



# “Current Scenario of India’s International Relations in Context with Its Foreign Policy”

## Authors

**SNEHA PANDIT JADHAV**

PhD Research Student  
Department of Economics  
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar  
Marathwada University,  
Aurangabad - 431004

**MR. NIKHIL N. JOGDAND**

M.Sc. Population Studies  
International Institute for Population Sciences  
Mumbai, Maharashtra.

**HARSHA KAILASH JADHAV**

Student  
Department of Social Work  
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar  
Marathwada University,  
Aurangabad – 431005

## Abstract:

*Foreign Policy plays a significant role in strengthening ties between the countries across the world. It is indeed crucial to set a platform for enhancing effective trade and investment for the development of any nation. India is emerging as a mega power in the era of increasing globalisation which is a remarkable phenomenon.*

*Due to the geographical contiguity, abundance of natural and human resources; India can play its role as a ‘Big Brother’ to help promoting economic cooperation among South Asian countries. For healthy, nurturing & diplomatic relations; strategic & goal driven foreign policy needs to develop in order to achieve the peace, progress & betterment of the nation as well as neighbouring countries.*

*The year 2021 deals with the bunch of challenges and opportunities in order to seek foreign policy objectives. Therefore, the present paper tries to envisage India’s current foreign policy that how the recent government tries to makes effective strides to foster strong ties among South Asian Countries during pandemic. The study also throws light on India’s relations with South Asian Countries. It also talks about the current challenges and opportunities in pursuit of fulfilling foreign policy objectives.*

**Key words:** Foreign Policy, Regional Cooperation, SAARC, South Asia, International Relations, Covid-19.

## Introduction:

Foreign Policy plays a significant role in strengthening ties between the countries across the world. Development of nations and gradually increasing interactions among them has resulted into the formation of foreign policy in the era of globalisation. It is crucial to form a foreign policy on the basis of set of principles and objectives for having a peaceful international relation for consistent progress of the nation. It is indeed important to set a platform for enhancing effective trade and investment for the economic development of a nation.

During Indira Gandhi Regime, India continued with policy of good neighbour ness and bilateral cooperation towards South Asian Countries. But India's explosion of nuclear device in 1974 & 'annexation' of Sikkim to the union of India in 1975 gave rise to a perception among smaller countries in the region. (Jain, 2005)

India is emerging as a mega power in the era of increasing globalisation which is a remarkable phenomenon. Due to the geographical contiguity and abundance of natural and human resources; India can play a role of 'Big Brother' to help promoting economic cooperation among South Asian countries. For healthy, nurturing & diplomatic relations; strategic & goal driven foreign policy needs to develop in order to achieve the peace, progress & betterment of the nation as well as neighbouring countries.

Foreign policy of any country has multi-faceted background. Policies are formed in accordance with the need of the situation which varies nation to nation. Therefore, national interest is the keen objectives of the foreign policy. India's foreign policy has expanded in a great extent since its independence. Emergence of India as a great superpower is the reason for high expectations of change in the formation of policy that projects its interests and future prospects.

Over the last decade, India has not only expanded its land, sea and military capability as befitting the world's largest arm importer, but has also sought to project strength beyond its region. (Sharma, Milkian, 2016). Therefore, defence deals have become an important aspect of India's foreign policy.

The year 2021 deals with the bunch of challenges and opportunities in order to seek foreign policy objectives. In the epoch of fastest growing economies across the globe, it is a requisite before India to shift the balance of power in the region and tackle foreign policy challenges and take the advantage of present opportunities carefully.

## Background of India's Foreign Policy:

The evolution of India's foreign policy has been shaped by its experience in balancing competing interests during the Cold War. This continues to influence contemporary policy debates as India seeks to shape its role in Asia and the world.

Liberal and free economy of world market persuaded numerous nations and also India's diplomacy to facilitate with new governance in order to establish external affairs. India then renounced its former active role in political developments and given priority to encourage international economic cooperation and economic diplomacy too. India's foreign policy during cold war was stuck with the concept of non-alignment which constituted unwillingness to enter into a formal alliance structure. Though, it did not confined India's foreign policy choices, Indian policy makers were extremely conscious about the balance of powers during the cold war period.

The balancing act was reflected at bunch of issues like disarmament, racial discrimination, colonialism and China's UN membership, India was clearly with communist bloc, hence, on major issues of aggression of North Korea, the US military adventurism in Korea etc. India became member of UN as well as Commonwealth and simultaneously followed its independent path of non-alignment and strategic autonomy. (Anand, 2018, pp. 19)

In the era of globalization, India's foreign affairs need to be healthy, diplomatic among all neighbouring countries. "There is an integral relationship between domestic politics and foreign affairs (Behera, 1997)". India's agenda after independence has been towards fostering new relationships with nations to attain peace, stability and cooperation in the arena of international disputes such as the cold war. India's foreign affairs dealt with many categorical changes after independence. India's adoption of new economic policy in 1991 has brought vital changes to the economic system which runs under the liberal initiation of governance across the globe. India opened up its doors to the world as a free market economy. But India's economic development was not at par with the other Asian nations in the 1990s.

