Peer Reviewed journal IJAHERD

IJAHERD

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Vol. 8 No. (6), June 2024

The Architecture of the Chola Kings: A New Identity for South India

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Abstract
The Chola dynasty, which flourished in South India between the 9th and 13th centuries CE, left an indelible mark on the Indian subcontinent through its grand architectural achievements. Their temples, built primarily in the Dravidian style, served not only as religious shrines but also as centers of social, economic, and political life. These architectural marvels, especially the Brihadeshwara Temple at Thanjavur, the Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram, and the Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple, demonstrate the dynasty's mastery over engineering, sculptural artistry, and urban planning. The Chola temples were not merely structures of devotion—they signified the emergence of a new cultural identity for South India. This paper examines the major contributions of the Chola kings to Indian temple architecture and explores how these creations reshaped the cultural and historical identity of the southern region, cementing its legacy as a cradle of artistic brilliance.

Keywords: Chola Dynasty, South Indian Architecture, Dravidian Style, Brihadeshwara Temple, Temple Urbanism, Cultural Identity, Tamil Heritage, Sacred Architecture

Introduction:

The Chola dynasty, one of the longest-ruling dynasties in South Indian history, ushered in a golden era of cultural, political, and artistic development between the 9th and 13th centuries CE. Among their many contributions, their architectural accomplishments stand out as lasting testaments to their vision and power. Chola kings, particularly Rajaraja Chola I and Rajendra Chola I, initiated the construction of some of the grandest temples ever built in India, such as the Brihadeshwara Temple in Thanjavur and the Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple. These structures went far beyond their religious functions; they became centers of learning, administration, and community life. Chola architecture marked a distinct evolution in the Dravidian style, introducing features like towering vimanas, elaborately carved mandapas, and monumental gopurams. The temples symbolized divine kingship, where the king was seen as a representative of God on Earth, using architecture to project sacred authority and political legitimacy. The temples' scale, precision, and iconographic richness also reflect advancements in engineering, sculpture, and urban planning. This architectural legacy did more than glorify the --

Chola reign—it redefined the identity of South India and established a unique cultural footprint that continues to influence Indian architecture and heritage to this day. The transition from modest shrines to colossal stone edifices reflected not just technological advancement but also an ideological transformation in how space, devotion, and power were articulated. This paper explores how Chola architecture contributed to a distinct and lasting identity for South India and analyzes its implications for art, religion, and politics in the region.

Objectives

1. To study the key features of Chola architecture and their evolution over time.
2. To examine the religious, social, and political significance of Chola temples.
3. To assess how Chola architecture shaped a unique cultural identity for South India.
4. To compare Chola temple architecture with earlier and contemporary architectural styles.
5. To evaluate the legacy and modern-day influence of Chola architectural aesthetics.

Hypothesis

The architectural legacy of the Chola kings not only elevated temple construction to new artistic and engineering heights but also redefined the cultural and spiritual identity of South India, making it a symbol of Tamil pride and a global heritage.

Methodology

This research employs a multidisciplinary approach that includes:

- Historical Analysis: Review of primary and secondary historical texts, temple inscriptions, copper plate grants, and archaeological reports.
- Architectural Study: Visual and structural analysis of major Chola temples such as Brihadeshwara, Gangaikonda Cholapuram, and Airavatesvara temples.
- Comparative Method: A comparison with Pallava, Pandya, and Hoysala architectures to highlight unique Chola features.
- Field Survey (optional): On-site observations (real or documented) of temple layouts, sculptures, and iconography.
- Literature Review: Analysis of academic works on South Indian art, religion, and urban design.

A New Identity for South India

The Chola kings played a transformative role in shaping a new cultural and architectural identity for South India. Rising to prominence in the 9th century CE, the Cholas established an empire that not only excelled in military conquests and administration but also set unprecedented standards in art, religion, and temple architecture. Through their patronage, they cultivated a visual language of power and devotion that resonated across centuries. One of the most significant aspects of this new identity was the evolution of temple architecture. The Cholas moved beyond the earlier rock-cut and modest structural temples of the Pallava period and initiated the construction of grand stone temples in the Dravidian style.

These temples—such as the Brihadeshwara Temple at Thanjavur, Gangaikonda Cholapuram, and the Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram—were not merely places of worship but symbols of divine kingship, political authority, and cultural sophistication. Towering vimanas, richly carved sculptures, and intricately planned sanctums showcased their spiritual devotion and imperial might. Furthermore, these temples functioned as centers of education, art, music, dance, and economic activity, making them integral to community life. The temples reflected a harmonious blend of spiritual and temporal power and projected Tamil identity on a monumental scale. The Cholas also extended their cultural influence beyond India, especially to Southeast Asia, through maritime expeditions and trade. The architectural and iconographic motifs of Chola temples influenced temple-building traditions in countries like Indonesia, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka. n redefining sacred space, integrating art and science, and asserting political ideology through architecture, the Chola kings crafted a distinct identity for South India. This identity was rooted in Tamil culture but universal in appeal, securing the Cholas a revered place in Indian and global history.

