

India's Strategic Silence: The July Revolution and Regional Geopolitics

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Abstract

The July 2024 Revolution was a pivotal chapter in the history of Bangladesh, when a democratic movement led by our students and youths brought down the Sheikh Hasina Regime. In this article, we analyzed the reasons why India, as a neighboring and responsible regional power, remained silent during this critical period. We tried to understand what this silence of India means—neutrality, or strategic stance? To collect and analyze data, this study uses a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative). Primary data were collected through surveys of 102 student protestors. Additional insights were adopted from local community forums. On the other hand, secondary data were drawn from analyses of several national and international news reports, social media content, daily newspapers, journal articles, NGOs, blogs, document reviews, and previous research on student movements and Bangladesh's political history. The findings revealed that India supported the Sheikh Hasina regime in various ways and, at the same time, maintained contacts with the new interim government. Although this dual strategy can be seen as an attempt to protect India's regional influences, it raised questions about India's moral standing and the acceptability of its leadership. In our study, we highlighted a reality in which India's role as a regional power is not limited to its political strategy but should be part of a larger moral responsibility. In this article, we recommend that human rights, justice, democracy, and sensitivity to its neighbors should be given priority in India's foreign policy in the forthcoming year.

Keywords: July 2024 Revolution, Student Movement, India–Bangladesh Relations, Regional Power Politics, Democratic Transition

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1.0 Introduction

The July Revolution is a movement that people witnessed a mass uprising after 1990. The Sheikh Hasina government was being

accused of dictatorship, electoral fraud and human rights violations for a long time. The government imposed a 56% quota for government jobs, which reflects widespread discrimination against general students. Later, it led to the fall of Sheikh Hasina's regime. This paper not only describes the July Revolution but also emphasizes the discourse on the reasons for India's silence during the July Movement. India is Bangladesh's nearest neighbor, a country that borders it. So, India, as a regional power, has a responsibility to its neighbors during critical situations under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle, ensuring the application of international law in the event of human rights violations. Even as the news of the crackdown spread around the world, neighboring India remained silent. Which raises many questions. What does that silence mean? Was it respect for the sovereignty of the other countries? Or was it to maintain Hasina's regime and achieve geopolitical interests? However, a quarter of Bangladeshis expressed their frustration with India for remaining silent during the July movement. Besides, this study remains unexplored in South Asian Studies. Most existing articles focus on India-Bangladesh relations, including trade, historical cooperation, border security, water sharing, and other regional cooperation, leaving a clear gap in understanding India's strategic silence during mass uprisings in Bangladesh. Therefore, this topic is relevant and suitable for this time because it highlights India's silence and role during such democratic movements as the July Movement in its immediately bordering country. Moreover, India's role is to encourage its neighboring countries to rethink their relations with India. It will also help policymakers develop the necessary policies towards India, which may enable researchers in the field to further their studies in the future.

2.0 Research objectives

The objectives of this study are listed below:

- i. To examine India's strategic silence during the July Movement in Bangladesh.
- ii. To understand India's reasons behind the silence during the movement.
- iii. To analyze Indian geopolitical interests in Bangladesh,
- iv. To assess the impact of India's silence through the lens of South Asian regional politics.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data. The Primary data were collected through surveys of 102 student protestors; additional insights were drawn from 4 focus group discussions. On the other hand, secondary data were collected from analyses of 50 national and international news

reports, social media content, daily newspaper reports, journal articles, NGOs, blogs, document reviews, and the previous work of student movements and Bangladesh's political history. Thematic content analysis was conducted for qualitative data, and statistical analysis for quantitative data. This research was conducted in accordance with the ethics of participatory research, in which each participant's voice was valued and respected.

4.0 Literature Review

India's silence during the July 2024 quota movement was not just a political or diplomatic event; it was rather a clear message. Some see it as a "strategic calculation", some consider it a "moral dilemma", and in the eyes of some, it was "silent partisanship".

