



Political and Culturalties between India and STU Countries

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ABSTRACT

India has a long history of political and cultural ties with different countries of the world. It has always played a crucial role in expanding its domain in every sphere - political, social, cultural, and economic and so on. It has believed in Reformation, Performance and Transformation. India has evolved as a competent country to establish peace and stability with the neighboring countries. India's continuous ability in developing strong relations with other countries has made its position as one of the strongest country in the world. This paper will focus on the shift of the foreign policy strategy in the Modi era with special reference to the West Asian countries, centering attention towards STU countries i.e., Saudi Arabia, Turkey and United Arab Emirates. The STU countries form a prime position among the other West Asian countries. From many past decades a good relation has been developed between India and STU countries. The paper will deal with the geo-political and strategic relevance, crucial relationship between India and STU countries, how they build importance for each other and the grand design for the future. Further, this paper will also cover the respective contributions of UPA and BJP, the two political parties which have played an important role in shaping Indian politics and how the latter proved to be more efficient in the task of building a stronger relationship with the STU countries.

KEY WORDS

Reformation, Performance, Transformation,
Geo-political, Cultural.

INTRODUCTION

India that is Bharat, a multicultural diverse country has developed immensely in so many years

after its independence. As an independent nation, it has not only strengthened itself but has also emerged as a powerful country with specific recognition in the world. This specific recognition can be said in terms of technological, cultural, political, social, and economic developments. To enhance its relationship globally it has stressed diplomatic relations, and cultural exchange and has not only worked on strategic relations but also other platforms internationally. In this article, three important countries of West Asia have been chosen to relate their political and cultural ties with India. These countries have been given the mnemonic- "STU" where S- Saudi Arabia, T- Turkey and U- United Arab Emirates. India shares a multifaceted relationship with these three countries and tries to encompass economic ties, strategic cooperation, cultural values etc. The bond has strengthened more after 2014 i.e., in the Modi Government. India is a country which has achieved in spreading its golden attributes in various other countries.

Why STU countries?

The reason for choosing STU countries among other West Asian countries comes from the knowledge of India's frequent engagement with these countries and most importantly the geographical location of these three countries. The location is close to India. Also, they have been arranged in descending as per their size. They are very close to each other and form a crucial core as Middle Eastern countries.

Saudi Arabia officially called the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has one of the largest economies among other Middle Eastern Country countries and has vast oil reserves. Turkey, called the Republic of Turkey is a transcontinental country which has a rich history of thousands of years and carries a dynamic political landscape. Whereas United Arab Emirates a federation of seven emirates located on the Arabian Peninsula, is a dynamic country with a modern and cosmopolitan outlook which is further supported by political stability, cultural diversity and social development.

India during UPA

The United Progressive Alliance Government tenure has witnessed variations in the relations of India with other countries of the world. To look specifically at the STU countries, it could be characterized by economic cooperation, diplomatic engagement and strengthening of bilateral ties. It is to be noted that several visits also took place during the tenure of the UPA Government which significantly marked the importance of developing a crucial relationship between India and STU countries.

India under the UPA Government with its relations with Saudi Arabia has viewed growth in economic cooperation for instance energy sector. They have explored avenues for cooperation in different ways- investment, defense, trade etc. This could further be marked by the visit of King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia to India, China and Malaysia in 2006. It had great importance in foreign policy as it marked a strategic shift after 1955. Saudi Arabia is also considered the most powerful within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The UPA Government also looked into the welfare of the large Indian expatriate community in Saudi Arabia and extended its assistance to the Indian nationals. Yet, several human rights challenges could be seen. Such as exploitation and abuse of the migrant workers including many Indians. The poor working conditions and lack of legal security became more prominent. Also, issues regarding women's rights faced severe criticism. Even though several organizations and institutions urged the Indian Government to look into but rather it became a task for the UPA to get themselves involved or to take a bolder step to reform.

India's relations with Turkey tried expanding during the UPA Government in economic cooperation by laying out its reach to other sectors beyond textiles and construction. Trade and investments were further made an ambition to work on. Less diplomatic engagement could be located during the UPA's tenure. It did not reach up to the level of strategic partnership. Neither did they engage in defence or security cooperation. Reversely could be seen in the relations between India and the United Arab Emirates. Their economic ties flourished and bilateral trade increased. It gradually became a significant source of investment. It explored opportunities in different sectors. For the Indian diaspora, the UPA Government worked for the welfare of the

large Indian expatriate community in the UAE and their concerns. Again several issues relating to human rights violations could not be addressed thus leading to the sufferings and problems of the same.

Therefore, even though the UPA Government has tried its level best to strengthen its relations with the STU countries, several drawbacks could be seen in terms of its engagement in economic cooperation and matters dealing with human rights concerns.

Political and Cultural Relations

India's political and cultural landscape is diverse and complex. It is a parliamentary democracy and is characterized by a multi-party system.

1) India and Saudi Arabia

India and Saudi Arabia form a cordial relationship in terms of diplomacy. They engage in strategic partnerships such as energy security, counter-terrorism efforts and trade.