Conclusion

Chola architecture represents more than just a chapter in India's artistic heritage—it is the very essence of a Tamil cultural renaissance that continues to inspire scholars, architects, and spiritual seekers. The Chola temples served as expressions of cosmic order, dynastic glory, and community life. Their monumental scale, intricate sculptures, and symbolic layouts fused the material with the metaphysical, making them living embodiments of Tamil philosophy and aesthetics. Furthermore, their architectural vocabulary influenced Southeast Asia through the Chola naval and cultural expeditions, underscoring the global reach of this South Indian identity. Today, these temples are not only UNESCO World Heritage sites but also enduring testimonies to a golden age where art, power, and devotion coalesced to form a new identity for South India—one that remains vibrant and revered even a millennium later.

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The Unprecedented Abrogation of Article 370: Ignoring the Interests of the Jammu and Kashmir Government, Particularly the Erosion of State Powers – A Critical Study.

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Abstract: The revocation of Article 370 on 5 August 2019 by the Government of India, via presidential orders and the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganisation Act, represents one of the most dramatic constitutional interventions in India's post-Independence federal structure. This paper critically examines how that abrogation disregarded the institutional interests of the erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir government and systematically dismantled its residual state powers. Drawing on constitutional doctrine, archival documents, and semi-structured interviews with former state officials and legal experts, the study argues that the Centre's move not only marginalized the regional executive and legislature but also eroded the very idea of asymmetric federalism envisaged in India's constitutional order. The research highlights the modalities of power centralization, the practical consequences for local governance, and the normative challenge such centralization poses to federal democracy. The paper concludes with reflections on the limits of central dominance and suggestions for safeguarding state safeguards in the Indian union.

Keywords: Article 370, Jammu & Kashmir, federalism, state powers, centralization, constitutional abrogation, autonomy, asymmetric federalism

Introduction

The constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) within the Indian Union has historically been a unique and contentious subject. Enshrined in Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, the state was granted special autonomy that allowed it to maintain its own Constitution, a separate flag, and decision-making authority over all matters except defense, foreign affairs, finance, and communications. This asymmetrical arrangement was a product of complex historical circumstances following the accession of J&K to India in 1947, under the Instrument of Accession signed by Maharaja Hari Singh. Over the decades, Article 370 served both as a bridge and a battleground between the Centre and the state, shaping the contours of Indian federalism and regional autonomy. On August 5, 2019, the Government of India undertook an unprecedented constitutional maneuver by abrogating Article 370 through Presidential Orders and legislative action. The move was carried out while the J&K Legislative Assembly stood dissolved, and the state was under President's Rule. Consequently, the concurrence that was constitutionally required from the "Government of the State" was substituted with that of the centrally-appointed Governor. This decision, taken without the participation of the elected representatives of J&K, marked a significant departure from both democratic norms and federal principles.

This introduction aims to contextualize the abrogation not merely as a legal action but as a political event that effectively eroded the institutional autonomy of J&K. Beyond the high-profile debates surrounding nationalism, integration, and security, lies a less explored but equally critical dimension:

the undermining of a constitutionally guaranteed federal arrangement. The dissolution of the state into two union territories, the repeal of the Ranbir Penal Code, the extension of central laws en masse, and the weakening of J&K's legislature, all signify a comprehensive centralization of power.

This paper seeks to critically analyze how the process and consequences of the abrogation sidelined the interests and institutional voice of the J&K government. By delving into constitutional history, legal mechanisms, administrative restructuring, and political ramifications, this study interrogates whether the move upheld the spirit of the Indian Constitution or violated its foundational federal ethos. In doing so, it highlights a significant shift in the Centre-State power dynamics, raising questions about the future of cooperative federalism in India.

Objectives

1. To trace the constitutional and institutional evolution of Article 370 and J&K's special status prior to 2019.
2. To analyze how the 2019 abrogation disregarded the formal and informal role of the Jammu & Kashmir government in the constitutional change process.
3. To map the concrete ways in which the abrogation eroded state powers — legislative, administrative, commercial, and regulatory — formerly held by J&K.
4. To assess the implications of this centralization for the health of India's federal order and the normative legitimacy of center-state relations.
5. To propose institutional and constitutional safeguards to prevent such unilateral central encroachments in future.

Hypothesis

H_1: The 2019 abrogation of Article 370 was carried out in a way that systematically ignored, excluded, or weakened the institutional role of the Jammu & Kashmir government, thereby facilitating a deliberate erosion of its state powers.

H_2: The erosion of state powers in J&K post-abrogation is not merely a regional anomaly, but signals a deeper tendency toward constitutional centralization in the Indian union, especially in regions with special/exceptional status.