Indian military involvement has been denied by both the then prime ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. They both have different visions. Nehru envisioned India as a 'peacemaker' on the other hand I. Gandhi's approach was that of 'security seeker' with the greater focus on the balance of power in South Asia.

While discussing the vagueness of the past of foreign policy, Subrata Mitra argues that "The Gandhian legacy, nostalgia for the halcyon days of Nehru's '*panchsheela*' and most of all, the political anchor of foreign policy in the larger project of nation building, explain the vagueness that distinguish India's foreign policy closer inspection of ground reality reveals clear, effective and determined action that holds the potential to be woven into a coherent doctrine, on the lines of the 'third way' in international politics." (Mitra, 2005)

Nehru's ideas had a lasting impact on the nation's foreign policy. The grand strategy rested upon two pillars that are self-reliance and non-alignment. It is argued that, 'non alignment was far from neutrality. India was active in the movement for disarmament, in decolonization, in the campaign for more equitable international economic development, the UN peace keeping forces etc.' (Gangopadhyay, 2012)

Nehru, architect of India's foreign policy, favoured formation of associations fostering and accelerating interstate cooperation for developmental ends. In this context he said in 1945 that, "Small states of the world tomorrow have no future in store and they are sure to be reduced to the status of satellite states...I stand for a South Asian Federation of India, Iraq, Afghanistan and Burma" (Jain, 2005, pp. 56, 57)

### **India's Relations with other South Asian Countries:**

In the era of globalized diplomacy, India is having many impediments while cooperating with neighbouring Asian countries as well as with global powers too. China is the biggest challenge before India handling the relationship with the super power. India shares its border with four of the SAARC countries viz. Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal. Hence, since mid-2014, priority has been given to the implementation of 'Neighbourhood First' & 'Act East Policy' by the central government of India.

"Neighbourhood first has been an excellent concept, vigorously implemented. It has infused a new drive into our relations with most South Asian and South East Asian Countries, even though Pakistan remains an outlier in this scenario" (Rana, 2018, pp. 21).

The objective of the policy is to improve interactions between countries that are having continuity and proximity with each other. It also comprises Indian Ocean islands to be focused on with the help of the said policy objectives. It is said that technology, connectivity and trade are now known to be the notions of power in the present era. It achieves various goals through a holistic approach to regional foreign policy.

Connectivity is one of the biggest facets of the policy with which India signed a MoU with members of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) for the development in the areas of trade, infrastructure, commercial linkages & transit facilities. This allows member countries to access of free flow of resources, commodities, labour, across the border. In South Asia, India is a largest nation in terms of its size, area, population and natural resources in abundance. Therefore, it is interesting to know the fact that India can emerge as a regional leader in South Asia. It is able to take the initiatives and play a 'big brother'

role, and wants to unfold the hegemony over the smallest countries to help them develop as regional family members. One good example is the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) grouping for energy development.

India's 'Act East' policy is a diplomatic initiative to encourage economic, strategic and cultural relations with the extensive Asia-Pacific region at various levels. 'Look East' policy has been launched at the time when Narasimha Rao was PM in 1992. In the due course of time, when geopolitical and economic circumstances changed, the current government relabelled it as the 'Act East' policy. It represents the proactive role for increasing integration with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) & East Asian Countries. BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical & Economic Cooperation) is the recent involvement of India which has put three basic objectives for the betterment of least developed countries that are connectivity, culture and commerce respectively.

Connectivity includes infrastructure investments like construction of highways & bridges, technology transfer and improvement of ports etc. Promoting tourism & preserving ancient manuscript, heritage sites and artefacts fall under the cultural objective. Strong production networks, regional value chains as well as bilateral trade agreements come under the third objective that is commerce. Least developed countries like Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar & Vietnam (CLMV) have been a focal point for India to look after these least developed countries. India's multi-faceted relations with ASEAN are an outcome of prominent changes in the world's political and economic since 1991. Since 2002, India has annual summits with ASEAN along with China, Japan and Republic of Korea.

The end of the cold war in 1991 brought a major shift in the economic & strategic policies of many countries in Asia. They were supposed to make changes in foreign policy in accordance with the changing purview of in economic and security situation. India's adoption of economic reforms in 1991 can be called as a major shift in its development strategy. So the decisions regarding least developed countries took by India during the early cold war period after the collapse of Soviet Union, there was a urgent requirement for redesigning the foreign policy because old objectives doesn't apply at present as the rapidly changing scenarios around the world.

At present, India's foreign policy formation has confronting various issues and threats i.e. rise of China as a super power, US-China competition in the Asia Pacific region, India's improved and better relations with Africa and the power volatility in the middle east in terms of sustained energy and energy security, integration of relations with south east Asia & Japan dealing with nuclear issues are some challenges before Indian foreign policy which India is tackling peacefully which is the remarkable thing to be considered.

