



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

India and East Asia: Strengthening Convergences

Dr. Vijay Chauhan

Assistant Professor

Department of Political Science

Maharana Pratap National College, Mullana (Ambala)

ABSTRACT

India's ties with the East Asia date back to many centuries. Indeed, India's civilizational influence to its east has significantly marked many modern East Asian nations. During the colonial period, India's long established autonomous ties with East Asia were weakened, although many Indians migrated to various other British Asian colonies. India has achieved incremental progress in building political, economic, and even limited security ties to countries in East Asia. India, however, is still not an integral part of the region's international relations or a critical bilateral relationship for Southeast Asia, China, or Japan. India's relationship with East Asia in this way stays the most fragile connection when contrasted with the other major partners. This research exercise examines India's policy towards East Asia.

Introduction:

Contemporary global politics is witnessing lots of structural and operational changes of unprecedented manner, which are affecting different global power centers in general and India's foreign policy in particular. The shift of global politics from Euro-Atlantic to Asia-Pacific and now Indo-Pacific led to the building of a new kind of permutation and combination in international relations.¹ Indian engagement of East Asia in the post-Cold War era has, indeed, assumed significant proportions and remains a top foreign policy priority for the Indian leadership. India is now a full dialogue partner of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) since 1995, a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the regional security forum since 1996 and a founder member of the East Asian Summit launched in December 2005. India is also a summit partner of ASEAN on par with China, Japan and South Korea since 2002. Over the years, India has also come to have extensive economic and trade linkages with various countries in the region. In the security arena, India is regularly conducting large scale joint naval exercises off the coast of the Bay of Bengal with the navies of

the US, Japan, Australia and Singapore. India, also very recently began joint military counterterrorism exercises with China, termed historic as it is first of its kind after the 1962 Sino-Indian border war.²

India has, indeed, emerged from the margins, at the end of the 1980s, to become one of the key pillars and players in East Asia at the beginning of the 21st century. In fact, a leading Indian strategic analyst pointed, as early as 1998, that India's growing links with this region 'seems to be pushing India in the direction of an East Asian identity'.

Historical Perspective:

India's influence on East and Southeast Asia, as well as some of the Asia-Pacific region, has been extensive. Hinduism and Buddhism spread throughout Asia from India, initially along trading routes. While Hinduism found its way across much of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, Buddhism reached Japan and Vietnam through China and Korea, and also flourished in countries closer to India, such as Burma, Cambodia, and Thailand. As Indian trading patterns expanded and religious ties spread throughout Asia so did cultural elements including language (particularly Sanskrit), social customs, styles of art, and architecture. Great Indianized kingdoms arose over the centuries throughout Asia and particularly Southeast Asia. However, aside from the solitary instance of invasion of the Srivijaya kingdom in Sumatra by the Indian King, Rajendra Chola, in the eleventh century AD to protect Indian commercial interests, India did not show any imperialist ambitions in Southeast Asia.³ As one non-Indian, former Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew, noted, 'Historically India has had an enormous influence on South-east Asia; economically and culturally too. The Ramayana story is present all over South-east Asia in different versions. The civilizations in the region were really Indian in origin...'⁴

The earliest Indianized kingdoms of Southeast Asia (founded early in the Christian era) were located in the Malay Peninsula, Cambodia, and Annam and on the islands of Java, Sumatra, Borneo, and Bali. Along with the traders that traversed the region, Brahmins (priests) from India introduced Indian rituals, scriptures, and literature among the elite in Southeast Asia. They introduced Indian court customs, administrative organization on the Indian pattern, and laws based on the Code of Manu, the Indian lawgiver. Indianization also included the alphabetical basis of Southeast Asian scripts, the incorporation of Sanskrit in vocabularies along with the adoption of the Hindu-Buddhist religious beliefs, and an Indian concept of royalty.⁵

In maritime Southeast Asia, Srivijaya on Sumatra, between the seventh and thirteenth centuries, was a centre for Buddhist studies and of Sanskrit learning. Moreover, the renowned maritime Southeast Asian dynasty of Sailendra, which became the dominant maritime and land power in Malaysia by the eighth century, is believed to have originated in the Indian state of Orissa. The last Hindu kingdom in the Southeast Asian region was Majapahit, which flourished between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries on Java. From the fifteenth century onwards, with the rise of the kingdom of Malacca, Islam spread throughout the region. For their part, Indian traders from Gujarat, Malabar, Tamil Nadu, and Bengal helped the spread of Islam in Southeast.