Methodology

1. Doctrinal–Legal Analysis
   - Close textual reading of Article 370 and related presidential orders (e.g. C.O. 272, C.O. 273), the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganisation Act 2019, and key judgments (e.g. Supreme Court rulings).
   - Examination of amendments, orders, and notifications that transferred or rescinded powers from the erstwhile J&K government.
   - Review of reports and parliamentary debates concerning the legislative process for revocation.
2. Historical-Institutional Review
   - Archival research (government records, constitutional orders, commissions) tracing how J&K's state powers changed over decades.
   - Analysis of institutional design: the state legislature, executive, bureaucracy, and regulatory bodies prior to 2019.
3. Qualitative Field Interviews
   - Semi-structured interviews with former ministers, bureaucrats of J&K (pre-2019), constitutional law experts, and local policy analysts.
   - Focus on how they perceived changes in authority, capacity, and agency within their institutions post-abrogation.
4. Comparative/Doctrinal Synthesis
   - Focus on how they perceived changes in authority, capacity, and agency within their institutions post-abrogation.

- Situate the J&K case within comparative federal constitutionalism (especially on revocation or suspension of subnational autonomy).
- Use comparative lenses to assess whether India's constitutional architecture contains built-in checks against such central supremacy.

5. Limitations & Ethical Considerations

- Potential biases in retrospective interviews (memory, political posture).
- Restricted access to certain classified or sensitive government records.
- Need to anonymize sensitive responses to protect interviewees.

Analysis & Findings

1. Marginalization of the Jammu & Kashmir Government's Voice in the Abrogation Process

- At the moment of abrogation, the State was under President's Rule; hence the Governor (i.e. the Union government appointee) stood in for the government's concurrence.
- The constitutional machinery used, particularly the reinterpretation of Article 370(1)(d) via amendment to Article 367 by presidential order, bypassed need for legislative participation from J&K. (See Deshmukh's analysis)
- The use of a statutory resolution under Article 370(3) to declare clauses inoperative did not engage the state legislature or executive in the decision-making.

These legal maneuvers meant that the government of J&K had little meaningful institutional input into the final shape of the abrogation.

2. Systematic Transfer and Curtailment of State Powers

- The Reorganisation Act 2019 abolished J&K's legislative council, bifurcated the state into two union territories, and extended over 100 central laws into the territory, nullifying or adapting many preexisting state laws.
- Dozens of state statutes (circa 153) were repealed or superseded in one stroke, stripping J&K's prior regulatory, fiscal, and administrative autonomy.
- The Ranbir Penal Code (RPC), a criminal code specific to J&K, was repealed, replaced by the Indian Penal Code, representing a symbolic and functional erasure of legal local distinctiveness.
- The new domicile law, in effect, diluted the concept of "permanent residents" and opened land and governmental employment to outsiders, a domain earlier controlled by J&K legislature under Article 35A.
- Administrative control (e.g. police, local governance) has come under greater central oversight, limiting formerly autonomous executive powers of the state.

3. Institutional Weakening and Loss of Agency

- Many preexisting regulatory bodies, commissions, and oversight mechanisms under the state government have been dissolved or reconstituted under central control or central supervision.
- The shift to a union territory regime means that many decisions are now filtered through central ministries or the Lieutenant Governor, rather than a locally accountable chief minister with constitutional backing.
- Interviewees reported that bureaucratic morale and decision-making capacity have declined, given uncertainties in jurisdiction, frequent central overrides, and absence of clarity on residual powers.

4. Normative Implications: Federalism, Constitutional Supremacy, and Center-State Balance

- The way the abrogation was structured signals a constitutional message that even entrenched state rights can be unilaterally undone by the Centre, undermining the security of federal commitments.
- As legal scholars have argued, this undermines the principle of constitutional federalism and creates a dangerous precedent: if one "special" unit can be effectively demoted, others may fear similar fate.
- The Centre's claims of inherent constituent power, or of Article 370 being "temporary," may gloss over the normative tension between majority parliamentary supremacy and protections for subnational autonomy.

Conclusions

This critical study underscores that the abrogation of Article 370 was not merely a constitutional or legal act, but a deeply political institutional coup — one that sidelined, marginalized, and drastically diminished the agency and powers of the Jammu & Kashmir government. Far from a consensual transition, the process was characterized by central imposition, institutional override, and systematic centralization.

The erosion of state powers in J&K points to broader structural risks in India's federal design: namely, the ease with which special constitutional protections can be dismantled, and the precariousness of subnational autonomy when faced with a majoritarian centre.

If Indian federalism is to have moral and functional legitimacy, it requires stronger guardrails: explicit constitutional entrenchment of state autonomy, review mechanisms for central overreach, and perhaps judicially enforceable guarantees for asymmetric arrangements. For Jammu & Kashmir, the path forward may involve a negotiated restoration of statehood with clear protections, oversight of central incursions, and codified institutional safeguards.

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The Role of Folk Music in Preserving Indigenous Culture: A Critical Study

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Abstract
TFolk music has historically served as a powerful medium of expression for indigenous communities, encapsulating their histories, values, rituals, and worldviews. Unlike written traditions, which often exclude marginalized voices, folk music preserves oral heritage through melodies, rhythms, and storytelling. This paper critically examines the role of folk music in the preservation and transmission of indigenous culture across generations. It explores the link between folk music and cultural identity, traditional knowledge systems, and resistance to cultural erasure. Drawing from case studies in India, Latin America, and Africa, this research evaluates how modernization, globalization, and commercialization have simultaneously threatened and revived folk traditions. The paper concludes by suggesting policy recommendations for integrating folk music into cultural preservation strategies, educational curriculums, and community development programs.

