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## CHALLENGES TO INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN SOUTH ASIA

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**Abstract:**-South Asia has always remained sensitive and attractive discourse to the academicians and scholars of international relations and politics. Four major wars and other severe internal problems, provoked and promoted by immediate neighboring countries and great powers of the globe have the region significant in the world As Bill Clinton described South Asia as the most dangerous place on the earth. Geographically, South Asia consists of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. The traditional Indian sub-continent included Afghanistan and Burma also as a part of South Asia, as this identity of South Asia has not been accepted as Afghanistan has more contacts and links in Central Asia but as Afghanistan had joined SAARC, She can be considered one of the parts of South Asia. As far as Burma's links with East Asia states and her closer ties in that region has discontinued her linkage with South Asian region.

**Keywords:**Challenges , foreign policy , academicians and scholars .

### INTRODUCTION:

South Asia is an India centric region. India shares its territorial borders with all the states. Due to its size, economic, political and military powers, India's role always remain significant in South Asia. Due to the variation in terms of physical and human geography and historical experiences, the constituent states have differences in strategic and political perspectives. These differences created the problems for good and healthy bilateral and multilateral relations among the South Asian states.

India's overwhelming size and the fact that Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka share a border with it but not with each other makes India the focal point of the region: all lines of conflict are with India: India and Pakistan have fought wars. During the cold war, the great powers became involved in South Asia along this principal axis of conflict. The US sided, on the whole with Pakistan and the smaller states; the Soviet Union sided with India; and China at first sided with India and later on with Pakistan and the smaller states. This exacerbated the extent of conflict between India and its neighbours.

Since 1947, India has been involved with recurring conflicts with its immediate neighbours in South Asia. Of course, the most bitter of these have manifested in multiple wars and near- war with Pakistan over the contested terrain of Kashmir, a border war with China in 1962, border and water disputes with Bangladesh since 1971, tense periodic disagreements over the conduct of foreign relations with Nepal and Bhutan, and a clash of worldviews with Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

In the post cold war era, number of problems has afflicted India's relations with her neighbours because of the contradictions resulting from the fragmentation of what was a naturally unified geo-political region. In this context it is important to study the challenges to India's foreign policy in South Asia. The paper is an attempt to analyze the fundamental challenges to India's foreign policy in South Asia in the changed scenario.

India's has various challenges in South Asia. Lack of strong institutional system for the formation of foreign policy regarding its neighbouring countries in South Asia is one of the important challenge. Ministry of External affairs, Parliament, National Security Council and Intelligence agencies are responsible for making of foreign policy in India. All these institutions are dominated by the politicians, bureaucrats and technocrats. But there is no Institution which involves academicians, intellectuals, scholars at national level to discuss, debate and analyze the issues related to South Asia. Lack of a clear vision towards South Asia is also a problem. Indian foreign policy makers are not aware about their vision to South Asia. What should be South Asia?, how the issues can be managed in the region?

Another important challenge is related to strategic and border disputes. India has boundary disputes with all its neighbours in South Asia. Due to these border conflicts India has fought wars with Pakistan and has tense relations with all

the countries. Beside the South Asian states, China is emerging as a security threat for India. Of the seven South Asian states, China shares common borders with four states. The unresolved boundary disputes between India and China have made the bilateral relations more crucial for India. As the Minister of External Affairs of India, S M Krishna has informed the Indian Parliament that; the Government of India has come to realize that China has been showing more than the normal interests in the Indian Ocean Affairs.

Lack of unity in South Asian states is another base of problem for India. Due to historical, political, economic and strategic reasons, South Asia is operating as a divided house at the global level. Some of the member states of the region are trying to identify itself with other region. Pakistan is trying to identify itself with West Asia as well as Central Asia. India and Sri Lanka are attracted by South East Asia and trying to join ASEAN. In these conditions South Asia is yet to emerge as a regional entity in global politics. It's a challenge for India to manage the differences among the countries of the region. The lack of commonality among the states always leads to new conflicts and misunderstandings among the states, which create threat to India's national interests in the region.