India's connections with Southeast Asia more recently flowed from British colonial expansion in the region. Sir Stamford Raffles arrived in Singapore in 1819 to establish a trading station, ideally located by the Straits of Malacca, as a base from which to protect and resupply East India Company ships carrying cargoes between India and the region, and beyond to China. Later, given this connection, Singapore was governed from Calcutta., India's interaction with Malaya (today Malaysia) encouraged large-scale migration of Indian (particularly Tamil) labor to Malayan plantations. More than 1.5 million ethnic Tamils from South India were enumerated in 1931 in other British colonies. Today, with over two million persons of Indian origin, Malaysia is home to one of the largest Indian Diaspora communities abroad.

India and East Asia in Cold War Period:

It is against the above backdrop that India's evolving policies and relations must be assessed. In some aspects, India was eager to renew its relations with East Asia in the early 1990s; however, it had always enjoyed vibrant and enduring relations for several centuries before the onset of colonialism, which not only disrupted these links but in fact severed them, as they were unsuitable for colonial masters who wanted to have exclusive monopoly. As is evident from a flood of scholarly works that came at the height of India's independence movement, awareness of India's strong influence was acute; there was not a single country in the entire East Asian region that was not influenced by India in one way or another. This played a key role among enlightened Indian nationalist leaders, especially from the early 20th century, in generating interest about developments in the region. That could be said to be the beginning of the first phase of India looking east. India's interest in East Asia was reflected in a series of events that took place from the late 1940s onwards. The most prominent was the convening of the famed Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in March 1947, before India formally gained independence later in August the same year. It was the first ever attempt to bring together Asian countries on a platform to express solidarity with each other and to evolve a common strategy to fight colonialism and imperialism. As part of this approach, India had also organized a special conference on Indonesia in January 1949 in support of its fight against the Dutch colonialists. Prime Minister Nehru also extended strong support to other independence movements, especially in Vietnam, and enthusiastically welcomed the emergence of the People's Republic of China under the communist party leadership. India also contributed troops for UN peacekeeping operations in Korea. Because of its neutral position and political standing in the newly unfolding Cold War atmosphere and its active participation in East Asian regional affairs, India was made the Chairman of the International Control Commission, which was set up under the 1954 Geneva Accord to ensure the smooth transfer of power in Vietnam. India's proactive policy was most visible in the convening of the Afro-Asian Conference (also called the Bandung Conference) in April 1955. As a result, India's initial foreign policy was heavily influenced by developments in East Asia. This could be considered another phase of the Look East policy. Unfortunately, with the Cold War taking deeper roots, engulfing virtually the entire region, India's role began to diminish. Compelled by a series of wars from the early 1960s onwards that it had to fight with China (1962) and Pakistan (1965 and

1971), India had to abandon its earlier activist policy.⁶ While India was busy strengthening its defense forces, leading eventually to the signing of a Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union in 1971, the pro and anti-communist divide was nearly total in East Asia. But for a short while India came under scrutiny due to its recognition of the regime that Vietnam propped up after its military intervened to remove the dreaded Pot in the 1970s (the only non-communist country to do so), and India's marginalization from regional affairs, both politically and economically, was nearly total.

Role of Look East Policy:

India's closer ties with the countries of Southeast and East Asia are the result of 'Look East' policy, first enunciated by the government of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao at the end of the Cold War in 1991 and pursued faithfully by all his successors. The first Prime minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had referred, in his classic *The Discovery of India*, to Southeast Asia as 'Greater India', but that heady romanticism foundered amid mutual suspicions during the Cold War, and relations remained sparse. The end of the superpower standoff-and thus of the obligation of states to determine their international allegiances in relation to Cold War loyalties and commitments-widened India's foreign policy options, permitting New Delhi to look beyond the conventional wisdom of its non-aligned years. 'Look East' followed. Initially aimed at improving relations with the member states of the ASEAN at a time when India had embarked upon economic liberalization, and indirectly at enhancing strategic cooperation with the United States (looking East to look West', as the author Sunanda Datta-Ray termed it), the policy has succeeded beyond the vision of its initiator. "Look East' has not just become an end in itself, cementing enhanced economic cooperation with a long-neglected region, but it has signaled India's return-some might say arrival in a part of the world increasingly anxious about China's overweening influence. That the policy continues to bear fruit two decades after it was launched is reflected in such recent developments as India's admission as a full dialogue partner of ASEAN, its acceptance as a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum and as a full participant in the East Asia Summit (even though by no stretch of the geographical imagination can India be said to be an East Asian power). In 2003 Yashwant Sinha, then India's minister of external affairs, described the 'Look East' policy as having evolved through two phases, the first 'ASEAN-centred and focused primarily on trade and investment linkages and the second characterized by an expanded definition of "East", extending from Australia to East Asia, with ASEAN at its core'. The latter phase, Sinha explained also marks a shift from trade to wider economic and security issues, including joint efforts to protect the sea-lanes and coordinate counter-terrorism activities.⁷

