INDIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY-CONTEMPORARY TRAJECTORIES

Prosenjit Pal

Assistant Professor and Teacher-in-Charge, Department of Political Science, The University of Burdwan,

Bardhaman, West Bengal, India

ABSTRACT

The neighborhood policy of a country is usually regarded as a subset of its foreign policy. This is no exception in the case of India. There has been a critical response to India's neighborhood policy until recent times. Foreign policy analysts argue that India does not have a well-defined neighborhood policy. This seems to be a reflection of the challenges facing the broader context of India's foreign policy.

In the backdrop of the Indo-centric South Asian region, India can be conceptualized as a pre-eminent yet 'reluctant' power, strong in the capability quotient, but lacking the attitude and aspiration and the endeavour to stamp assertively its dominance in the region. India's immediate neighborhood policy seems to reflect such a lack of an attitude identifiable with an emerging power in the contemporary world order. In the interplay between Realism and Idealism in the realm of Indian foreign policy, pragmatism and hard-core realism has often been arrested by an adherence to the inherent idealistic culture of peace, non-violence, open diplomacy and adherence to moral norms, and reluctance to project hard power in the astute military sense of the term.

Prof. Harsh V. Pant in his seminal work "A Rising India's Search for a Foreign Policy" (Orbis, spring 2009) identifies few gray areas in Indian foreign policy. These are: (a) lack of comprehensive planning behind foreign policy; (b) dearth of proper strategic thoughts and institutions; (c) ambiguous and contradictory positions of power; and (d) continuous ad hoc crisis management system in foreign relations.

The paper analyzes the contemporary directions of 'Modified' neighborhood policy, especially harping on the so-called 'proactive' initiatives of P.M. Modi and whether that can signal a real turnaround in the context of India's relations with South Asian neighbors, in a pervasive spirit of pragmatic Realism, or is it on 'a road to nowhere'.

KEYWORDS: Culture of Peace, Non Violence, Open Diplomacy and Adherence

INTRODUCTION

Challenges Confronting India's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century

A nation's foreign policy flows from several sources, from the international system to its domestic political imperatives to the cultural factors that underline its society to the personal characteristics and perceptions of individual decision-makers. Like most of the nation, India's foreign policy is no exception. But as a nation's weight in the global balance of power rises, it becomes imperative to pay greater attention to the systemic constraints. India, in the Indo-centric South Asian Region may be conceptualized as a pre-eminent yet reluctant power, strong in the capability

quotient, but lacking the endeavor to stamp assert its dominance in the region; and its immediate neighborhood policy also seems to reflect such a lack of an attitude identifiable with an emerging power in the contemporary world order. In the interplay between the theoretical aspects of Idealism and Realism in the realm of Indian foreign policy, pragmatism and hard-core realism have often been arrested by an adherence to the inherent idealistic culture of peace, nonviolence, open diplomacy and adherence to moral norms, and reluctance to project hard power in an astute military sense of the term.

As India seeks to become a major player on the international political stage, it will face two major internal constraints: First, India will have to recognize the need to exploit the extant structure of the international system to its advantage more effectively. Structural constraints are the most formidable ones a state encounters in its drive towards the status of a major power. Yet, Indian foreign policy continues to be reactive to the strategic environment rather than attempting to shape the strategic realities. While such an ad hoc response to the structural imperatives carried little costs when India seems poised to play a significant role in global politics. Second, India must come to grips with its discomfort with the very notion of power and in particular its wariness of the use of 'hard-power. (Pant, Orbis, 2009: p250) Throughout history, all the major powers have been required to employ the military instrument skillfull. India's reluctance to accept a more sophisticated understanding of power, in general, and military power, in particular, will continue to undermine Indian foreign and as well as security policy. (Pant, Orbis, 2009: p250)