➤ Political Relations

Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy serving the head of the state and Government. The political structure is such that the royal family has a considerable influence over the country's political affairs.

Both the countries, India and Saudi Arabia have signed numerous agreements to strengthen their ties. Official visit of Secretary (CPV & OIA) Shri Muktesh K. Pardeshi from 4th to 7th May to Saudi Arabia aimed at strengthening the strategic partnership. A Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the energy sector was signed in New Delhi on 10th September 2023. Earlier, the signing of the Delhi Declaration in 2006 during the visit of King Abdullah eventually laid a roadmap for bilateral cooperation. The signing of the Riyadh Declaration in 2010 led to an increased interaction in the Strategic Partnership in the political, economic, security and defence sectors. Similarly, other MoUs were also signed regarding combating crime, defence cooperation, labour cooperation for domestic service, and cooperation of IT and Services. Also, the latest visit of Saudi ministers to India as part of the G20 has led to several sectoral and bilateral meetings.

➤ Cultural Relations

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic heritage and India is a diverse nation with a rich cultural heritage. They intersect culturally through various channels- trade, language, presence of a large Indian expatriate community. There is cultural exchange and understanding. During the visit of the Secretary (CPV & OIA) to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a review of preparations for Haj 2024 in Jeddah and Madinah was conducted. India and Saudi Arabia celebrate a long history of cultural engagements. Several bilateral cultural activities have increased with Saudi Arabia's Vision of 2030. Also, India participated as Guest of Honour at the 32nd edition festival of Heritage and Culture in Saudi Arabia in 2018. Another important feature was the popularity of Yoga in the Sports activity in November 2017. Azaadi ka Amrit Mohotsav was celebrated as 75 years of India's independence. It celebrated 75 years of establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Saudi Arabia. The culture has also seen an expansion in areas of cinemas and entertainment, sports activities such as cricket, and football and tourism.

2) India and Turkey

India has a significant amount of contribution to its relations with Turkey from antiquity such as historic connections like the first exchange of diplomatic missions during 1481-1482. Which was between the Muslim rulers and Ottoman Sultans of the Indian subcontinent. Also, many features such as common language could also be traced. India played an important role in the formation of the Turkish Republic during the Turkish War of Independence in the 1920s.

➤ Political Relations

Turkey is a country which is called a parliamentary republic with a democratic system of Government. Its political landscape is secular with Islamic influences. The ties between India and Turkey got strained due to

Turkey's support to Pakistan in the Kashmir issue and the abrogation of Article 370. Yet, both of them have expressed support for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Diplomatic relations were established in 1948. They have mutual respect and cooperation for each other. Moreover to look specifically one can see that due to regional dynamics and global geopolitics, the political ties have shown complexity.

➤ **Cultural Relations**

The cultural ties between the two countries could be seen as deeply rooted historically which is quite rich and diverse. Both have a rich history of civilisation, art and literature due to the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. There is also a share in the culture of traditional music, dance and textiles, film festivals and academic collaborations. They both have a shared cultural heritage. While Turkish cuisine comes from Central Asia, the Middle East and the Mediterranean, the Indian cuisine reflects a blend of the indigenous flavours from various other regions. Linguistic roots are another feature which they share. Both countries share religious and spiritual bonds. They were known as important forks of the Silk Road which is found to connect West and East. This not only enhanced the exchange of silk, spices, textiles etc but also increased great cultural exchange between India and Turkey.

3) **India and the United Arab Emirates**

India and UAE are two countries that have their different and unique way of living.

➤ **Political Relations**

The UAE is India's third-largest trading partner. It established diplomatic relations in 1972. A new strategic partnership could be seen in the visit of PM Modi to the UAE in August 2015. They signed eight pacts to enhance the cooperation in various areas of investment, electricity trade and digital payments. Both countries emphasized each other's economic growth and stability. Most importantly there is a significant number of Indian expatriate communities in the UAE which have immensely contributed to bilateral relations through remittances and cultural exchange. Several agreements have been signed by both the countries in areas of energy, infrastructure and technology.

➤ **Cultural Relations**

The Indian culture is vibrant and diverse. UAE is also a multicultural society. Both countries from the very antiquity have developed historical ties and have maintained cultural exchanges at all levels. Cultural relations between them could be seen as the Signing of a Cultural agreement in 1975. The Cultural Centre organised several events such as Handicraft Bazar - Discover India, a Poetry Reading session by Dr Satchidanandan, Art and Culture-specific to UAE, and Photo- an exhibition of Islamic monuments of India. Several Indian festivals can be seen celebrated in UAE such as Diwali, Holi and Eid. This shows the richness of Indian traditions. Also, Indian cuisine is very famous in the restaurants of UAE. Several cultural events are organised to promote the Indian arts, music, literature, dance etc which involves a large participation from both sides.