Challenges for India:

Since its inception, the Indo-Pacific region remained a part of India's Foreign policy mooring but at varying levels. In the beginning, India was attracted towards this region in terms of its historical legacies of Buddhism and cultural sharing of Ramayana and Mahabharata epics. Besides, spice trade and people of Indian origin settled in different countries attracted the most. As a result, India has limited influence in Japan, China Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and some far-off island territories However, these ties

were mainly limited to socio cultural and religious moorings During the first half of the 1950s, even political understanding with these states was reflected through the organization of Asian conferences in New Delhi (1947 and 1949) and Bandung conference in Indonesia (1955). To some extent, the efforts of some states in the formation of NAM also brought India closer to them. But in political terms, this period of cooperation was very short-lived. Since mid 1950s, India drifted its foreign policy orientation towards Europe with the culmination of goodwill with the erstwhile Soviet Union. Later on, the politics of Cold War led to a policy of neglect between India and these states of Indo-Pacific. However, Indian interests remained limited to the Indian Ocean due to power rivalry in this area and its serious implications for India's security concerns. Moreover, the Cold War arena of power politics also concentrated around the Indian Ocean, then to the area of Asia-Pacific or presently described as Indo-Pacific. However, the end of Cold War, emergence of new permutations and combinations, growing economies of ASEAN states, emerging new regionalism with different thrust, initiations of the process of globalization, etc., led to a new shift in India's foreign policy in the form of 'look east' Simultaneously, cordiality in Indo-US ties in the post-Cold War era also initiated through Kick lighter proposal of 'military-to-military' cooperation in Indo-Pacific between the two countries. India's thrust became manifest in the form of its improvement in relations with ASEAN as 'sectoral' and later 'full dialogue partnership'. This was further strengthened by India's joining of ARF and organization of India-ASEAN summits. India also signed FTAs with some states of this region. Later on, India became a strategic partner of the US's 'pivot of Asia' strategy in the form of multilateral cooperation with the allies of the former through quadrilateral and bilateral naval exercises and other related areas of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.⁸ Thus, in the post-Cold War era, India started looking at this region as an important factor in terms of its security concerns, non-traditional threats, trade, investments, joint ventures establishments, energy supply, freedom of sea lanes of communication and for its overall economic growth.

Conclusion:

In an anarchic, self-help international system, survival remains the primary motivation of state behavior in the international arena. Therefore, states constantly search for opportunities to ensure their survival by preserving and maximising their relative power and influence The finish of the Cold War gave such a chance to states like India to reconfigure their international strategy needs and, in the light of the fundamental changes, utilize the recently made space to endeavor to augment their force and impact in the global framework.. The disintegration of the USSR, leading to the consequent heralding of the US-led unipolar world, coupled with the rise of China as a major power East Asia, forced India to rediscover' East Asia India's own great-power ambitions could be pursued with greater vigour as the structural limitations imposed by the bipolar international system had vanished India has, accordingly, pursued a more assertive foreign policy in East Asia. It involves a policy of 'congaging' China, robust political relations, maximal economic integration and interdependence, incremental security cooperation; and, finally, proactive regionalism and multilateralism. As India accumulates greater power and influence in East Asia and emerges as a major actor in the region, it will

correspondingly desire more space to achieve its strategic objectives. In pursuance of this strategy, India also has sought

to engage the US, the sole superpower today, and harmonies its interests-political, security, economic and diplomatic-within East Asia India's consistent and forceful engagement with East Asia in the post-Cold War era is leading to its emergence as a key player in the region, with serious implications for the evolving security dynamics in East Asia.

References

1. R.S Yadav, "Politics of Indo-Pacific Region: Policy Options for India", Political Discourse, vol.2, no.2, 2016, p.3.
2. Manish Dabhade "India and East Asia: A Region Rediscovered" in Harsh V. Pant *India;s foreign Policy in a Unipolar world* (eds), New Delhi: Routledge,2013, p.305.
3. D. R Sardesai, "Southeast Asia: Past and Present", Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007, p.7.
4. Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, "Looking East to Look West: Lee Kuan Yew's Mission India" New Delhi: Penguin India, 2009, p.13.
5. David M. Malone, "Does the Elephant Dance?: Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy", New Delhi: Oxford, 2011, p.199.
6. G.V.C. Naidu, "India and East Asia: The Look East Policy". URL- http://sam.gov.tr/pdf/perceptions/Volume-XVIII/spring-2013/GVC_Naidu.pdf
7. Shashi Tharoor, "Pax Indica", New Delhi, Penguin, 2012, pp.183-184.
8. R.S Yadav, "Politics of Indo-Pacific Region: Policy Options for India", Opcit, p.9.

