

## Systematic Review on Indo-Afghan Relations

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### ABSTRACT

Indo-Afghan relations represent one of the oldest and most significant diplomatic, cultural, and strategic partnerships in South Asia. Rooted in centuries of historical interactions through trade, religion, language, and cultural exchanges, the relationship has evolved considerably in the modern geopolitical context. India and Afghanistan have shared common interests in promoting regional stability, economic development, and people-to-people connectivity. Since the establishment of formal diplomatic ties in 1950, India has emerged as one of Afghanistan's major development partners, contributing substantially to infrastructure development, education, healthcare, capacity building, and humanitarian assistance. India's investments in major developmental projects have strengthened bilateral cooperation and enhanced goodwill among the Afghan people. The changing political landscape in Afghanistan, particularly after the withdrawal of international forces and the political transition in 2021, has introduced new challenges and opportunities in Indo-Afghan relations. Issues relating to regional security, terrorism, humanitarian concerns, connectivity initiatives, and diplomatic engagement continue to shape the dynamics of this relationship. India's humanitarian assistance and continued engagement with the people of Afghanistan demonstrate its commitment to regional peace and development despite evolving geopolitical realities. In this article, systematic review on Indo-Afghan relations was discussed.

**Keywords:** *India, Afghanistan, Relations.*

### INTRODUCTION

Indo-Afghan relations constitute one of the most enduring and historically significant bilateral relationships in Asia. The ties between India and Afghanistan date back to ancient times, when both regions were connected through trade routes, cultural exchanges, religious interactions, and intellectual traditions. The historical linkages established through the Silk Route facilitated the movement of people, goods, ideas, and philosophies, contributing to mutual cultural enrichment. From the periods of the Mauryan Empire and the Kushan dynasty to the medieval and modern eras, the people of India and Afghanistan have shared deep-rooted socio-cultural and economic

connections. In the following India's independence and the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1950, both countries have consistently maintained cordial and cooperative ties based on mutual respect, sovereignty, and shared developmental aspirations. Over the decades, India has played an important role in supporting Afghanistan's reconstruction and socio-economic development through investments in infrastructure, education, healthcare, institutional capacity-building, and humanitarian assistance. Bilateral cooperation has expanded beyond traditional diplomacy to include strategic partnerships, regional connectivity initiatives, and cultural collaborations. The geopolitical significance of Afghanistan has made Indo-Afghan relations an important subject of academic and policy discourse. Afghanistan occupies a strategic position linking South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, making it crucial for regional security and economic connectivity. Consequently, India's engagement with Afghanistan has been guided by considerations of regional stability, counter-terrorism cooperation, economic integration, and the promotion of peace and development. The signing of the Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2011 marked a significant milestone in strengthening bilateral relations and institutionalizing cooperation across multiple sectors. However, the political transformations in Afghanistan, particularly the developments following the political transition in 2021, have introduced new dimensions and challenges to Indo-Afghan relations. Questions relating to humanitarian assistance, diplomatic engagement, regional security, and connectivity have acquired renewed significance. India's continued humanitarian support and its people-centric approach towards Afghanistan reflect its commitment to maintaining constructive engagement despite changing political circumstances. In the contemporary international order, Indo-Afghan relations represent an important case study of historical continuity, developmental diplomacy, and strategic cooperation. Understanding the evolution, opportunities, and challenges of this bilateral relationship is essential for analysing broader issues of regional geopolitics, security, and sustainable development in South Asia. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the historical foundations, strategic importance, contemporary challenges, and future prospects of Indo-Afghan relations from multidisciplinary perspectives. The objective of the study is to explore the systematic review on Indo-Afghan relations.

## **SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Kotokey, A. (2024). As India engaged further with the Taliban's interim government, there was a lot of talk in academic and policy circles regarding India's ties to the present Afghan government. This was especially true after an Indian delegation went to the nation in March 2024. India's relationship with Afghanistan has always been based on strong links between people, no matter who is in charge in Kabul. India's strategic and security objectives have been more important than the humanitarian bond in its relationship with Afghanistan. India does not recognize the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, but it is important to understand why India is working with the new Afghan government after the Taliban took power again in 2021.

Chawla, S. (2024). In early March, a group from India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) went to Kabul to meet with high-ranking officials from the Afghan government. New Delhi thought the visit was very important because it got people interested in the ties between Afghanistan and India. The visit is part of India's ongoing approach with Kabul, which has always put the Afghan people first.