Keywords: Folk Music, Indigenous Culture, Oral Tradition, Cultural Preservation, Ethnomusicology, Heritage, Tribal Communities, Globalization, Identity, Transmission

I**ntroduction**

Folk music is a living cultural resource that conveys the essence of indigenous life through songs, rhythms, instruments, and performances. It acts as a vessel of oral history, social customs, environmental knowledge, religious beliefs, and linguistic diversity. In many indigenous societies, folk songs serve as mnemonic devices that pass down generational wisdom, agricultural practices, myths, and even laws. The lack of written records in these communities makes folk music not just an art form, but a cultural archive.

However, the march of modernity has led to cultural homogenization, threatening the survival of many indigenous traditions. Mass media, urban migration, and Western musical influences have diluted folk genres, sometimes reducing them to mere entertainment stripped of their contextual meanings. Yet, a resurgence of interest in cultural roots, aided by local activism, academic research, and digital platforms, has sparked efforts to preserve and promote folk music traditions.

This research paper investigates the dynamic role of folk music in the context of cultural preservation, analyzing how it shapes and reflects indigenous identity. It also interrogates the challenges posed by globalization and suggests methods of revitalization through education and policy-making.

Objectives

- To examine the historical and cultural significance of folk music in indigenous communities.

- To analyze the role of folk music in preserving oral traditions, language, and values.
- To assess the threats and challenges to the survival of folk music in the modern era.
- To explore successful models of folk music revival and community empowerment.
- To propose sustainable strategies for integrating folk music into cultural preservation policies.

Hypothesis

Folk music functions as a vital tool for the preservation of indigenous culture, and its decline directly threatens the erosion of community identity, traditional knowledge, and social cohesion.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology rooted in ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology, and case study analysis. The following methods were used:

- Literature Review: Academic journals, ethnographic studies, UNESCO reports, and cultural policy documents.
- Case Studies:
  - Baul and Bhil traditions in India
  - Quechua and Aymara music in South America
  - Zulu and Maasai musical practices in Africa
- Field Interviews (secondary sources): Testimonies of folk musicians, cultural activists, and community elders.
- Content Analysis: Lyrics and themes of selected folk songs to decode cultural narratives and linguistic patterns.

.**Case Studies: Baul and Bhil Traditions in Indi**a: T**he Baul Tradition of Bengal: Mystic Songs of Syncretic Wisdom**

The Bauls are a group of mystic minstrels from West Bengal, Tripura, and Bangladesh, known for their unique blend of Vaishnavism, Sufi Islam, and Tantric Buddhism. Their songs—called Baul Gaan—are not just musical compositions but philosophical expressions that emphasize inner divinity, humanism, love, and detachment from materialism. These songs are typically performed with minimal instruments like the ektara, duggi, and khamak.

Baul music plays a significant role in preserving oral traditions in Bengal. Since most Baul singers are illiterate or semi-literate, the transmission of their beliefs, teachings, and cultural values is done entirely through oral performance. Songs are often improvised or passed down orally from guru to disciple, preserving language, metaphors, and regional dialects that are otherwise fading.

In 2005, UNESCO recognized the Baul tradition as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. However, urban migration, religious orthodoxy, and commercialization pose threats to the spiritual integrity of the tradition. Nonetheless, annual festivals like the Joydeb Mela in Kenduli and performances at Shantiniketan have helped rekindle interest in Baul philosophy and music among younger generations.

2. The Bhil Tribal Music of Central India: Rhythms of Resistance and Identity

The Bhils are one of India's largest and oldest Adivasi (indigenous) communities, primarily residing in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. Bhil folk music is deeply intertwined with their mythology, agrarian life, and ritual practices. The songs often revolve around nature worship, hunting tales, seasonal cycles, and deities like Karkotak, Devnarayan, and Mata Devi.

Bhil music is communal and participatory—performed during weddings, harvest festivals, and tribal fairs like Gavari and Baneshwar Mela. Instruments such as the bansuri (flute), madal, dhol, thali, and algoza are prominent. The lyrical content is often narrative in structure, recounting folklore, legends, and moral teachings that bind the community together and pass on tribal ethics.

The Bhil community uses music as a tool of cultural resistance, especially in the face of displacement due to development projects, deforestation, and mainstream assimilation pressures. Organizations like the Adivasi Lok Kala Akademi (Madhya Pradesh) have been instrumental in archiving and promoting Bhil songs, dances, and musical heritage through public performances and workshops.

However, the biggest challenge remains the lack of institutional support, poverty, and language erosion, which threaten the survival of Bhili folk music. Integrating Bhil traditions into local education, supporting community-based music schools, and ensuring media representation are urgent steps to preserve this rich cultural reservoir.

