

# INDIA–CHINA CONFLICT: CONSEQUENCES IN SOUTH ASIAN POLITICS

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## ABSTRACT

*Despite the fragmentation of the South Asia region, cultural and moral equality is seen here. India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Maldives are South Asian countries. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a political and economic regional organization of South Asian countries, through which peace and security of the region is ensured. It cannot be denied that China has always been interested in the Central Asian region. Both India and China have special importance in contemporary world politics. Geographically, the two countries share a long border. India occupies an important position to counter China's expansionist policies in South Asia. China wants to establish its dominance in this region, while India opposes the interference of any external power in South Asia. China is also trying to dominate the intra-regional trade in South Asia. China is trying to encircle India by strengthening strategic and economic ties with India's neighbours. This article marks the growing rivalry between India and China in the South Asian region. Along with this, the description of the stand of all the countries of South Asia on this rivalry is also seen in this article. However, China's entry into South Asia and its influence depends on India's diplomatic desire for political and regional integration.*

**KEYWORDS:** South Asia, Indus Valley Civilization, Cultural and Moral equality, SAARC, Contemporary world politics,

## INTRODUCTION

In 21st century, the economic relations between India and China have been linked to both the countries on a large scale. But this also need to notifying that the India-China encounter can also be seen as a rivalry to reduce each other's influence in South Asia. China has provided huge financial assistance to Nepal (8.3billion US\$), Sri Lanka (1.12billion US\$), Bangladesh (38.05billion US\$). At the same time, India has also provided 2.5 billion US dollars to Sri Lanka, 2 billion US dollars to Bangladesh. This shows that the countries of South Asia also see the India-China encounter as their advantage. Recently, in 2020, Galwan river valley fight took place. This valley is along the border of Pakistan, China and India, India is building a road here and China wants to stop it.

## Objectives

India and China both are the fastest growing economies. India is in a strong position in South Asia, while China is making its mark as a big emerging nation in East Asia. From time to time there are many conflicts arrived between the China and India. Both countries want to establish their influence in South Asia. Therefore, keeping in view the relations, conflicts and interest of both the countries in South Asia, the following objective has been highlighted in this

study- 1. Effect of India-China border conflict on other South Asian countries. 2. Relations of India and China with the countries of South Asia and its implications in the politics of South Asia.

## Research Method

To predict the future status of any region, it is necessary to understand the politics of the major emerging countries of that region and the current direction of their foreign relations. This study is an attempt to understand the Indo-China situation in South Asia, using primary and secondary sources and qualitative data. The opportunities and challenges of small countries of South Asia have been discussed extensively by studying the available e-resources related to this topic.

## Result and Discussion

### India – China Relations

*“Whatever its denovement- whether war or peace or something in between- the crisis will further complicate India's efforts to complete strategically with china.”*

- 1962 - Border war between India and China.
- 1967 - Nathu La clash on border between China and Indian protectorate of Sikkim.

- 1975 - 4 Indian soldiers killed in skirmish in Arunachal Pradesh.
- 1987 - Sumdorong stand-off.
- 2013 - Depsang stand-off.
- 2014 - Chumar and Demchok stand-off.
- 2017 - Doklam stand-off.
- 2020 - Ladakh crisis (20 Indian soldiers killed).

### *Military Unnerving*

Relations between the India and China are becoming increasingly unusual, since the encounter of 2020. Both countries have increased their military capability on the LAC. Indian Foreign Ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi said that China had violated the 1993 and 1996 agreements by increasing military capability along the LAC. As External Affairs Minister Jaishankar has also said that the future relations between India and China need peace on the border. It would be fictitious to ignore border disputes and talk about pursuing the rest of the relationship (ibid). Trust plays a very big role in relations between the countries, after the 2020 encounter it would not be wrong to say that China has done great damage to India's trust. It is very important to restore this trust in order to reach any decision or normalize other relationships in the future. Since the Ladakh crisis, both countries have expanded their military capability. India has also taken temporary steps to modernize the army and expand maritime power in the Indian Ocean region. It is clear that both the countries will have to spend a huge amount of cost on the LAC, due to which India and China can deviate from the objective of development of South Asia.