The MEA spokesperson stressed that the visit was mainly about two important things: Afghan traders using the Chabahar port and giving humanitarian supplies to Afghanistan. Since August 2021, when the Taliban took over Afghanistan, India's attitude toward the Taliban has slowly changed. India has been working to stabilize Afghanistan by slowly getting involved with the Taliban. This is because India closed its consulates in Afghanistan in 2021 because it was worried about security issues that arose from its past experience with Taliban rule in the 1990s. India is helping the Taliban with humanitarian aid, even though it doesn't recognize the Taliban administration. India and Afghanistan's relationship has altered because of strategic changes in the past. After 2001 (until August 2021), the two countries stayed friends because of strong relationships between their people and exchanges between their governments. India has been a helpful player in Afghanistan, focusing on boosting capacity and growth. India and Afghanistan have a long history of good relations and strong cultural links. India's ongoing backing for the Northern Alliance while the Taliban was in power in the 1990s hurt relations between the two countries a lot. India's main goals after 2001 were to help people and improve industries, hydropower, education, and health. India was one of the biggest donors to Afghanistan, giving the government around \$3 billion in total aid. In 2011, the Strategic Partnership Agreement between India and Afghanistan made their friendship even stronger.

Barman, J. (2023). Afghanistan is vital to India's strategic thinking because it helps India keep China and Pakistan in check and connect with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and West Asian countries like Iran. India still sees Afghanistan as important for trade, security, building regional and global bases, and its energy plans. However, security has become the most important aspect in determining Afghanistan's importance to India because it is so important for keeping the area and the country stable. India has given Afghanistan more than \$3 billion in aid and investments since the Taliban took back control of the country in 2021. India has built more than 400 projects in Afghanistan to help with infrastructure development. These include a highway, a pediatric hospital, a dam, and its parliament building. All of these initiatives have earned India the highest support from Afghans. But India's complete retreat from diplomacy in the country makes people worried about India's future interests and gains in Afghanistan. This study looks at India's past ties with the Afghan government under Hamid Karzai after the Taliban were kicked out in 2001. The study examines the connection between India and the Ashraf Ghani administration within the framework of the political transformations in both nations in 2014. The report also looks at how India deals with Afghanistan after the Taliban took over in 2021. It also examines India's perspective and stance on recent events and their repercussions, excluding geostrategic objectives in Afghanistan.

Dubey, Y. (2023). This essay's goal is to look at India's foreign policy toward Afghanistan following 9/11. The US-led military intervention in Afghanistan gave India a much-needed chance to fix its diplomatic ties with Kabul, even though the attacks on September 11, 2001, marked the start of a new era in world affairs. Since then, India has been careful with how it deals with Afghanistan. It has relied less on military action and more on foreign policy efforts that are based on helping the country that is in trouble. India still needs to answer the question of how well it has been able to create a strategic presence in Afghanistan. The Taliban took back control of the country in August 2021, which forced India to close its embassies and consulates there. Or did India squander its chance to take advantage of the fall of the Taliban administration in late 2001 because it relied too much on soft power?

Khawrin, M.K. (2023). The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) is the name of the current Afghan government, which is often called the "Taliban." It beat NATO and its allies and has been in charge of Afghanistan for the second time since August 15, 2021. Both sides still don't know what the Taliban's ties to India are for a number of reasons. The fact that the Taliban is thought to assist Pakistan, India's arch enemy, is a big reason why the two countries have had a hostile relationship. The Taliban and Pakistan were quite close to each other. The Taliban's rigid view of Islam and its treatment of women's and minorities' rights made things worse between India and Pakistan. The Taliban strictly enforce sharia law in Afghanistan, which makes it hard for women to go to school and work. These methods were not accepted by many countries, including India. There was no communication between the Taliban and India, no clear direction for foreign relations, and policies with its neighbour's region that caused problems.

Singh, S. (2023). This paper talks about how India and Afghanistan get along, especially after the 9/11 attacks on the US. It examines the amicable relations between India and Afghanistan since the latter's independence, excepting the Taliban's brief governance from 1996 to 2001. When the US destroyed the Taliban government and set up a democracy in Afghanistan, India was able to reconnect with its old historical and cultural ties. India has been helping Afghanistan rebuild in several ways since 2001. When the US leaves Afghanistan in August 2021 and a new Taliban 2.0 leadership takes over, India's national interests are even more at stake. This recent event in Afghanistan has changed the way India gives aid. The paper does this to learn more about how India and Afghanistan get along.