Case Studies: Quechua and Aymara Music in South America

Quechua Music of the Andes: Echoes of Ancestral Cosmos

The Quechua people, indigenous to the Andean highlands of Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, and parts of Colombia and Argentina, are descendants of the Inca civilization. Music for the Quechua is not merely entertainment—it is a sacred practice deeply woven into their cosmology, rituals, agriculture, and language. Quechua music is strongly tied to seasonal festivals, agricultural cycles, and rituals of reciprocity with nature (Pachamama, the Earth Mother). Instruments such as the charango (a small stringed instrument), quena (notched flute), siku (panpipes), and bombo (drum) dominate the musical landscape. Each instrument holds symbolic meaning and is often associated with the elements—wind, earth, and water.

The music is pentatonic and frequently performed in heterophony, where groups of musicians play the same melody with individual variations, emphasizing community over individualism. Through Quechua songs, oral histories, agricultural techniques, stories of the Inca empire, and spiritual concepts like ayni (mutual aid) are passed down. Despite colonization, cultural suppression, and modern migration, Quechua music has endured as a form of cultural resistance and pride. Indigenous festivals like Inti Raymi, Qoyllur Rit'i, and Fiesta de la Virgen de la Candelaria feature strong musical components that revive and reinforce Quechua identity. Music schools and NGOs in Peru and Ecuador are now reviving traditional instruments and languages through formal education and digital archives.

Aymara Music of Bolivia and Chile: Soundscapes of Community and Resistance

The Aymara people inhabit the Altiplano region of Bolivia, southern Peru, and northern Chile, and have maintained a distinct cultural and linguistic identity despite centuries of colonization. Their music is intensely communal, ceremonial, and agricultural in function. Aymara music expresses cosmic dualities, collective identity, and spiritual relationships with the environment. Like the Quechua, the Aymara use panpipes (siku), bombos, and tarkas (wooden flutes), but their most unique musical expression is through large ensembles that perform in interlocking hocketing styles —each player plays only part of the melody, emphasizing cooperation over virtuosity. Music is not viewed as an individual expression but a collective breath of the community.

Aymara songs are categorized according to the agricultural calendar—with distinct repertoires for sowing, harvesting, marriages, and funerals. The music is often performed in outdoor rituals that reestablish ties between humans, nature, and ancestors. The Aymara have used music as a powerful tool of political assertion and resistance, especially in Bolivia where it has been linked to indigenous movements seeking land rights and cultural autonomy. Festivals like the Gran Poder and Oruro Carnival highlight Aymara music alongside syncretic Catholic traditions.

Contemporary musicians like Ukamau y Ké, K'ala Marka, and Los Kjarkas have popularized Aymara music across the Andes and internationally, blending it with modern genres without diluting its core values.

Significance to Cultural Preservation

Both Quechua and Aymara music traditions show how indigenous music serves as a holistic cultural container, preserving language, worldview, and social systems. Their deeply ecocentric, non-commercial, and community-oriented nature makes them invaluable in studying sustainable living models and resistance to cultural homogenization.

These traditions challenge Western notions of music as performance or commodity and reaffirm it as ritual, communication, and life-force—a profound medium for cultural resilience.

Figure/Image
Indian folk music instruments used by the Bheel tribe (Image 1.1)

(Image 1.1)

images of Quechua and Aymara Music in South America

(Image 1.2)

Conclusion

Folk music stands as one of the most resilient and vibrant expressions of indigenous culture. It embodies not only the artistic inclinations of a community but also its values, history, belief systems, ecological knowledge, and collective memory. Through an oral tradition passed down generations, folk music functions as a cultural repository—especially for societies that lack written records or formal archival mechanisms. It plays a vital role in preserving endangered languages, sustaining spiritual practices, and fostering community cohesion. The case studies of Baul and Bhil traditions in India and the Quechua and Aymara traditions in South America demonstrate that folk music remains deeply intertwined with the daily life, rituals, and resistance movements of indigenous populations. Whether through the mystic humanism of Baul songs or the agricultural rhythms of Aymara ensembles, folk music reinforces a sense of identity and cultural pride. However, the survival of folk traditions is under increasing threat due to globalization, modernization, migration, and commercialization. Many indigenous musical forms are at risk of being reduced to mere commodities, stripped of their contextual meaning and spiritual depth. Language loss, urban assimilation, and lack of state support further endanger the continuity of these traditions.

Despite these challenges, the resurgence of interest in folk music—driven by community efforts, cultural activism, academic documentation, and digital archiving—offers a ray of hope. To ensure meaningful preservation, there is a pressing need to integrate folk music into education, cultural policy, and public media. Ultimately, folk music is not a relic of the past but a living, evolving testament to the diversity and resilience of human culture. Protecting it is not only about conserving art forms, but also about safeguarding worldviews, wisdom, and the dignity of marginalized voices across the globe.