### **Impact on South Asian Countries**

In 19<sup>th</sup> century the whole world was engaged in the Cold War between America and the Soviet Union. At that time, India adopted the policy of non-alignment by staying away from both the factions. Due to which India made profit from both the countries. Similar situation is happening in South Asian countries today, it would not be an exaggeration to say that there is a situation of cold war between China and India and both the countries want to increase their influence in the South Asian region (Zreik, 2018). It is believed that taking interest of both the big countries in South Asian countries can prove to be very effective for these small countries. Both the main countries are financially eager to invest in these smaller countries of South Asia. But at the same time, we should not forget that these countries can also be unlucky, because the danger of grinding between the power of these two big countries also remains constant.

### *Nepal*

Nepal is a landlocked country; whose borders are with India and China. Nepal's biggest concern has increased due to the growing differences between India and China,

because Nepal's territorial integrity may be damaged in the power game between India and China. Nepal has a border dispute with India on some areas. A small independent and sovereign country like Nepal should tread carefully while negotiating with both the superpowers to avoid the territorial ambitions of India and China. After the recent India-China encounter, Nepal passed a map in which disputed area have been described as part of Nepal, which has soured relations between Nepal and India (Mukherjee, 2021). India says that Nepal has done this at the behest of China (Bagchi, 2020). We know that both India and China consider Nepal a very important country through their security, so Nepal should avoid getting caught in the conflict between these two countries. Nepal should not only focus on promoting its geopolitical ambitions, it should focus on improving its relations with both the countries and making profit from both the countries (Bhattarai, 2020). Nepal can act as a bridge between India and China relations only by becoming a peaceful, stable and prosperous country (Baral, 2019).

### *Shri Lanka*

The India-China conflict is also of great importance for Sri Lanka, as both countries cooperate with Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka has its own importance in the Indian Ocean as well. As everyone knows, China is gradually increasing its reach in Sri Lanka, it is believed that Sri Lanka can become a reason for India-China conflict. The India-China conflict also provides an opportunity for development for Sri Lanka. Recently, it was decided to give a loan of US \$ 450 million from India to Sri Lanka and there has also been an agreement between China and Sri Lanka for 500 million US dollars (Moramudali, 2021). The India-Sri Lanka-Japan agreement for the Eastern Container Terminal was recently cancelled by Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka's Jaffna Peninsula contract with China has been signed. In such a situation, the inclination of Sri Lanka towards China remains a matter of concern for India. In January 2021, China organized the Third Multilateral Dialogue, which is increasing China's influence in South Asia. We all also know that the Hambantota port of Sri Lanka is owned by China and also Sri Lanka is a supporter in China's BRI project.

### *Bhutan*

Bhutan is the only South Asian country not included in China's BRI project. Recently, the East Bhutan region, where the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary is located, has been declared a disputed area by China, which was quite shocking for Bhutan itself. This area is bordering the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, it is being speculated that, since Bhutan did not participate in the BRI project, China is dragging it into the India-China dispute. Because Bhutan's sympathy remains with India (Gurung & Ranjan, 2021). If we look at the Doklam issue, both India and China have clashed with

Bhutan's sovereignty and Bhutan is not even in a position to claim its own territory. It is quite challenging for Bhutan to strike a balance between the two powerful neighbours (Mitra & Thaliakkattil, 2018). However, India also sees Bhutan's relations with China with apprehension and reacts through political, economic sanctions. Bhutan is also a landlocked country, so like Nepal, it too is at high risk of grinding between India and China conflict. In such a situation, it is very important for Bhutan to maintain good relations with both the countries to maintain a balance between the two superpowers.

### ***Pakistan***

Pakistan has always had poor relations with India and Pakistan maintains better relations with China. The CPEC between China and Pakistan is important in changing the politics of South Asia. India believes that China is trying to surround India through this corridor. Whereas Pakistan gives more importance to China to reduce the influence of India. Pakistan believes that despite the India-China encounter, other relations between India and China are progressing (Shafqat & Shahid 2020). Despite the recent territorial disputes between India and China, during the Wuhan meeting, both countries have agreed to train 10 Afghan diplomats during the India-China joint training program. In such a situation, Pakistan is moving towards its development by joining China's BRI project.