Indian foreign policy has been rapidly evolving over the last two decades. As India has risen economically and militarily in recent years, its political clout on the global stage has also seen a commensurate increase. From the peripheries of international affairs, India is now at the center of major power politics. (Bhattacharyya, 2014: p1) It is viewed as a major balancer in the Asia-Pacific, a major democracy that can be a major ally of the West in countering China even as India continues to challenge the West on a whole range of issues- non-proliferation, global trade and climate change. Indian foreign policy was largely driven by a sense of idealism since its independence in 1947 under the patronage of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister were driven by two principal goals: retention of complete autonomy in the pursuit of its foreign policy to safeguard India's national interests and the determination to make a major impact on the course of post world war II international relations defined as it was by the cold war rivalry between the united states led 'western bloc' and the Soviet Union led bloc located primarily in Eastern Europe. This is not to say that the other objectives of India's foreign policy, such as decolonization, disarmament, strong moral and material support for the United Nations and peaceful co-existence in a nuclearized world were any less important. However, it was strongly felt that if the two primary goals were not met in India would not be able to make an effective contribution to the other issues which bedeviled the world at the time. The fundamental instrument chosen by Nehru to pursue the basic goals of India's foreign policy, was non-alignment, which was meant to perform the essential functions of ensuring the autonomy of India's foreign policy as well as give it a significant voice in international relations as the heir to a great civilizational heritage. (Bhattacharyya, 2014:p1)

A review of India's foreign policy over the past two decades reveals the extent to which policymakers in New Delhi have been successful in dovetailing the elements of continuity and execution of political(Chatterjee, 2009: p179). There is a general consensus that any analysis of India's foreign policy in the 21st century, taking on board the dramatic transformation of the world following the end of the Cold War and its consequent ramifications for India's foreign policy whose contours and character have acquired dimensions hardly imaginable even in the late 1980s. Throughout the Cold War period, India was concerned about getting entangled in the superpower rivalry. It made sense to make a choice in

favor of a non-aligned foreign policy posture that at least in theory preserved the India's decision-making autonomy in the realm of international affairs. Many of the central assumptions of Indian foreign policy had to be reviewed in light of change circumstance, following the end of the Cold War. The shape of the world changed, signaling the possibility of a new Indian foreign policy and national security strategy. A rapidly shifting Geo-strategic landscape confronted India as it made its way up in the interstate hierarchy. At the beginning of the new millennium, India is poised on the threshold of achieving the status of a major global power, emerging as an indispensible, albeit reluctant, an element of the new global order exemplified not only by its growing economic and military might but also the attraction of its political and cultural values (Pant, 2016:p4). However, in the changed circumstances in the world material might and political influence are means and not ends to pursue interests and foreign policy objectives. According to policymakers in New Delhi the desire to attain great power status is primarily for 'defensive' reasons. It is meant to be a protection against external domination or intimidation. (Chatterjee, 2009: p178 . Keeping this context in mind four broad goals for India's foreign policy in the 21st century can be identified. These are:

- *Discomfort with Power:* India's lack of an "instinct for power". (Chatterjee, 2009: p)

- *Inability to Use Force Effectively:* India's lack of an instinct for power is most palpable in military realm where, unlike other major global powers throughout history, India has failed to master the certain, deployment and use of its military instruments in support of its national objectives. (Chatterjee, 2009:p).

- *Marginalization of Military:* After independence in 1947, Indian politicians viewed the Indian Army with suspicion as the last supporters of the British Raj. Accordingly, they did their best to isolate the military from policy and influence. This attitude was further reinforced by the views of two giants of the Indian nationalist movement, Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru. (Pant, 2016 p10).

- *Strategic Culture Deficit:* A state can promulgate law and pursue a strategy once it has not only achieved a legitimate monopoly on violence, but also when it is free of the coercive violence of other states. (Pant, 2016: p10). It is no surprise, therefore, that India's ability to think strategically about national security issues remains at best questionable. George Tanham, in his landmark study of Indian strategic thought, argues that the lack of long-term planning and strategy owes largely to India's historical and cultural developmental patterns. Tanham argues that as a consequence India has been on the strategic defensive throughout its history, reluctant to assert itself except within the subcontinent. (Tanham, 1992: p5).

- *Lack of Institutionalization:* A major consequence of the lack of any Indian strategic culture worth its name is a perceptible lack of institutionalization of the foreign policy-making in India. The weakness of India's foreign policy is reflected also in the realm of India's neighborhood since neighborhood policy is a subset of a country's foreign policy. (Pant, 2016: p11).