Some important books and analyses help us to understand this silence. First of all, *The India Way* by India's current Foreign Minister, S. Jaishankar, offers an insightful perspective on modern diplomacy. He argues that in contemporary international relations, expressing opinions on every issue is not always wise; rather, knowing when to remain silent can itself be a strategic act. Jaishankar views silence not as inaction, but as a deliberate choice that can strengthen a nation's position. In this sense, India's measured silence reflected a conscious effort to safeguard its national interests while avoiding unnecessary complications. (Jaishankar, 2020)

This theme is found in more detail in the book *Choices* by former National Security Advisor of India Shivshankar Menon. There, he says that India does not always want to rush in like a hero into the crises of its neighbors. Sometimes, 'watching from a distance' and 'taking timely action' are the most effective strategies (Menon, 2016). India was in exactly this position during the Bangladesh movement, neither too close nor completely far away.

However, to understand the extent of India's strategy, we must look at Brahma Chelani's contribution to *Asian Geopolitics*. He explains that India's silent position in sensitive regions like South Asia is also a kind of 'geopolitical signalling'. That is, India silently analyses the actions of powers such as China while maintaining its own influence (Chellaney, 2021).

In light of these books, it can be understood that India's silence does not express its absence but rather constitutes a conscious strategy. However, not everyone sees this strategy in the same way. For example, the younger generation in Bangladesh, especially students involved in the movement, has labeled this silence as 'unfriendly'. They want India, as a friendly neighbor, to take at least a moral stand.

On the one hand, as the relevant literature shows, India thinks and remains diplomatic through the guise of silence. However, the reality on the ground shows

that this silence often seems like ignoring the ‘cry of the helpless’. We need to understand India's “strategic silence” by standing between these two lines of argument.

5.0 Theoretical Framework

In this study, we have analyzed four issues in parallel: India-Bangladesh relations, regional politics, moral responsibility, and public expectations. Therefore, no single international relations theory is sufficient to explain the entire perspectives of our study. For this reason, we have adopted multiple theoretical postures, including Neorealism, Constructivism, Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and Regional Security Complex Theory. This theoretical framework has provided our study with a deep and multidimensional analysis.

5.1 Neorealism or Structural Realism

According to neorealism, each state considers the preservation of its own existence as its highest priority(Waltz, 1979). This theory suggests that states determine their strategies within an ‘anarchic’ international system, where power and influence are the primary drivers(Waltz, 1979).

From this perspective, India’s silence does not evidently expose ‘silence’, rather it crafts a well-planned strategy. India has continued to maintain dual diplomatic relations with the Sheikh Hasina government, even after highlighting the issue to India, while simultaneously communicating with the interim government. This was an ambiguous ‘dual strategy’-a Kautiliayan trick (Dvaidhibhava) to protect its regional influence and position itself on a strong footing for the coming days(Kautilya, 1915).

5.2 Constructivism

Constructivist theory holds that international politics is driven not only by power and interests but also by identity, norms, and social interactions.

The people of Bangladesh, especially the students and the youth, have historically seen India as an ally and a pro-democracy force since 1971. But India’s silence in the July 2024 movement clearly indicates a twist in exposing this identity. In this study, we see how people’s view of India has transformed from a ‘moral leader’ to a ‘strategic opportunist’ force, driven by a latent quest for regional dominance, in line with India's Doctrine practiced since 1947, the Sub-Continent’s independence period (Wendt, 1999).

5.3 Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

The R2P principle, adopted by the UN in 2005, states that when a state commits genocide, war crimes, or human rights violations, its neighbors and the

international community have a moral responsibility to take a stand (United Nations, 2005).

Even when the news of widespread repression, casualties, and human rights violations splashed in the media during the student movement in Bangladesh, India did not take any public stand. This is not just political silence, but a major moral question. This theoretical framework helps to explain India's silence as a moral failure and evasion of regional responsibility (United Nations, 2005).

5.4 Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

This theory holds that regional countries are dependent on each other for security, with these dependencies directly influencing each other's activities (Buzan & Waever, 2003). India-Bangladesh relations are a clear example of this regional security complex.