### ***Afghanistan***

China now wants to include Afghanistan in the BRI project, for which a meeting was held between the two countries in June 2019. At the same time, China has been looking at America's presence in Afghanistan with suspicion. While China is investing in the mining and minerals sector in Afghanistan, India has also invested extensively in Afghanistan's infrastructure. India and China share common security interests in Afghanistan since 2014 (Bose, 2014). The deteriorating situation between India and China will affect Afghanistan on a large scale. Recently, with the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, the Taliban's hold in Afghanistan is getting stronger and there is a situation of civil war in Afghanistan. Afghanistan needs the help of both the superpowers like India and China for its development, so India and China differ are very harmful for Afghanistan. If both the countries pay more attention to their conflict, then it is not good enough for the development of South Asian region.

### ***Bangladesh***

Bangladesh has its own importance in the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh played an important role in resolving the special issue between India and Myanmar regarding the Bay of Bengal (Yasmin, 2019). Even today Bangladesh tries to

strike a balance between countries like India and China. Both China and India are investing in Bangladesh to increase their influence. Recently China has promised US \$ 39 billion to Bangladesh (Anwar, 2019). India wants to remove BCIM from being listed in 6 corridors of BRI. Dhaka is becoming China's second arms exporter destination after Pakistan. China and India want to dominate the Bay of Bengal, in such a way Bangladesh is developing its territory by cooperating with both the countries. Similarly, Bangladesh will have to refrain from hunting these countries and will have to maintain its dominance and its presence in the Bay of Bengal forever.

### ***Maldives***

Maldives has always had its own importance in South Asia. Maldives has understood China's expansionist policy, how China takes ownership of other places in case of non-payment of loans. Maldivian Minister Ismail said that Maldives will also maintain good relations with China and nothing will be done to threaten India's security through the Maldives territory (Moorthy, 2020). Maldives is ready to avoid getting caught in the strategy of both the countries. Maldives is ready to maintain good relations with India and China and will give priority to the security of India and other neighbouring countries. Thus, we can see Maldives striking a balance between the two superpowers.

### **SAARC**

South Asia continues to be an economically poor region. China is collaborating with India, where smaller countries in the region can reap economic benefits. The South Asian small countries can turn to institutions like SAARC to protect themselves from big countries like India and China. Almost all countries of South Asia have cooperated in China's BRI project, due to which the cost of these countries also increases and there is also the risk of being burdened with debt. In such a situation, regional organizations like SAARC will be suitable for these countries to defend themselves

Recently, there has been an imbalance in India's relations with almost all SAARC countries, due to which these countries lean towards China. India also needs to emphasize on good relations with its neighbours in South Asia along with relations with Western countries (Bose, 2020). South Asia region has many opportunities for progress and there are doubts about grinding between the cold wars of these two big countries. Due to the China Strategy, the situation of these countries is also likely to go bankrupt. The region will also have to focus on regional organization like SAARC to develop itself by getting involved in big projects like BRI. While China is a major power in East Asia, India has emerged as a major power in South Asia. India has been playing an important role in SAARC. China became an observer member of SAARC in 2005, since then it has been very active in South Asia. Before making China a full

member of SAARC countries, it will be necessary to know whether China's influence in the South Asia region will be meaningful or not. Because the entry of any big external power in its area can also become a threat to the sovereignty of this region (Agarwal, 2017).

## CONCLUSION

Today the changing international system has also increased the importance of small countries like Nepal, Bangladesh at the global level. At the same time, competition between two big countries like India, China also becomes beneficial for these small countries. These countries will also be able to become the cause of rivalry between two big countries like India, China and also have the ability to attract these two big countries. South Asia is still influenced by the past, which is probably why the region is one of the least integrated in the world. The people of all the countries of SAARC are completely affected by each other, their internal politics also affect each other's people completely. Due to the mistrust of the past of SAARC countries, there is also a lack of solidarity in these countries. Here Kautilya's theory "the enemy of the enemy is the friend" comes into play. The way India and China are paying more attention to their military capability today, it can prove to be harmful for the South Asia region. The rivalry between India and China also provides opportunities for development for the region, but this can happen only if the rivalry between India and China is at the commercial level and not at the military level. India should also keep in mind that India's encounters with China from time to time may also be a way to divert India's attention from development and relations with other neighbouring countries. In the conflict with China, India should not only focus on increasing its military capability and building relations with Western countries, but India should now focus on improving relations with its neighbouring countries as well.

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