India's Neighborhood and her Policy towards Neighbours till 2014-Major Directions

In this context, one must concentrate on the gradual emergence of the modern region of South Asia, which is traditionally known as the Indian subcontinent. **It is prudent to examine the geographical, demographic and financial contours of modern-day South Asia.**

The geoPolitical Dynamics of South Asian Region

- Indo-centricity and its transcendence to the levels of a perceived imaging of India as a hegemonic power generating a 'fear psychosis' among the smaller neighbors and catalyzing a strong sentiment of anti-Indianism.

- Post Colonial Nature of the region.

- The nation-building process remains incomplete, whereas the state-formation process has been a colonial/western construct-suitability of western institutions and processes remain questionable, competing/conflicting forces of nationalism remain active, ethnic-nationalistic forces unleashed.

- It represents an ethnic mosaic with several ethnic groups in the mutual contestation in order to preserve their ethnic identities.

- Lack of the potential to build an effective security community due to the lack of common security perceptions.

- Prevalence of Interstate and intrastate disputes.

- Lack of a regional identity or failure to evolve a regional identity.

- The failure to institute regional economic cooperation/ economic interdependence. (Pal, 2017:p 9)

The forces of regionalism have been arrested due to the prevalence of politics. The SAARC has been a victim of these acute realities facing the South Asian Region. (Pal, 2017: p.9) The geopolitical dynamics of South Asia and prove why regionalism has a checkered history in the same context. The Indo-centric nature of South Asian Region has been virtually translated into congenital anti- Indianism (smaller-neighbor syndrome-perception of India as hegemonic power). (Pal, 2017: p.9) India is the largest country in the South Asian Region. Its features of size, population, resources, economic development, scientific and technological advancement, military strength, etc., are quite disproportionate in comparison with those of other countries of the region. Geography has provided India a central position, as it shares 4,046 km land border with Bangladesh, 3,310 km with Pakistan, 1,752 km with Nepal and 587 km with Bhutan, apart from a maritime border with Sri Lanka. (Chattopadhyay, 2013: 16) India has major or minor border disputes with all these countries except Bhutan. No other country of the region shares borders with any other country except India. This Indo-centric nature of the region has been a major source of dissonance. Indo-Centricity, along with asymmetry in size, resources and capabilities, has given rise to feelings of insecurity among the smaller states of the region. (Chattopadhyay, 2013: 16) They feel themselves overshadowed by India. Because of its vastness, India has a natural sphere of influence, which has often caused suspicion among the smaller states. India's initiatives are not only misunderstood, but often characterized as 'hegemonic', meant to serve its own vested interests. (Chattopadhyay, 2013: 16) The smaller states, therefore, tend to develop their own distinct identities and, in this process, affinities with India are being ignored and points of diversity are being stressed repeatedly. India straddles the whole of the South Asian subcontinent, touching all its neighbors, who fear dominates. Today, India's influence and proximity produce stress and strain in its relations with neighbors providing them no alternative but to treat India with objectivity and adroitness rather than the emotion-charged populism employed in the conduct of neighborly policies.

The neighborhood policy of a country is usually regarded as a subset of its foreign policy. Now the question arises that, has India a framework of power, when it comes to its neighborhood ? Many writers have opined that Indian leaders have reacted in an ad hoc manner to most of the issues of foreign policy. Through many theorists claim that Indian theorists like Kautilya have propounded a framework of realpolitik. The **Rajamandala** (meaning "circle of states", is a Sanskrit word) was formulated by the Indian author Kautilya in his work on politics, the Arthashastra (written between the 4th century BC and 2nd century AD). It describes circles of friendly and enemy states surrounding the king's (raja) states. This concept of concentric circles has been that the immediate neighbors are unfriendly or rivals, hence it is in the next circle that one has to make the allies and friends to create a balance of power. Many have alluded to the "Indira Doctrine", with regard to this framework. (Pandit and Basu, 2013:p25)

Beside this some other scholars argue that, India does not have a well-defined neighborhood policy. The reasons for the prevailing negative perceptions about India in the region is because India has largely adopted an ad hoc and bilateral approach vis-à-vis its neighbors and has allowed its policy to be guided by an overarching concern for security. In recent years, India's approach has changed considerably. However, it needs clearer articulation. India must effectively communicate its vision of regional integration to its neighbors, enable them to participate profitably in its growing economy, spell out its 'non-negotiable' in matters concerning its security and national interest, maintain linkages at the highest political level, open multiple tracks of communication and take a leadership position in multilateral forms like SAARC and BIMSTEC to bring peace and prosperity to the region through greater cooperation in diverse areas. This will prove effective in improving its relations with its neighbors.