Yousuf, M. et al. (2023). The recent political developments in Afghanistan make it clear that the country is inextricably linked to uncertain international geopolitics. This is also redefining the South Asian region's role in global geostrategic realignments. Because the US pulled out of Afghanistan, China and India are now trying to build their own relationships with the country. The essay talks briefly on how the geopolitics of the region are changing and how a new global order is forming. It then goes on to talk about India's policy options in Afghanistan in this complicated situation. These new geopolitical realities make it clear that India's policies in Afghanistan need to be strong and focused on protecting its geopolitical interests and concerns against China's growing power. At the same time, India should work to promote a multipolar world order, which seems to be a return to India's previous policy of not taking sides.

Reyaz, M. & Ahamed, S. (2022). Before the Taliban took over Afghanistan again in August 2021, India and Afghanistan had good relations and sometimes called each other great allies. India has helped build a number of infrastructure projects since 2002 as part of its promised development assistance program of more than \$2 billion (later raised to \$3 billion). India earned the trust of many Afghans because it put money into the country. However, it would be erroneous to assert that India's support was the sole determinant of the two nations' unique and intricate bilateral relations. This study piece is a one-of-a-kind effort to understand how Afghans see India, based on a field survey in Afghanistan in 2019. The study tries to find out how much goodwill and pleasant feelings India brought forth in Afghans by looking at the answers of more than 321 Afghan volunteers. Still, many Afghans thought that India had not done enough during the situation in August 2021. This study

posits that soft power efforts in Afghanistan facilitated India's nation-branding by enhancing its appeal and cultivating goodwill, as evidenced by the survey and the prevailing sentiments of Afghans post-Taliban resurgence. But "soft power behavior" couldn't give New Delhi the strategic influences it needed since the city wasn't willing to take smart action.

Ganaie, R.A. & Ganaie, M.A. (2022). The goal of this essay is to look at India's foreign policy toward Afghanistan after 9/11. The US-led military campaign in Afghanistan gave India a much-needed chance to fix its diplomatic ties with Kabul, even if the attacks on September 11, 2001, marked the start of a new era in world affairs. Since then, India has been careful with Afghanistan, relying more on foreign policy efforts driven by aid than on sending troops to the war-torn country. India had to close its embassy and consulates in Afghanistan in August 2021 after the Taliban won back control of the country. It is still not clear how much strategic space India has been able to carve out for itself there. Or did India miss the potential to take advantage of the demise of the Taliban administration in late 2001 because it depended too much on soft power?

Dhar, X & Dhiman, A. (2021). An old player has come back to the South Asian geopolitical scene, which is always changing. The Taliban seized Afghanistan twenty days after the U.S. troops withdrew. Even while there is pushback, the Islamic extremist group keeps getting stronger. The new leaders' presence raises questions about how well the growing relationship between India and Afghanistan will be able to continue. We don't know if the Taliban's power will stop the two countries from working together or if it will lead to a small relationship and make the already high tensions in the area worse.

Sethi, H. (2020). Afghanistan is a big player in Asian geopolitics because of where it is located in terms of geography and geopolitics. Because it lies at the crossroads of the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, and the Middle East, it has been a centre for transit and transportation since the Silk Road. Because of its strategic location and borders with Iran, Pakistan, China, and Turkmenistan, it has been a place of both cooperation and conflict in international relations. The Soviet Union's decision to pull its troops out of the Afghan Civil War changed Afghanistan's role and status in Asia in a big way. Afghanistan is also in full disarray since many Mujahidin parties have risen up, with backing from adjacent countries and interference from other countries.

Subirthana, M.S. (2020). India and Afghanistan have a strong bond because of their shared history. India's help with Afghanistan's growth and recovery has made their connection even stronger. The friendship between India and Pakistan stayed strong even throughout the war between the two countries in 1965. India's role in Afghanistan changed when the Taliban took over. India's role in Afghanistan got worse because the Taliban had close ties to Pakistan. When the Karzai government came to power in late 2001, India renewed its ties with Afghanistan and became more interested in the country. The government guaranteed India a stable relationship with Afghanistan, and India profited from the Taliban's demise. The Strategic Partnership Agreement between Afghanistan and India added fresh promises to their partnership. But Pakistan was quite worried about how near the two countries were to each other. This page tries to answer some of the questions people have about Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. Why is India so interested in Afghanistan? Is India's only interest in Afghanistan economic? What does Pakistan worry about when India gets involved in Afghanistan?

