
Book Reviews

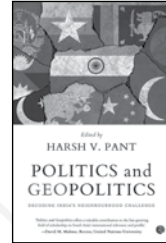
*Politics and Geopolitics: Decoding India's
Neighbourhood Challenge*

Edited by Harsh V. Pant

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With the change in the global geopolitical landscape, the popular discourse among scholars is that global power is shifting toward the east. This shift in global power is primarily because of China's rise and India's emerging economy bringing new challenges to global politics, especially in South Asian region with 'China rise' as it pivots, the book 'Politics and Geopolitics: Decoding India's Neighbourhood Challenge,' edited by Prof. Harsh V Pant, is a timely work to analyse the changing contours of national interest in India's neighbourhood.

The book is a compilation of nine chapters written by various scholars, experts and policymakers. With 'China rise' and India's policy initiative after 2014 as a benchmark, the various contributors try to analyse the present situation and put forward the future trajectory of India's relationship with its neighbour. The book provides a detailed

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account of India's neighbours and helps in understanding the changing geo-economic and geopolitical dynamics of the region.

Three parameters shape the opinion of the various scholars. First is the structural disparity between India and its neighbouring countries. Here, India's big brother image among the smaller nations is the major challenge in shaping the relationship. Second, it talks about India's domestic compulsion in shaping India's neighbourhood policy. Any instability in any neighbouring country affects India's internal politics and poses various national and internal security challenges. Third, India's strategic interest shift from SAARC to BIMSTEC underlines New Delhi's growing aspirations towards the countries in the east.

The underlying theme seen in every chapter is the scope that 'China rise' has given to India's neighbourhood to leverage their economic interest, which mushroomed the instability in the region. The smaller nations use China to leverage their economic interest while also keeping aligned with New Delhi for their security interest. Also, India's inability to compete with Chinese economic investment is a significant area of concern.

Chapter 1 on Afghanistan, written by Jayant Prasad, provides a detailed account of the various events in the country and talks about India's strategic interest in the country. The author considers the Pakistan factor, the emergence of the Taliban and India's historical, and cultural ties with Afghanistan in analysing the Indian policy initiatives in the region. Though written before the Taliban takeover of the country, the author provides the various options available to Indian policymakers dealing with Afghanistan in the future.

Chapter 2 on Pakistan, written by Aparna Pande, elaborates on the Kashmir issue as the prominent bone of contention, lauds the Indian government's initiative and reprimands Pakistan for not responding with the desired deal and sticking to the age-old terrorism and proxy war tactic. She recommends garnering international support for Pakistan's

disregard of international norms against India. However, the chapter provides a thorough understanding of the India-Pakistan relationship but compromises on giving concrete policy initiatives.

Chapter 3 on China, written by Gautam Bambawale, highlights the growing rivalry between India and China in shaping their interest in the region. He pointed out that cooperation and competition shall be the relationship's future trajectory. China's aggression against India in Galwan is seen as a turning point which has compelled New Delhi to shape a nuanced approach toward China. Besides giving historical facts, the chapter provides a clear understanding of China's true character and gives various policy options to be adopted for challenging the dragon in the future.

Chapter 4 on Nepal, written by Manjeev Singh Puri, provides a detailed account of historical ties, shared culture and increasing partnership between the nation while at the same time concerned over the impact of China and western influence, globalisation on Nepali's internal politics. The author suggests the (Ekla Chalo Re) walk-alone approach to reshape the India-Nepal relationship, wherein New Delhi must proactively engage with Kathmandu.

Chapter 5 on Bhutan, written by V P Haran, provides detailed facts on security and development cooperation, trade, connectivity and investment. The author dwells on the nation's shared culture and reflects on growing Chinese aggression at the Bhutan border, especially near the tri-junction.

Chapter 6 on Bangladesh, written by Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, has lauded Bangladesh's progress and upheld the cooperation between the nation. China's increasing presence in the country is seen as a significant challenge and the author suggests improving connectivity and increasing more areas of collaboration to tackle the same.

Chapter 7 on Myanmar, written by Gautam Mukhopadhaya, revolves around the growing Chinese presence in the country, north-eastern

centrality and push for India's Act East Policy. The dilemma seems to be, whether to increase military cooperation or focus on economic cooperation. However, India's inability to complete the various economic projects on time is the primary area of concern in the relationship with Myanmar.

Chapter 8 on Sri Lanka, written by Indrani Bagchi, talks about the historical relations and provides an account of India's policy dilemma in the country. She elucidates on increasing Chinese presence, growing threat of terrorism and India's reluctance to review the free trade agreement with Sri Lanka.

Chapter 9 on the Maldives, written by N. Sathiya Moorthy and Vinitha Revi, underlines the detailed historical events that happened in the country after 2014. The author talks about Chinese influence, India's interest, and future policy initiatives to improve the relationship.

The book covers remarkable facts about all the events that shaped India's relationship with its neighbour since 2014. It is written in a simple language and every chapter gives a thorough understanding of the mentioned country. However, the book relies more on facts and past events. It does not provide clear-cut policy measures to be adopted to shape the future of India's relationship with its neighbour. The book comes up as an excellent read for scholars, students, and all interested in knowing about India's neighbouring countries.