The political leadership in India has defined India's strategic neighborhood as the area extending from the Persian Gulf to the Malacca Strait. However, the ministry of external affairs (MEA) has traditionally deemed countries bordering India as neighbors in its annual reports. It is interesting to note that, initially, countries such as China,   Iran and even Indonesia featured in the section on neighborhood. By the mid-1960s, China was shifted to the East Asia section and Iran to West Asia. This article makes use of the MEA's definition of India's neighborhood.

 India has undoubtedly emphasized its relationship with its neighbours in its foreign policy pronouncements, which emerge in the shape of repeated statements on neighbourhood as the 'first circle' of India's foreign policy, prioritization of it in the annual reports of the MEA and the appointment of senior diplomats as ambassadors to neighboring countries, etc. However, no conscious attempt has been made to conceptualize the problems confronting Indian diplomacy in the neighbourhood and evolve a comprehensive framework to deal with them. A glaring example of the lack of attention to the neighbourhood has been the absence of regular high-level bilateral visits to the neighbouring countries, which creates an impression of neglect. The result has been obvious- India has focused more on 'managing its relationships with its neighbors rather than shaping it and giving direction to it with a longterm objective and vision in mind.

India's neighborhood policy has not received much attention outside the region. However, in the post-Cold War period, there have been some assessments of India's regional policy. Schaffer and Schaffer, for example, argue that in spite of India's emphasis on economics in its foreign relations, its neighbors 'feel extremely vulnerable to Indian political, military and economic pressures and perceive their domestic economies as being vulnerable to the Indian whim', and none of them would wish India to assume the role of the regional policeman. India has dealt with its neighbors in an ad

hoc fashion, allowing the relationship to be conducted on a country-by-country basis. It has to evolve a long-term, forward-looking vision for the region and adopt a strategy, spelling out its priorities and concerns clearly and openly declaring its expectations from its neighbors. This will help India in engaging its neighbors more meaningfully.

Security concerns have dominated India's policy towards its neighbors. That is why India has followed a realistic policy vis-à-vis its neighbors, which is often contrary to the ideals enunciated by its leaders in the realm of foreign policy. This has been occasioned by its experience of direct military conflicts in the past, the existential threat of terrorism directed against it from within its immediate neighborhood as well as its sensitivity to external in the region.

India's presence is so huge that it is likely to evoke fear among its neighbors unless India adopts a proactive diplomacy vis-à-vis its neighbors. Its diplomacy has not so far matched its size, capability and intentions and has failed to inspire the necessary confidence in its neighbors to deal with India and not as a power eternally planning to subjugate them. India has to make use of its soft power and devise an innovative as well as a cooperative economic agenda to convince its smaller neighbors of the advantages of cooperating with India. The economic content of India's foreign and neighborhood policy has increased substantially over the last decade. However, the complex interdependencies being built up by the growing economic ties between the countries have not dispelled the fear of India in the neighborhood. Unresolved political issues (border disputes, differences over sharing/managing the global commons, connectivity promotion, energy cooperation, etc.) tend to vitiate the atmosphere of good neighborliness in the region.

The areas of engagement identified in these agreements indicate India's interest in economic, developmental and security cooperation with its neighbors, but still it smacks of a lack of dynamism, pro-activeness, assertiveness in the realm of Indian foreign policy towards her immediate neighborhood. Indian policy makers, perhaps, seemed to have forgotten to take lessons from the famous Kautilyan dictum-'Rajamandala' (Pandit and Basu, 2013:p25)

Modi's 'New Turn' in India's Foreign Policy: 'The Neighborhood First' Policy

Narendra Modi's election as India's prime minister in May 2014 has generated speculation that a new 'Modi's doctrine' is emerging in Indian foreign policy. (Balakrishnan, 2014: p23) Indian foreign policy under Modi is witnessing a proactive turn infused by a strong leadership. The new government has redefined India's foreign policy priorities, and the level of external engagement has also gone up. Modi's foreign policy has been characterized by great energy, a desire to break the mold of the past and a penchant for risk-taking.(Muni 2014: p6) The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by Narendra Modi completed three years in office in May 2017. He launched his 'tenure as prime minister with a flurry of overseas visitors to large and small powers alike' (Basrur,2017:p 7). As of August 2017, in his thirty-one foreign trips to six continents, he has visited more than forty-nine states, including eight states twice and five times the USA. To rejuvenate India's foreign engagement, the new government has taken several initiatives such as the Act East policy and Neighborhood First policy. These initiatives have raised the hope that Indian foreign policy will witness significant changes.