Due to this problem, the countries of South Asia have different perception and attitude towards each other. Most of these perceptions arise because of the different vintage points determined by their respective national interests. For instance during the formation of SAARC, Initially, Bangladesh was primarily interested in the management of river water. Pakistan approach was political and its interest was to check the increasing influence of India in the region and it seemed to be least interested prominently in the regional economic cooperation. Nepal joined SAARC only to demand that it should be a zone of peace. Sri Lanka's main interest was to solve the domestic ethnic problem with the help of the other members. Each and every country was having specific national interests at the time of joining SAARC. The attitude and approach is controlling the bilateral relations of the countries.

Beside this, except India all the states are having the experience of undemocratic or military rule in their past. The problems of corruption, mis-governance, criminalization of politics and ethno-cultural cleavages have stunted the growth of democratic institutions in the region. The lack of good governance, bureaucratic dominance, political instability, rent seeking character of social forces, state repression and lack of accountability in the system remain the main stumbling blocks in this process. The discernible pattern of rise of religious and sectarian forces in political process erodes the democratic culture of tolerance. The lack of democratic institutions and democratic government always lead to instability and imbalance in the bilateral relations.

Beside this the undemocratic behavior and attitude of India in itself towards its small neighbours is also a challenge. Except, Gujral Doctrine India did not develop any effort for mutual cooperation. India failed to develop a democratic vision towards its neighbours in South Asia. The ambiguous and undemocratic approach of India is a challenge for its foreign policy in the region.

Lack of information sharing system among the countries of the region is also a challenge for India. India does not have mechanism by which she can get proper information of happening in the neighbouring countries. It is difficult to make foreign policy in the absence of accurate information. All these factors led to the hostile relations between India and other states of the South Asia and have created the environment of suspension and misunderstanding in bilateral relations of the countries. Which is a big challenge for India's foreign policy in South Asia in the post cold war era?

The bilateral disputes between India and the South Asian countries is one of the biggest challenges for India's foreign policy in South Asia. How to manage the bilateral conflicts related to all the neighbouring countries is a problem for India. As India has close historical, economic, religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic relations with all the countries of the region. But India also has bilateral disputes with all the countries. These disputes always dominate the bilateral relations and foreign policy formation in the region.

The involvement of extra regional powers in South Asia is another challenge for India's foreign policy. The feeling that extra-regional links of small South Asian states would balance India's dominant position in the region cannot be compatible with the regional understanding with South Asia, to which India's role is central. After the end of cold war and the disintegration of Soviet Union, the shifting approach of US towards South Asian states is a positive symbol. But the increasing role of China in economic and strategic areas may disrupt the bilateral relations of the countries. The new situation demands for adjustment and accommodation from each member states in the region.

Religious fundamentalism is acting as an antithetic to equality, social justice and secularism and it has always weakened democratic political systems in the region. Religion and religious fundamentalism is a source of tensions, disharmony and divisions in the society in all the states of the region and also led to the various conflicts between the states.

The rise of religious fundamentalism in Pakistan and the official patronage it has got has an enormous political and security impact on the region. The terrorism campaign sponsored by Pakistan and waged by Islamic fundamentalist groups in Jammu and Kashmir and Afghanistan has wide implications and poses a major threat to the region. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan has far reaching consequences for the natural integration and unity of all the countries of the region. It poses a challenge to the pluralistic social order and inter-religious harmony and the efforts to construct secular and democratic polity in the region. Being a secular state, it is a challenge for India to manage the religious affairs at domestic and regional level.

## CONCLUSION

Resolving outstanding disputes and tensions with the South Asian states is important for India in the changed scenario. With a few exceptions, Indian leadership has largely engaged in jealous arguments, petty fighting, and bureaucratically suffocating strategies to stymie regional initiatives. It is important to accommodate and adjust itself with the ground realities of the region. The image of big brother must be adjusted in friendly way with the small states of the South Asia. An effort should be made to develop a democratic vision towards the South Asian states. The change in regime in India may play significant role in overcoming the challenges and disputes in South Asia.

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