have aided in promoting regional stability and the balance of power, especially in light of China's growing prominence. Finally, India has a great deal of opportunity to use its soft power to forge closer economic relationships with its neighbours. India can develop a positive image of itself and encourage people-to-people relationships, which can result in stronger economic ties by boosting cultural diplomacy, education and training, health and wellness, and entertainment.

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