Ali, A.M. (2014). The idea of security expanding from conventional to unconventional threats, along with shifting geo-economic tactics, has led to a transformation of the foreign policy of modern nation-states. India also saw that it needed to change its views and ways of dealing with the rest of the world after realizing this. However, her foreign policy goals for socio-economic growth, security, and peace depend on having a stable and prosperous neighborhood. The "Connect Central Asia Policy" and "Peaceful Co-Existence Principle" provide Central Asia and its surrounding areas the attention they deserve when it comes to geo-economic, geo-strategic, and geo-political issues. Afghanistan is also a good place for India to achieve its foreign policy goals in the region and around the world. This is because Afghanistan is located between South, Central, West, and East Asia, and world powers have been involved in the country since 9/11. India has given \$2 billion to help rebuild Afghanistan, making it the largest regional donor and the sixth-largest worldwide donor in this process. India has finished a number of initiatives in this unstable country to improve its economy, science and technology, civil infrastructure, and human resources in fields like education, health, and agriculture. India is trying to help Afghanistan become stable, safe, peaceful, democratic, and prosperous. This is important for India's political, strategic, and economic interests because Afghanistan is in both South and Central Asia, which gives India a strong presence in the region. India does have certain problems, though, when it comes to meeting and promoting her interests in Afghanistan. These problems have gotten worse because the Taliban is back, Pakistan is back in Afghan politics, and the US-led ISAF is leaving. So, the study tries to look into India's evolving foreign policy goals, especially her Afghan policy, to help us understand how "emerging India" is becoming an important player in international politics in the area and around the world. India must play a major role in making the "Asian Century" a reality. This means investing and helping, as well as working to turn hate into love, making regional organizations more effective, and peacefully resolving international and inter-regional problems. All of these things require a humane approach.

## **FINDINGS**

The systematic review on Indo-Afghan relations reveals that the bilateral relationship is characterized by historical continuity, strategic cooperation, and developmental engagement. Existing literature consistently highlights that India and Afghanistan have maintained strong cultural, political, and economic ties that predate modern diplomatic relations. Historical interactions through trade, religion, and cultural exchanges have significantly influenced contemporary bilateral cooperation. The review indicates that India's developmental diplomacy has emerged as one of the most significant dimensions of Indo-Afghan relations. Scholarly studies emphasize India's contributions to infrastructure development, education, healthcare, capacity building, and humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. These initiatives have strengthened people-to-people relations and enhanced India's image as a reliable development partner. Development-oriented cooperation has been identified as a key factor contributing to mutual trust and goodwill between the two countries. Another important finding relates to the strategic significance of Afghanistan in regional geopolitics. The literature reveals that Afghanistan occupies a crucial position in regional connectivity initiatives linking South Asia and Central Asia. Consequently, India's engagement with Afghanistan has been shaped by concerns relating to regional stability, economic integration, and security cooperation. Researchers

have observed that bilateral relations extend beyond traditional diplomacy to encompass broader regional and international strategic interests. The systematic review further highlights that security-related challenges continue to influence Indo-Afghan relations. Political transitions, concerns regarding terrorism, regional instability, and evolving geopolitical dynamics have affected the nature and scope of bilateral engagement. Studies published after recent political developments in Afghanistan emphasize the need for flexible diplomatic approaches that balance strategic interests with humanitarian commitments. An additional finding of the review is the growing importance of humanitarian diplomacy in maintaining bilateral relations during periods of political uncertainty. Humanitarian assistance has emerged as an effective instrument for sustaining engagement and promoting regional peace and stability. The literature suggests that people-centric policies have contributed significantly to preserving mutual goodwill despite changing political circumstances. The review also identifies certain research gaps within the existing body of literature. Comparative studies examining the long-term impact of developmental cooperation, regional connectivity initiatives, and emerging diplomatic strategies remain relatively limited. There is a need for interdisciplinary research integrating perspectives from international relations, political science, economics, and regional studies to understand the evolving nature of Indo-Afghan relations more comprehensively. The findings suggest that Indo-Afghan relations are multidimensional and continue to evolve in response to historical legacies, strategic imperatives, and contemporary geopolitical developments. Sustained diplomatic engagement, developmental cooperation, and humanitarian commitments remain central to strengthening bilateral relations and promoting regional peace, stability, and prosperity.