To tap the dynamics of Indian foreign policy under Modi's prime ministership, numerous scholars have studied the different dimensions of the Indian foreign policy. *However, their opinion is divided*. Some have talked about the substantial change and described him as a rescuer of Indian foreign policy, while others do not see any major shift. Rajesh Basrur has found that 'foreign policy under Modi picks up from where his predecessors left off and is characterized by essential continuity'(Chandra 2017:p99). *Ian Hall* virtually concurs with this view and argues that despite bringing a

proactive turn in Indian foreign policy, 'Modi has not made major modifications to the aims and methods of Indian foreign policy' (Hall 2017:p 127). In contrast, another group represented by *C. Raja Mohan* sees the changes as 'so seminal as to mark the beginning of the "**Third Republic**"' in Indian foreign policy (C Raja Mohan 2015: p23). *Kanti Bajpai* (2015) has found a 'new zeal' and rebooting of Indian foreign policy under the new regime(Bajpai 2017: p23).

Modi's diplomatic activities, offer a clear picture of India's priorities and strategic objectives. They are essentially fivefold:

- Prioritizing an integrated neighborhood- "Neighborhood First."

- Leveraging international partnerships to promote India's domestic

- Development.

- Ensuring a stable and multipolar balance of power in the Indo-Pacific;

- "Act East."

- Dissuading Pakistan from supporting terrorism.

- Advancing Indian representation and leadership on matters of global

- Governance.

Neighborhood First: Improving Connectivity, Prioritizing an Integrated Neighborhood

The approach called 'Neighborhood First' – a phrase adopted by the Indian government – is meant to indicate four things. The *first* is New Delhi's willingness to give political and diplomatic priority to its immediate neighbors and the Indian Ocean island states. The *second* is to provide neighbors with support, as needed, in the form of resources, equipment, and training. The *third*, and perhaps most important, is greater connectivity and integration, so as to improve the free flow of goods, people, energy, capital, and information. The *fourth* is to promote a model of India-led regionalism with which its neighbors are comfortable.(Chandra 2017: p104)

Impact of 'Neighborhood First' in the Context of India's Relations with Her Immediate South Asian Neighbors

The newfound diplomatic priority in the region is evident in Modi's visits to all of India's neighbors – barring The Maldives – as well as regular leadership meetings in India and on the sidelines of multilateral summits. India has also become more forthcoming in providing support and in capacity building, whether concluding its biggest ever defense sale to Mauritius, or in providing humanitarian assistance to Nepal or Sri Lanka. With Bangladesh, the completion of the Land Boundary Agreement, improvements in energy connectivity, and steps taken towards accessing the port of Chittagong have all been crucial developments that help to set a positive tone for a region long defined by cross-border suspicion and animosity. India's focus on connectivity is also gradually extending outward, whether to Chabahar in Iran or Kaladan in Myanmar. Although India will continue investing in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as an institutional vehicle, it has also expressed a willingness to develop issue-specific groupings that are not held hostage to consensus: a "SAARC minus X" approach. Two examples of this are the **Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal** (BBIN) grouping – meant to advance motor vehicle movement, water power management, and inter-grid connectivity – and the common SAARC Satellite, which India has decided to proceed with despite Pakistan's objections. (Chanda 2017: p102)

These concerted efforts have so far had mixed results. Bangladesh and Bhutan have clearly been positive stories from India. Ties with **Sri Lanka** have proved a mixed bag, despite the electoral loss of former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, who had testy relations with New Delhi. However, President Maithripala Sirisena remains well-disposed and personally invested in better relations with India. Sri Lanka has leased the Hambantota port to China for 99 years, much to India's discontent. The **Maldives** has proved more difficult. India has continuing concerns about the fate of former president Mohamed Nasheed, although several defense agreements were concluded during the visit to India of the incumbent Abdulla Yameen..(Chanda 2017: p102). The setting up of a Joint Ocean Observer Station on March 2018 in the Maldives by China (Makundhoo) has been a point of concern for India.