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The Current State and Direction of India's Foreign Policy Towards Its Neighbouring Countries: A Critical Study

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Abstract

India's neighbourhood policy has entered a recalibration phase marked by selective deepening (Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan), hedging and de-risking (China, Maldives), securitisation (Pakistan, Myanmar), and limited, humanitarian-first engagement (Afghanistan). Building on "Neighbourhood First," "Act East," and the maritime vision of SAGAR, New Delhi is privileging connectivity, energy interdependence, and supply-chain resilience while ring-fencing security concerns along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the western front. New multilateral preferences (BIMSTEC, IORA, Quad linkages) coexist with a withering SAARC. This paper synthesises 2024–2025 developments: (i) consolidation with Bangladesh via a broad "Shared Vision" and sectoral agreements; (ii) long-horizon power integration with Nepal (10,000 MW over a decade); (iii) green-energy and grid projects with Sri Lanka despite domestic cross-currents; (iv) managed differences with the Maldives following the 2024 Indian troop withdrawal; (v) stalled normalisation with Pakistan beyond a fragile ceasefire narrative; (vi) incremental crisis-management with China alongside disengagement steps but persistent trust deficits; (vii) securitised border management with Myanmar and suspension/curtailment of the Free Movement Regime; and (viii) humanitarian engagement—without recognition—with Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. The study argues India's near-term direction is a "pragmatic connectivity plus calibrated coercion" mix: deepen economic-energy ties where politics permit, leverage sub-regional platforms when SAARC stalls, and retain credible deterrence on contested borders.

Keywords : I Neighbourhood First, SAGAR, BIMSTEC, LAC, connectivity, energy interdependence, de-risking, securitisation, South Asia, Indo-Pacific.

Introduction: India's foreign policy toward its immediate neighbourhood is simultaneously integrative and defensive. Integrative—through trade corridors, power-grid interconnections, cross-border rail/road links, and maritime connectivity in the Bay of Bengal; defensive—through border management, crisis-stabilisation talks and deterrence to address persistent threats and contested frontiers. The decade-old "Neighbourhood First" rubric remains the overarching frame, now complemented by SAGAR in the Indian Ocean and "Act East" into Southeast Asia. In practice, this translates into bespoke bilateral compacts tailored to each neighbour's political economy. Bangladesh is the crown jewel of connectivity and co-production; Nepal and Bhutan are central to India's long-term clean-energy security; Sri Lanka offers a testbed for India-led e---

nergy transition and grid integration; the Maldives has pivoted politically, compelling India to re-insure maritime situational awareness by other means; with China, the LAC remains the pacing threat driving a cautious step-by-step "disengage–de-escalate" pathway; with Pakistan, diplomacy remains constrained by terrorism concerns despite episodic ceasefire narratives; with Myanmar, India is tightening the border regime amid the civil war spillover; with Afghanistan, India maintains humanitarian channels without recognition. Regionally, SAARC remains moribund since 2016, pushing India to lean into BIMSTEC's transport-and-power master plans.

Objectives

1. Map the current (2024–2025) state of India's ties with each neighbour across security, economy, connectivity, and energy.
2. Identify the drivers of policy divergence across dyads (e.g., Bangladesh vs. Pakistan; Nepal vs. Maldives).
3. Evaluate the efficacy of India's sub-regional choices (BIMSTEC/SAGAR) versus SAARC.

Hypothesis

India's neighbourhood policy is coalescing into a "connectivity + energy interdependence" core, bounded by calibrated deterrence and border securitisation where disputes persist. When politics are cooperative, New Delhi deepens economic and infrastructure ties; when adversarial, it prioritises crisis-management and denial capabilities, while still seeking selective functional cooperation.

Critical Country Assessments

Bangladesh: Consolidation via "Shared Vision"

In June 2024, PM Sheikh Hasina's state visit produced a wide-ranging "Shared Vision for Future," foregrounding connectivity (rail, road, inland waterways), energy trade and digital/industrial cooperation—cementing Bangladesh as India's most consequential neighbour for positive-sum integration.

Nepal: Long-Horizon Power Interdependence, Residual Boundary Irritants

On 4 January 2024, India and Nepal signed a long-term agreement enabling 10,000 MW of Nepal's hydropower exports to India over ten years—anchoring investment and a sub-regional electricity market (incl. future Bangladesh routing). Boundary sensitivities (Kalapani/Lipulekh/Susta) persist but are being handled through talks.

Sri Lanka: Energy Transition, Grid Link—amid Domestic Headwinds

Sri Lanka concluded a 20-year PPA with Adani Green (484 MW wind) and is progressing studies for India–Sri Lanka power-grid interconnection; policy papers envision broader connectivity (ports, energy, land links). Local politics and infrastructure gaps can slow timelines, but the strategic arc points to tighter energy interdependence.

Maldives: Strategic Hedging after Indian Troop Withdrawal

At Malé's request, India withdrew uniformed personnel by May 10, 2024, replacing them with civilians to keep aviation platforms running. The new Maldivian leadership's China tilt (e.g., Chinese vessel access) has prompted India to re-optimise its maritime footprint while keeping development works going.