## DISCUSSION

The systematic review on Indo-Afghan relations demonstrates that the bilateral relationship extends beyond conventional diplomatic engagement and is deeply rooted in historical, cultural, strategic, and developmental dimensions. The literature reviewed indicates that Indo-Afghan relations have evolved through multiple phases, adapting to regional political transformations while preserving their fundamental character of mutual cooperation and friendship. Historical linkages have significantly contributed to fostering trust and facilitating diplomatic engagement between the two countries. One of the major themes emerging from the review is the significance of developmental diplomacy in shaping contemporary Indo-Afghan relations. India's developmental initiatives in Afghanistan have not only contributed to socio-economic reconstruction but have also strengthened people-centric diplomacy. The emphasis on education, healthcare, infrastructure development, and capacity-building programmes reflects a model of international cooperation based on sustainable development and humanitarian engagement. Such initiatives have generated considerable goodwill and have provided a stable foundation for bilateral relations despite changing geopolitical circumstances.

The discussion further reveals that Afghanistan's strategic geographical position has substantially influenced India's foreign policy priorities. As a gateway connecting South Asia with Central Asia, Afghanistan remains important for regional connectivity, economic cooperation, and security considerations. Consequently, Indo-Afghan relations cannot be analysed solely through bilateral perspectives but must also be understood within broader regional geopolitical frameworks.

Contemporary diplomatic engagements increasingly reflect the interconnected nature of regional security, economic integration, and multilateral cooperation. The review also highlights the complex relationship between political developments in Afghanistan and India's diplomatic strategies. Political transitions have repeatedly reshaped the nature of bilateral engagement, requiring adaptive and pragmatic policy responses. India's continued humanitarian assistance during periods of political uncertainty demonstrates that people-centric diplomacy remains an important instrument for sustaining constructive engagement. The findings suggest that humanitarian commitments have strengthened India's diplomatic credibility and reinforced long-standing cultural and historical ties with the Afghan people. Another important dimension identified in the literature concerns regional security challenges. Issues relating to terrorism, political instability, and transnational security threats continue to influence policy decisions and diplomatic initiatives. Sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan have direct implications for regional development and security in South Asia. Therefore, cooperative approaches involving diplomatic dialogue, humanitarian engagement, and regional partnerships remain essential for addressing contemporary challenges. The systematic review further identifies the need for expanding academic scholarship on Indo-Afghan relations. Existing studies have predominantly focused on strategic and security dimensions, while comparatively fewer investigations have examined the long-term socio-economic impacts of developmental cooperation, cultural diplomacy, and regional connectivity initiatives. Future research adopting interdisciplinary and comparative approaches may provide deeper insights into the evolving dynamics of bilateral relations in the context of twenty-first-century geopolitical transformations. The discussion underscores that Indo-Afghan relations are multidimensional, dynamic, and resilient. Historical continuity, developmental cooperation, strategic engagement, and humanitarian diplomacy collectively shape the contemporary character of bilateral relations. Strengthening these dimensions through sustained diplomatic efforts and collaborative regional initiatives will remain crucial for promoting peace, stability, and mutual prosperity in the years to come.

## **CONCLUSION**

Indo-Afghan relations reflect a unique blend of historical continuity, cultural affinity, developmental cooperation, and strategic engagement. The relationship between the two nations has evolved over centuries, transcending geographical boundaries and political transformations. Rooted in mutual respect and shared civilizational linkages, India and Afghanistan have consistently sought to strengthen bilateral ties through diplomacy, economic cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and people-to-people interactions. India's contribution to Afghanistan's socio-economic development has demonstrated its commitment to fostering peace, stability, and inclusive growth in the region. Developmental projects, educational initiatives, healthcare support, and capacity-building programmes have significantly enhanced bilateral cooperation and reinforced India's role as a trusted development partner. At the same time, Afghanistan's strategic location continues to influence regional geopolitics, making Indo-Afghan relations an important component of South Asian and Central Asian connectivity and security frameworks. The changing political environment in Afghanistan has undoubtedly created new challenges relating to diplomatic engagement, regional security, terrorism, and humanitarian concerns. Nevertheless, these challenges also present

opportunities for constructive dialogue and innovative approaches to cooperation. Sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan remain closely linked to broader regional prosperity, making continued engagement both necessary and mutually beneficial. In the years ahead, the future of Indo-Afghan relations will depend upon sustained diplomatic efforts, respect for sovereignty, humanitarian commitments, and collaborative initiatives aimed at promoting regional peace and development. Strengthening cultural ties, enhancing economic partnerships, and supporting the aspirations of the Afghan people will remain central to this relationship. Indo-Afghan relations, therefore, continue to exemplify the importance of historical friendship and strategic cooperation in addressing contemporary global and regional challenges, while contributing meaningfully to peace, stability, and sustainable development in the twenty-first century.

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