The obvious regional outlier has been **Nepal**, which has been the most vexing foreign policy problem facing the Indian government over the past year. Despite considerable Indian assistance in the aftermath of last year's devastating earthquake – that reportedly included over 1,700 tonnes of relief material and medical assistance to thousands – Nepal's constitutional crisis severely set back relations. The crisis was not of India's making – it was primarily the product of differences between Nepal's hill elites and the Madhesis – but New Delhi was confronted with a tough choice. As India protested against the alleged persecution of the Madhesis in Nepal, and blockaded the Indo-Nepalese border with Indian trucks carrying essential commodities to Nepal, Nepal took the issue to the UN that India has instituted an economic embargo of Nepal due to differences over an internal political problem of Nepal and was showing a big-brotherly, bullying attitude over its smaller counterpart. As Indo-Nepalese relations slid downwards, China has looked up to Nepal with infrastructural and other necessary support(The Dragon has entered the Himalayan Kingdom-critics opine) (Pal 2018: p25)

On the positive side, India's relations with **Bangladesh** have improved, following a Modi's visit to Bangladesh and the signing of the historic Land Boundary Agreement. With Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in 2017, several other breakthroughs were sealed in the areas of energy, trade, connectivity, etc., yet issues like illegal migration, Teesta Water disputes continue and critics remain speculative over the prospect of Indo-Bangladesh ties if BNP comes to power in Bangladesh

With regard to **Pakistan**, there was an initial euphoria generated due to Modi's positive overtures/gestures towards his Pakistani counterpart, Nawaz Sharif-'Tea-diplomacy','birthday diplomacy'(as they were making rounds in the newspaper and media in 2014)were gradually paving the way towards, secretary-level talks to foreign minister level talks then ultimately towards a composite dialogue at the PM levels. (Pal 2018: p23)

Pakistan's India policy and the congenital anti-Indianism may be attributed to her domestic factors, especially the Bonapartist nature of her state system wherein the military-bureaucracy, complex dominates, working in tandem with the support of the Islamic Fundamentalist group, in building and sustaining what may be termed as the 'terror industry' in order to destabilize Kashmir and wrest it from India. They, in their very own interest, in order to ensure the legitimacy of their survival and operations, often attempt to successfully thwart any sort of peace initiatives, prospects of stability, a dialogue in India-Pakistan relations, that is initiated at the Track-I levels of diplomatic exchange. According to Harsh V Pant, "India and Pakistan are moving through a road to nowhere –whenever India and Pakistan decide that they need to talk. Either the talks happen and nothing comes out of it, and even before the talks start, something happens to derail them. It can be considered the biggest failure of Indian diplomacy that even after more than six decades. India has not found a

way to neutralize the challenge posed by a neighbor one-eighth its size" (Pant: 2016,p-10).

In 2014, after a gap of three decades, a majority government had come into power and therefore it was expected that it would not have the headache of satisfying its coalition partners while taking bold decisions. Indeed, a "bold move" was seen when, to the surprise of many; Narendra Modi called his counterparts from all SAARC countries to participate in his oath-taking ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhawan. This marked the start of his "Neighborhood First" policy. (Pal, 2018: p34) He stated the importance of cooperating and having a cordial relationship with all the neighbors which would be mutually beneficial for everyone in the region. Indo-Pak relations have seen a roller coaster ride. From inviting Nawaz Sharif to PM Modi's oath taking ceremony to Modi paying an impromptu visit to Pakistan on Nawaz Sharif's birthday, from the Pathankot attack on Uri Attack, from Pakistan backed terrorism in Kashmir valley to the LoC surgical strikes, the list goes on.