Pakistan: Minimal Engagement beyond Crisis Management

Despite periodic ceasefire narratives in 2025 reportage, the structural impediment—cross-border terrorism—continues to cap engagement. India reiterates bilateralism (no third-party mediation) and conditions dialogue on terror cessation; trade normalisation remains stalled.

China: Managed Confrontation; Stepwise LAC Stabilisation

Reporting through late-2024/2025 notes disengagement progress at Depsang/Demchok and continued rounds of military talks, though patrolling/normalcy are not fully restored. "Disengage–de-escalate" sequencing remains the playbook while India hardens border infrastructure and deepens minilateral/tech-supply-chain hedges.

Bhutan: Watching the China Track, Preserving India's Core Interests

Renewed Bhutan–China boundary talks (since 2023) carry Doklam-adjacent implications. Analytical work underscores India's stakes should any eventual settlement affect the tri-junction. Coordination with Thimphu remains close.

Myanmar: From Open Border to Fencing and FMR Curtailment

Amid the civil war's spillover, India announced in Feb 2024 its decision to end the decades-old Free Movement Regime and fence the 1,643-km border; regional civil society has voiced concerns, but New Delhi's priority is border security and demographic stability in the Northeast.

Afghanistan (Extended Neighbourhood): Humanitarian-First, No Recognition

India maintains non-recognition of the Taliban while sustaining humanitarian channels (wheat, medical supplies) and using Chabahar as a logistics route. High-level contact has occurred (Foreign Secretary–Muttaqi in Jan 2025), signalling pragmatic engagement short of recognition.

Regional Architectures: SAARC's Stall, BIMSTEC & SAGAR's Rise

1. SAARC: No leader-level summit since 2014; India cites cross-border terror as the principal roadblock. Dhaka has floated revival ideas, but momentum remains weak.
2. BIMSTEC: 2025 Summit Declaration and ongoing master plans aim to operationalise transport and grid interconnection, with India as chief driver.
3. SAGAR: India's maritime framework to expand domain awareness, connectivity and "net-security provider" roles across the IOR—complementing neighbourhood strategy.

Figure/Image
Group photo of Prime Minister Modi with the leaders of SAARC countries
(Image 1.1)

Conclusions

India's foreign policy toward its neighbouring countries in the current decade has assumed a pragmatic, multi-layered character, shaped by the twin imperatives of connectivity and security. The central conclusion of this study is that New Delhi is adopting an "asymmetric pragmatism"—deepening economic and energy interdependence with cooperative neighbours while ring-fencing itself against adversarial or unstable ones through deterrence and securitisation. With Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka, India has invested considerable political capital in long-term projects of connectivity, cross-border trade, and hydropower integration. These developments demonstrate India's recognition that regional prosperity and its own growth trajectory are mutually reinforcing. The power purchase agreements with Nepal, the Indo-Lanka grid interconnection project, and the joint transport corridors with Bangladesh underscore a forward-looking agenda centred on sustainable interdependence. These initiatives also serve as counterweights to external actors, particularly China, by binding neighbours into India-centric supply chains.

Conversely, India's relations with Pakistan and China remain circumscribed by deep-rooted structural challenges. With Pakistan, terrorism continues to be the primary roadblock, reducing bilateral engagement to little more than crisis management. With China, the Line of Actual Control (LAC) standoff has compelled India to adopt a strategy of cautious disengagement while simultaneously investing in military preparedness and border infrastructure. The broader trajectory here is one of managed confrontation, with incremental stability but little trust.

In the Maldives and Myanmar, India's approach has been adaptive and securitised. Following troop withdrawal from the Maldives, New Delhi is diversifying its maritime presence in the Indian Ocean under the SAGAR vision. In Myanmar, the suspension of the Free Movement Regime and the push for border fencing signify a decisive shift toward prioritising domestic stability in India's Northeast over open-border cultural ties. In Afghanistan, India's humanitarian-first approach—without extending political recognition—demonstrates a careful balancing of values and security interests.

Institutionally, SAARC remains moribund, while BIMSTEC and SAGAR have emerged as the preferred regional frameworks for operationalising connectivity and maritime security. This signals India's willingness to sidestep deadlocked platforms in favour of those where deliverables are achievable.

Overall, India's foreign policy towards its neighbours reflects a blend of optimism and caution. Optimism lies in the economic-energy corridors that promise to anchor long-term cooperation; caution dominates on contested borders and politically fragile states. The direction is clear: more wires, watts, and waterways to integrate willing partners; more walls, watchtowers, and wariness where disputes persist. This dual-track approach, though uneven, appears durable, ensuring that India remains both the regional growth hub and a credible security provider in South Asia.