### **Challenges before India regarding Foreign Policy:**

India's foreign policy is based on certain external as well as internal factors. There are certain challenges and opportunities in front of India while pursuing for fulfilling the foreign policy objectives. There are certain challenges and opportunities arose in front of foreign policy makers in India after the end of the cold war.

- **Emergence of China as a Super power:**

China is a major super power that has shown a positive growth during the pandemic. While entire the world is facing economic crisis, China has controlled the problem of Covid-19 virus spread and set the new goals for the year 2021. China is militarily making itself strengthened & striving for dominating the Indo-Pacific Ocean with its pronouncement of launching third aircraft carrier in the year 2021. The relation between India and China are on the verge of lasting peace in the context of crucial breakthrough in the long standing border dispute, it is highly expected confrontation between armed forces of both the nations.



- **Growing Axis between Russia and China:**

India and Russia have gone through several ups and downs in their old bilateral relationship. Russia has been a long standing and time tested partner for India. Russia is prominent about displaying its interest of their matters. After the annexation of Crimea in the year 2014, sanctions are imposed on Russia resulted it's involvement towards China. In this context, it appears that it is an indication that Russia has reduced its interest towards countries like India.

- **India's Enfeebled ties with Neighbour Countries:**

It is a worrisome issue that India is enfeebled its relations with the neighbouring countries. Recently, India is having cheque book diplomacy issue with China. It is a type of diplomacy based on debt carried out in the bilateral relations between countries. India-Bangladesh issue regarding NRC bill and border controversy with Nepal on the release of the new map, India's relations with Pakistan are not cordial and seems bleak. They fought many bloody wars on the issue of Kashmir is still remained constant since independence. These effects of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests are weakened & create complications in order to achieve India's foreign policy objectives.

- **Self-Isolation from two Supranational bodies:**

India is a founding member of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) & Non-aligned Movement (NAM). India adopted Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RECP) which is a mega regional economic agreement being negotiated since 2012 between ASEAN & free trade agreements (FTAs). Goals are set to boost economic growth and equitable economic development, advanced economic cooperation and deepen integration in the region through the RECP. It also aims to cover the trade in goods and services, investment, economic and technical co-operation, intellectual property and dispute resolution. India's hegemonic role & involvement in these organisations will strengthen the associations. The self-imposed isolation is pulling India's aspirations of becoming a global power.

### **Prospects for India's foreign policy initiatives:**

India's stance towards development is human centric driven by respect, diversity & sustainable developments. For India, the most fundamental principle in cooperation is respecting development partners and be guided them by their respective development priorities. India's model for developmental cooperation is comprehensive, involves multiple instruments comprising grant-in-aid, line of credit, capacity building and technical assistance depending upon the priorities of the partner nations. India's development cooperation ranges from commerce to culture, energy to engineering, health to housing, IT to infrastructure, sport to science, disaster to relief and humanitarian assistance to restoration & preservation of cultural and heritage assets.

India's valorous initiatives towards diplomatic endeavour will help improve the relationship with its neighbouring countries viz. Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan etc. Entire the world is recovering from the current pandemic and tries to accelerate the pace of economic growth slowed down during the catastrophic corona virus (Covid-19 Virus). Though the Covid-19 virus has made the whole world upside down, India has a lot more to gain from what we call it as 'Vaccine Diplomacy' with least developed countries and small countries in 2021 by making them vaccine available either at free cost of an affordable prices. Here India can apply its neighbourhood first policy for the betterment of the Neighbouring countries.

Besides this, if we look at the current Sino-Indian relations, India needs an adequate external aid measures. For that India should allow other super powers enter into treaties with it. Continuing support from US, Japan, Australia, European Countries like Germany, France is the most required external aid for India to become a super power in the Indo-Pacific region. India's engagements with US will strengthen the Indo-Pacific strategy as it completely relies on new US administration. India has to build its strategy & defence ties with the US to resolve the trade barriers and visa matters.

As recently, India became the non-permanent member of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the eighth time on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2021 for the period of two years. India will seat among the 15 nations meet on the very powerful horseshoe table. It is a golden opportunity for India to raise all burning global matters like China's belligerent behaviour, from Tibet to Taiwan, Iran-Saudi Rivalry and Refugee crisis between Bangladesh and Myanmar etc. India ought to take the opportunity to resolve problems by put up all global issues in UNSC meets.

### Conclusion:

India is one of the largest democracies in the world. India has constantly supported the policy of peace, fraternity & cordial relations with neighbouring countries. Strategic planning will help growing and developing India's relations with other countries.

China is posing a new confrontation before India. It is again a major challenge for India to keep US as the focal point. Keeping US intact in favour of India will definitely help India fulfilling its foreign policy objectives keenly as US - India relations has become remarkable after the end of cold war. Despite that, in the process of making close relations with super powers, India should consider its neighbouring countries and the least developed nations as well.

Considering the changing realities of international circumstances, it is essential for India to play its role carefully while forming strategies for building foreign policy measures if India wants to come out as a global power.

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