Modi's 'neighborhood first' policy of actively engaging the South Asian neighbors as the first step towards working to engage an extended neighborhood also included initial positive overtures towards Pakistan. C Raja Mohan, 2015: 32) But as the 'march towards a composite and comprehensive dialogue' were slowly progressing, they were cut short due to the Pathankot attacks, followed by attacks on army bases in Uri and Nagrota. Modi initiated a somewhat tit-for-tat tactics in unleashing the counteroffensive Surgical Strikes, threatened to revoke the 1960 Indus Water Treaty, the MFN status given to Pakistan and took the issue of Pakistan as a state that sponsors terrorism, to global quarters in order to brand Pakistan's image, negatively, as a terror-sponsoring state. (Pal, 2018: p34) Hence India and Pakistan, despite Modia's proactivist foreign policy initiatives, still stand on a road to nowhere, if one considers the prospects of a government-level, politically mediated and diplomatic solution to the problem—the road is, as it has been in the past, virtually blockedPant, 2015: p10). Animosity levels between these two Frontline South Asian states do not augur well for the South Asian region-one can easily argue.(Pal 2018: p2)

Meanwhile, China is making headway in wooing India's neighbors. Clearly, "Neighborhood First" is turning into "Neighborhood Lost". (Pal, 2018: p34)

With respect to all of its neighbors, including Nepal, India has taken concrete steps over the past two years to promote goodwill and deepen economic and social connectivity. But nationalist sentiments in all these countries – often directed against India as the region's predominant power – will continue to present a challenge. Anti-Indian sentiments will also, paradoxically, drag India further into these countries' domestic politics, suggesting that undulating highs and lows in its neighborhood relationships will now be the norm. Furthermore, for all of India's neighbors, **China** is now prepared to step in to provide financial, military, infrastructural, and even political assistance, and act as a potential alternative to India. This new development is something India will have to carefully monitor and appropriately respond to – as it has in recent years – particularly if Indian security interests are seriously compromised. As the status quo power in its neighborhood, India will have to constantly play defense in its own backyard. *The China factor, looms large in India's backyard*. China's *String of Pearls Strategy* of strategic encirclement of India, One Belt One Road*OBOR*), *CPEC*, tacit support to Pakistan, *China's debt diplomacy*-a policy bent on land acquisition from countries surrounding India, goes to prove that China is bent on containing the rise of India as a Regional power. The recent *Doklam crisis* proved the same and has negatively reflected in the context of Indo-Bhutanese ties too. (Pal 2018: p25)

On the balance sheet, despite the initial hype and euphoria, according to critics Modi's neighborhood policy's success is outweighed somewhat with the failure quotient, due to which they often pinch Modi's 'neighborhood policy' as 'neighbourhood lost' policy

CONCLUSIONS

The paper has analyzed the process of continuity and change in the realm of India's neighborhood policy, taking the macro context of the strategic challenges facing India's Foreign Policy in the 21st century. In order to be reckoned as a potent power, India needs to shred its tag as a reluctant power, and attempts to shape international realities rather than being responsive to the same. Hardcore realism, pragmatism needs to be inbred in the realm of India's strategic culture; it should be more proactive in its foreign policy choices and aggressive enough to at least showcase its military might-meagre advocacy of soft and dovish diplomatic means may not always help in face of the acute global realities.

Being the most important component of its foreign policy, India's immediate neighborhood Policy should also be well-equipped to confront the Geo=political realities of the South Asian Region, especially India's policy options vis-à-vis Pakistan. Modi's Pakistan policy seems to be like 'an old wine in an old bottle'. His 'neighborhood first policy' in the context of the broader 'Modi Doctrine' has all the hype, rhetoric, grandeur and pomp, but reality has showcased otherwise, despite the initial euphoria. Actions are doing lesser than the words-loud it seems apparent in its design, but somewhat important in its execution. Behind the spectacle of the pomp and show, the real test of foreign policy and strategy lies in the coherence of design, the ability to balance it in the context of regional realities, finesse of execution and efficacy of outcomes. Then only one can assertively be able to say that a 'Third Empire' has been resurrected in the context of India's foreign policy.

The paper attempts to suggest a few alternative routes towards conflict resolution and engendering peace in the region-a requiem for any 'neighborhood policy' to be successful. Besides complimentary also needs to be maintained-India's neighburs do need to reciprocate, for that, a culture of mutual trust, cooperation and connectivity needs to be engendered. The future of South Asia has to be written by the South Asian societies rather than by the states which are mired in conflict. Reflecting on the above the paper argues that there may be a clarion call-for the civil-society-sector linkages, citizen diplomacy, people-to-people contact that can somewhat soothe the rigidities prevailing at the political, elite-levels, to come forward in furthering the future of a region so immense in its potentialities-connectivity. The media, both traditional and new media can act as cementing forces, its conflict-transformation and peace-building potential can be positively harnessed with a positive mindset. Academicians and specialists working in this area can also come up with some positive discourses –can act as harbingers of new ideas that can foster a spirit of cooperation and strive to build bridges of connectivity-a requiem for peace and conflict resolution among the two frontline states of South Asia, thereby creating a path towards peace in South Asian neighborhood.