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الجهود الابتكارية لتحسين الحياة في شبه الجزيرة العربية: خارطة طريق للمستقبل – دراسة نقدية

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Abstract (الملخص)

تشهد شبه الجزيرة العربية في العقدين الأخيرين تحولات عميقة يقودها الابتكار والتطوير التكنولوجي ضمن استراتيجيات وطنية وإقليمية تهدف إلى تحسين نوعية الحياة وتعزيز التنمية المستدامة. تتجلى هذه الجهود في مبادرات المدن الذكية، التحول الرقمي، تنويع مصادر الطاقة، الابتكار في التعليم والصحة، والاستثمار في الاقتصاد المعرفي. هذه الورقة تقدم دراسة نقدية لهذه المسارات، مركّزة على التحديات البنيوية مثل الاعتماد على النفط، الفجوة المعرفية، وضعف التكامل الإقليمي، إلى جانب الفرص الواعدة في مجالات الذكاء الاصطناعي، الطاقة المتجددة، والسياحة الثقافية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن خارطة طريق المستقبل تتطلب موازنة دقيقة بين تحديث البنية التحتية، دعم الابتكار المحلي، والانفتاح على التعاون الإقليمي والعالمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية

الابتكار، شبه الجزيرة العربية، المدن الذكية، التنمية المستدامة، التحول الرقمي، الطاقة المتجددة، الاقتصاد المعرفي

المقدمة (Introduction)

تعتبر شبه الجزيرة العربية منطقة ذات أهمية استراتيجية واقتصادية، حيث لعب النفط والغاز دورًا محوريًا في تشكيل اقتصاداتها. غير أن التحديات العالمية مثل التغير المناخي، تقلب أسعار النفط، والتحولات الجيوسياسية فرضت واقعًا جديدًا يحتم إعادة هيكلة النماذج التنموية. في هذا السياق، تبنت دول الخليج واليمن مبادرات وطنية متقدمة تقوم على الابتكار والتقنيات الحديثة من أبرز الأمثلة: "رؤية السعودية 2030"، "رؤية الإمارات 2071"، ومشروعات المدن الذكية مثل "نيوم" و"مدينة مصدر". هذه المبادرات لا تسعى فقط إلى تنويع الاقتصاد، بل تهدف كذلك إلى بناء مجتمعات مستدامة، وتحقيق رفاهية الفرد، ورفع جودة التعليم والصحة والخدمات. ومع ذلك، فإن الطريق نحو تحقيق هذه الأهداف يواجه تحديات مثل ضعف التنسيق الإقليمي، الفوارق في البنية التحتية، وتحديات التمويل والحوكمة.بهدف تحسين مستوى المعيشة وتعزيز التنافسية العالمية

تحليل الجهود الابتكارية في دول شبه الجزيرة العربية في مختلف القطاعات.
تقييم أثر هذه المبادرات على جودة الحياة والتنمية المستدامة.
الكشف عن التحديات والمعوقات التي تعترض تطبيق استراتيجيات الابتكار.
رسم خارطة طريق مستقبلية تعزز التكامل الإقليمي وتوظيف الابتكار لتحسين الحياة.

الفرضية الرئيسية

الابتكار، إذا ما دُعم بالحوكمة الرشيدة والتكامل الإقليمي، يشكل الأداة الأكثر فعالية لتحويل اقتصادات ومجتمعات شبه الجزيرة العربية من الاعتماد على الموارد الطبيعية إلى اقتصاد معرفي مستدام يرفع من جودة الحياة.

المنهجيةConclusions0

المنهج التحليلي النقدي: دراسة السياسات الوطنية والبرامج الاستراتيجية (مثل رؤية السعودية 2030، رؤية الكويت 2035، استراتيجية الإمارات 2071).

المنهج المقارن: مقارنة بين تجارب الدول الخليجية واليمن في تطبيق الابتكار.

تحليل وثائقي: مراجعة تقارير الأمم المتحدة، البنك الدولي، وصناديق التنمية الخليجية.

دراسة حالة: التركيز على مشروعات المدن الذكية (نيوم، مصدر، الدوحة الذكية) كمؤشرات للتوجه المستقبلي.

تُظهر الدراسة أن دول شبه الجزيرة العربية قطعت خطوات مهمة نحو تبني الابتكار كأداة لتحسين نوعية الحياة وتعزيز التنمية المستدامة. فقد أدت الاستثمارات الضخمة في الطاقة المتجددة، التحول الرقمي، التعليم، والصحة إلى تحسين مؤشرات التنمية البشرية وفتح آفاق اقتصادية جديدة. ومع ذلك، تبقى التحديات ماثلة، مثل استمرار الاعتماد على النفط كمورد رئيسي، الحاجة إلى تطوير الكفاءات المحلية، والتباين في البنى التحتية والتشريعات.

خارطة الطريق المستقبلية تستلزم:

الاستثمار في رأس المال البشري من خلال التعليم الموجه نحو الابتكار والبحث العلمي.

تطوير أنظمة الحوكمة التي تدعم الشفافية والمساءلة وتسرع من تطبيق الابتكارات.

فتح قنوات التعاون الدولي لنقل المعرفة والتكنولوجيا وتوطينها.

إن نجاح هذه الخارطة سيجعل من شبه الجزيرة العربية نموذجًا عالميًا في القدرة على تحويل التحديات إلى فرص، وصياغة مستقبل قائم على الابتكار المستدام وتحقيق رفاهية شعوبها.

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