Foreign Policy Strategy: Modi Era

Since 2014, when the BJP Government came to power at the centre, India witnessed a multidimensional prosperity in various fields and has also emerged as one of the most powerful countries. Our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has planned a dynamic foreign policy strategy. This has certainly enlarged India's vision and made it stand at a unique platform today. He took a multifaceted approach which aimed at strengthening relations of India with other countries of the world. This paper has certainly and especially taken into consideration those important countries of West Asia i.e., Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates with which India can envision expanding its bilateral relations, economic cooperation and political ties in the near future.

PM Modi was also honoured with the high civilian award from West Asian countries- Saudi Arabia, Palestine and Bahrain.

In the Modi Era, several challenges and regional and global disparities have been addressed and solved at large. His approach could be seen as:

- PM Modi's visit to Saudi Arabia in 2019 boosted the Look West policy. He talked about the Future Development Initiative (FII) in Riyadh. Since then stress has been given to diversifying India's largely oil-based manufacturing, technology and tourism.
- Several cultural and business reforms have been initiated strongly at large.
- An important initiative was taken up by UAE and Saudi Arabia which pledged to invest in India in areas of infrastructure, refining, minerals, petrochemicals and mining.
- Modi's visit to Saudi Arabia also welcomed the integration of the E-migration system with the Saudis to safeguard employment conditions.
- A historic step was taken by both India and Saudi Arabia recently in 2023 in which PM Modi stated that Saudi Arabia is seen as one of the most important and influential strategic partners of India. As two of the world's fastest-growing countries, our partnership is important for the stability of the entire region. We took the historic step to connect India, West Asia and Europe through an economic corridor. Apart from connecting the two countries, the corridor will help in the increase of economic growth, energy sector and digitisation".
- Relations with Turkey have been cordial but with sporadic tensions. India's cooperation and helping hand have become an important move to appreciate its work. Operation Dost - helped the earthquake hit regions of Turkey and Syria. India sent relief materials, and medical facilities and the NDRF team was sent for rescue operations. Due to multifaceted foreign policy, the ties between the two countries have generally improved. Both countries are cooperating in the domains of trade, combating terrorism and agreement with UN reforms.
- India and the UAE have signed several agreements to enhance cooperation in various sectors. PM Modi has made seven times visit to UAE thus making UAE the most notable partner in West Asia.
- Since the agreement of CEPA(Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement) between India and UAE in 2022, a 16% increase in trade could be seen. Also, the MoU between the Reserve Bank of India and the Central Bank of UAE pushed cross-border trade using the rupee and dirham which can further lead to boost the internationalisation of the rupee.
- Under the Modi Era, the relationship between India and UAE has developed close cultural, economic and people-to-people connectivity. BAPS Swaminarayan Temple in Abu Dhabi is a growing cultural tie.
- In the I2U2 Summit, UAE is to invest US \$ 2 billion in India to establish integrated food parks to address food security issues.
- Further UAE being part of the India - Middle East- Europe Economic Corridor which would connect India, West Asia and Europe marked a progressive goal.

Therefore, PM Modi's era of foreign policy strategy towards Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates has been possible by a pragmatic approach to maximise opportunities for cooperation and to counter the difficulties and drawbacks that arise.

Reformation, Performance and Transformation (2014 onwards)

Reformation

India is working towards diversifying beyond its traditional energy sector and emphasizing more in areas like infrastructure, technology, healthcare, tourism and bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia. India is trying to resolve the differences on specific issues with Turkey and exploring dimensions for economic cooperation and more cultural exchanges. Several reform measures have been taken to promote bilateral

trade and investment. Also, with UAE, has implemented reforms to promote the ease of doing business and facilitate trade and investment flows.

Performance

India and Saudi Arabia have shown significant growth in bilateral trade. Along with this, several opportunities have been explored in areas of renewable energy, defence and food security. Strategic partnerships have strengthened through visits and exchanges. India and Turkey exploring ways to enhance interaction between people to people and to explore more opportunities in the areas of textiles, automotive, construction and tourism. The high-level visits to UAE and vice versa have led to several important agreements which will boost the trade and investment sector and open employment opportunities for the people.

Transformation

A huge effort is being made to counter terrorism and transform the relationship into a strong strategic partnership to enhance security, defence and cultural exchanges. The STU countries and India will soon transform into one of the most strategic partners in the world.

CONCLUSION

India has established a good bilateral relationship with other countries of West Asia in economic, political, cultural and social terms. During the UPA Government, several initiatives were taken to promote trade and investments but also faced a lot of challenges and criticisms. However, after 2014 when the BJP Government came into power a series of significant interactions happened which bolstered relations of India with West Asian countries. The foreign strategy of PM Modi developed strong strategic partnerships with countries like STU. This could help India to develop as a country which can help other countries and get helped when it comes to it. It will strengthen the defence, technology and security of the country. Good bilateral relations with the core of the Middle East will make India engage with countries which have tensions with other countries. India is thus looking forward to more such innovations from the Modi Government as this Government has engaged at large with other countries with its strong diplomatic strategy.

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