The success-failure ratio of Modi Doctrine, including his 'Neighborhood First' initiative is contingent on the above and can then only strive to see the light of the day, and a positive, realistic new 'turn' can be realized in the micro-realm of India's neighborhood policy and the macroambit of Indian foreign policy

REFERENCES

1. Ganguly, Sumit.ed(2014), **India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect**, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

2. Mohan.C. Raja,(2015) **Modi's World-Expanding India's Sphere Of Influence,** Harper Collins Publishers, India, 2015

3. Malone, David M (2014), **Does The Elephant Dance**? Oxford University Press: New Delhi.

4. Pant, Harsh V. (2016), **Indian Foreign Policy: An Overview**, New Delhi: Orient Blackswann.

5. Suresh Dhanda, Indias Foreign Policy in Changing Global Milieu,International Journal of Political Science, Law and International Relations (IJPSLIR), Volume 4, Issue 4, July-August 2014, pp. 9-22

6. **Tanham, George (1992), Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretative Essay**, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

7. Bajpai Kanti,(2015). 'Continuity-But With Zeal', **Seminar**, Vol 668, N0-2, April, 2017

8. Basrur Rajesh,(2017), 'Modi's Foreign Policy Fundamentals: A Trajectory Unchanged", **International Affairs**, Vol-93, No-1

9. Bhattacharyya, Purusottam (2014), "Quest for Major Power Status: An Overview of the Challenges Facing India's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century", **JAIR: Journal of International Relations, Vol. 1, Issue. 1, January-June, 2014.**

10. Behuria, Ashok K et al (2012), "Does India Have a Neighbourhood Policy?", **Strategic analysis**, Vol. 36, No. 2,March 2012.

11. Balakrishnan, Bhaskar (2014),"Indian Foreign Policy and Diplomacy: The First Months of the New Government" **Indian Foreign Affairs Journal**, Vol.9, No. 3, July-September 2014.

12. Chatterjee, Aneek (2009), "Does India have a Foreign Policy? A review of Six Decades of Indian Foreign Policy", **Socialist Perspective**, Vol.37, No. 3-4, December 2009- March 2010.

13. Chattopadhyay, Pratip (2013), "Theorising India's South Asian Policy: From Geopolitics to Global Politics", **South Asian Survey**, Vol. 20, number. 1, March 2013.

14. Chandra, Vikash (2017), "Modi Government and Changing Patterns in Indian Foreign Policy", **Jadavpur Journal of International Relations**, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2017.

15. Hall, Ian (2015), "Is a 'Modi doctrine' emerging in Indian foreign policy?", **Australian Journal of International Affairs**, Vol. 69, No. 3, 2015.

16. Muni, S. D. (2014), "Modi's Neighbourhood Initiative", **Economic and Political Weekly**, Vol. 38, September 20, 2014.

17. *Pant, Harsh V. (2009), "A Rising India's Search for a Foreign Policy",* **Orbis**, *Published By Elsevier Limited on behalf of Foreign Policy Research Institute*

18. *Pal, Prosenjit (2017), "The Challenges of Conflict Resolution and the Quest for Engendering Peace: A Study of The South Asian Regional Matrix",* **South Asia Politics Vol 28, Issue 11, November 2017.**

19. *Pandit, Santishree D and Basu Rimli, (2013), "India and Her Neighbours- The New Paradigms of the 21ˢᵗ Century at a Glance",* **International Studies**, *Vol. 1, Number 1, July-December 2013.*

20. *Pal, Prosenjit (2018), "Quest For Engendering Alternative Visions of Peace Through Media Images And Citizen Diplomacy: Challenges And Prospect In The Context Of India-Pakistan Relations,"* **JAIR Journal Of International Relations**, *Vol-12, December 2017, New Delhi.*

21. *Raghavan, Srinath (2015), "Modified Foreign Policy",* **Economic and Political Weekly,** *Vol. 5, January 31, 2015*