Had India intervened directly during the July Movement, it could have affected not only Bangladesh's internal politics but also Indian border security, the spread of extremism, and Chinese strategic influence. Therefore, India's silence was partly a 'response control' strategy aimed at maintaining a delicate regional balance (Buzan & Waever, 2003). The theoretical insights into the interaction among countries in a region are presented in the following table.

Table 1: The theoretical insights

Theory	Application in the study	Main Focus
Neo-realism	India's silence was part of protecting its strategic interests	Strategy and regional dominance
Constructivism	Changing image of India in the public perception	Identity, values, and reactions
Responsibility to Protect (R2P)	Failure of India to morally assist its neighbors	Humanity and morality
Regional Security Theory (RSCT)	Strategic silence in maintaining security and balance	Regional security and stability

Source: Authors' theoretical interpretation based on existing scholarly frameworks.

6.0 Findings / Results

6.1 India's Silence

77.5% of the participants completely agreed that India was deliberately silent during the July 2024 movement; 11.8% partially agreed, and 2% disagreed. On the other hand, 8.8% of participants were unaware of this.

6.2 Strategic Position

70.6% of the participants completely agreed that India's silence was part of a strategic foreign policy, not mere inaction. 16.7% of participants partially agreed, and 2.9% disagreed. On the other hand, 9.8% of participants were unaware of this.

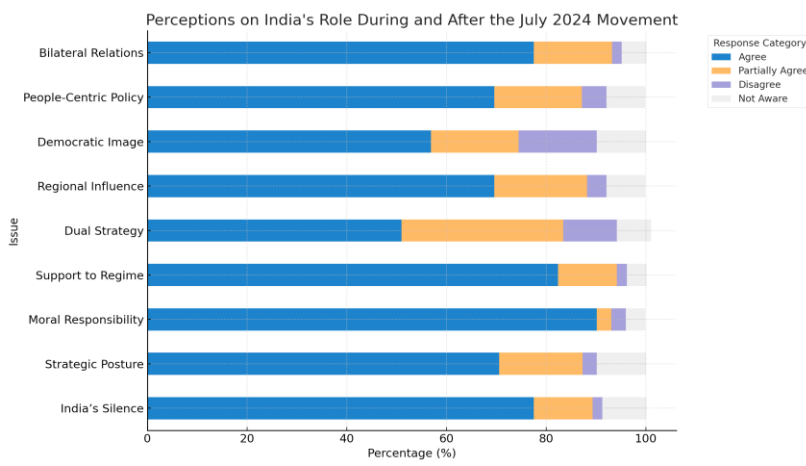


Figure 1: Perceptions on India’s Role During and After the July 2024 movement

Source: Adopted by authors from Survey, 2025

6.3 Moral Position

90.2% of the participants completely agreed that India, as a regional power, should have spoken out against the repression; 2.9% partially agreed, and 2.9% disagreed. On the other hand, 3.9% of participants were unaware of this.

6.4 Support for the Ruling Government

82.4% of the participants completely agreed that India's silence indirectly supported the ruling government; 11.8% partially agreed, and 2% disagreed. On the other hand, 3.9% of participants were unaware of this.

6.5 Dual Strategy

51% of the participants completely agreed that after the revolution, India maintained relations with the ousted government on the one hand by providing shelter or assistance, and on the other hand cooperated with the new government through diplomatic means. 32.4% of the participants partially agreed, and 10.8% disagreed. In contrast, 6.9% of participants were unaware of this.

6.6. Reflection of Public Opinion

69.6% of the participants completely agreed that India's dual strategy was mainly aimed at maintaining its regional dominance over Bangladesh; 18.6%

partially agreed, and 3.9% disagreed. On the contrary, 7.8% of participants were unaware of this.

6.7 Democratic Image

56.9% of the participants strongly agreed that India's silence during the revolution affected their view of India as a democratic country; 17.6% partially agreed, and 15.7% disagreed. Conversely, 9.8% of participants were unaware of this.

6.8 People-Centric Policies

69.6% of the participants strongly agreed that India should adopt a people-centric approach rather than a state-centric or regime-centric approach in its relations with its neighbors; 17.6% partially agreed, and 4.9% disagreed. Alternatively, 7.8% of participants were unaware of this.

