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**EMERGING CONTOURS OF INDIA-MYANMAR
RELATIONS: RATIONALE, DEVELOPMENTS AND
CHALLENGES**



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**EMERGING CONTOURS OF INDIA-MYANMAR RELATIONS:
RATIONALE, DEVELOPMENTS AND CHALLENGES**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Geopolitics and
International Relations in Partial Fulfilment for Master's Degree in
Geopolitics and International Relations**

Supervisor

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BY

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June, 2021



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Date: 29 June, 2021

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled **“Emerging Contours of India-Myanmar Relations: Rationale, Developments and Challenges”** submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Geopolitics and International Relations of Manipal Academy of Higher Education is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

Puyam Priyobarta Singh
(Puyam Priyobarta Singh)

CERTIFICATE

I recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Supervisor

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Arakan Army
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEP	Act East Policy
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral and Economic Cooperation
CADP	Comprehensive Asia Development Plan
DTAA	Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement
ICWA	Indian Council of World Affairs
JTC	Joint Trade Committee
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
LEP	Look East Policy
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MGC	Mekong Ganga Cooperation
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MDONER	Ministry of North Eastern Region
NSCN-IM	National Socialist Council of Nagaland- Isak- Muivah
NSCN-K	National Socialist Council of Nagaland - Khaplang
NHPC	National Hydroelectric Power Cooperation
NLD	National League for Democracy
SAARC	South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation

TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Asom
UNLF	United National Liberation Front

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation on the theme “Emerging Contours of India-Myanmar Relations: Rationale, Developments and Challenges” has made a modest attempt to delve into and understand the

evolving nature of the bilateral relationship between Myanmar and India since the end of the Cold War. The dissertation begins with an assessment of the historical background of the relationship between Myanmar and India till the end of Cold War. This was done in order to understand how the relationship progressed after both the nations got independence from the British rule. The historical mapping of the relationship covered the period from the signing of the friendship treaty between the two nations in 1951, the many vicissitudes in the relationship at a time when global politics was revolving around the global race for supremacy between the United States and the Soviet Union. What were the major drivers and factors that shaped the India-Myanmar relationship during the Cold War and what were its implications for the time to come in the bilateral dynamics formed a major focus of this study.

Except during the early stages of both nations' independent existence, India's relationship with Myanmar was not particularly warm throughout the Cold War. With the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, it shifted radically in a new direction. The reunion between India and Myanmar owed, on the one hand, to the developing worldwide phenomena of economic liberalization and, on the other hand, to the historical ideals that both nations shared for decades. The dissertation attempts to explain the bilateral relationship in between the two nation states from the angle of international relations theories like neo-liberalism, constructivism, realism and regional security complex theory in order to understand the emerging contours of the bilateral relationship between the two. Following that, the dissertation attempts to assess and analyse the multiple dimensions in which the relationship has been strengthened over the years. India and Myanmar inked a slew of bilateral agreements and joined regional groups like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi- Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC). The India-Myanmar relationship was further augmented in multifaceted ways through India's Look East policy, later rechristened in 2014, as the Act East policy. The dissertation attempts to analyze and understand the steps that were taken up under these policies which results in stepping up the bilateral relationship in between India and Myanmar.

Although the restructured relationship was insufficient to fully realize the potential the legalized trade and commerce channels between the two countries, it did plant the seeds of socio-economic interdependence between the two nations. Specifically, the relationship in the post-Cold War era has provided an opportunity for both sides' neglected frontiers to rebuild long-standing development deficits, particularly in North-East India, which has been largely known for being regionally imbalanced, to witness the process of infrastructural development

and more initiatives underlay to translate words into action. With the shifting Indo-Myanmar ties and the region's economic integration into the Southeast Asian economies, the North-East becomes a key focus of India's growth story. India-Myanmar relationship has become dynamic, with reciprocal collaboration in such a short interface bringing cyclic development. This paradigm change is a notable feature of the development apparatus of the emerging relationship between India and Myanmar. Therefore, this research study attempts to evaluate the re-establishment of Indo-Myanmar ties in the post-Cold War period, examines the change in development policy paradigm, and critically examines how the border region of North-East India has benefited from recent cooperative attempts.

Underlining the significance of the China factor in India-Myanmar relations, the dissertation makes an attempt to assess and analyse the complex dynamics of the 'India-China-Myanmar' triangle. Given the intersecting domains in their respective spheres of influence, Myanmar has emerged as an important area of competition for the rise of China and India. China's dynamic grip over the politics and economics of Myanmar has been relatively deeper and broader than most other countries. The deep linkages between the military and civilian aspects of China and Myanmar requires to be studied and understood, for India to make informed policies towards strengthening India-Myanmar relations in its own ways. In the realm of civilian and security cooperation, including infrastructure building as well as counter-insurgency, the India-Myanmar relationship will encounter both challenges and opportunities. The intention and ability of Myanmar to hedge its ties between India and China, for its own benefits cannot be discounted in this complex dimensions. In the context of more recent developments, the dissertation has made a modest attempt to understand how the military coup in Myanmar will affect the bilateral relationship in between India and Myanmar. Such an attempt includes an analysis of the China factor in the emerging dynamics of Myanmar's external orientations post the military coup, and the way it has been playing out for India's relations with Myanmar's military and civilian leadership. One of the most apparent assessments of India-Myanmar relationship remains the inevitability of a closer India-Myanmar relationship with or without the coup, given India's sizeable stakes in the politics and economics of Myanmar.