6.9 Growing Bitterness in Bangladesh- India Relations

77.5% of the participants strongly agreed that India's silence during the revolution contributed to the growing bitterness in Bangladesh-India relations; 15.7% partially agreed, and 2% disagreed. Additionally, 4.9% of the participants were unaware of this.

6.10 Books, Journal Articles, Newspapers, and Relevant Literature

Below is a diagram that presents the key findings from the books, journal articles, newspaper reports, and relevant literature.

6.11 Newspaper Analysis

Table 2: Newspaper Analysis

Title	Key Findings	Citation
All India Students' Association expresses solidarity with quota protesters in Bangladesh.	Indian student organization AISA has expressed solidarity with the anti-quota movement in Bangladesh.	The Business Standard, 18 July 2024
Indian Government Issues Advisory Amid Protests in Bangladesh.	When violence escalated during the anti-quota movement, the Indian government advised Indian citizens and students in Bangladesh to stay home.	Financial Express, 18 July 2024
Bangladesh quota conundrum is also India's overriding concern.	Although the Indian government has called it an internal matter of Bangladesh, the massive loss of life, deployment of troops, and social unrest in the movement have raised concerns about India's regional security.	India Today, 4 August 2024
Quota Protests Turn Political: The Threat to Indo-Bangladeshi Harmony.	The anti-quota movement is taking a political turn, with involvement of anti-India and fundamentalist groups being seen in some places. This has raised concerns about the relationship and stability between the two countries.	Tripura Star News, 1 August 2024

BJP protests insult to Hindu religion, Modi in Bangladesh quota movement.	The BJP protested in Kolkata after some protesters raised slogans against India and Prime Minister Modi during the anti-quota movement.	Dhaka Tribune, 30 July 2024
Why can't India accept that the people of Bangladesh toppled Sheikh Hasina?	This article criticizes India's position. According to the author, India is calling the mass uprising in Bangladesh a foreign conspiracy instead of seeing it as a legitimate movement. This reveals India's duplicity towards democracy and human rights.	The Daily Star, 14 August 2024

Source: Compiled by the authors from newspaper articles published between July and August 2024.

6.12 Book Analysis

Table 2: Book Analysis

Name of the Book	Key Learning	Direct Relevance to July 2024 Movement	Quotation and Chapter
"The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World" by S. Jaishankar	In the current global uncertainty, India sees "silence" or "non-response" as a strategic strength.	During the movement, India made its position clear without saying anything directly - this is the main principle of this book.	"Not reacting can be a strategy. Silence can be power." (Chapter: Krishna's Choice)
"Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy" by Shivshankar Menon	India maintains a strategic silence, never directly intervening in the internal crises of its neighboring countries.	Similarly, during the quota movement, India kept itself aloof to avoid damaging bilateral relations.	"India cannot and should not be a fire brigade for all the fires in the neighborhood." (Chapter: Intervention in Sri Lanka)
"Asian Geopolitics: The New Great Game" by Brahma Chellaney	In Asian geopolitics, the use of force is not just about rhetoric; it can also be exercised through silence.	Although India does not say anything publicly during the movement, it maintains regional balance through strategic silence.	"India's quiet maneuvers in South Asia are often more potent than loud declarations." (Chapter: China's Periphery Policy)

Source: Compiled by the authors from secondary literature and textual review.

7.0 Discussion

The findings of this study provide a clear picture of India's policy and attitude towards students of Bangladesh in the wake of the rise in July 2024. India's silence is not just a political strategy; it has a profound impact on the freedom, justice, and democratic spirit of the people of Bangladesh. The analytical part of this study clearly shows that India's silence during the July 2024 revolution has

multiple dimensions and strategic implications. In the eyes of many, this may seem a sign of diplomatic restraint or immunity from another state's internal affairs. However, the analysis of the study shows that India's silence during the July movement in Bangladesh was not just a passive go-away; rather, it was a well-calculated long-standing position of India through which India protected its geopolitical interests vis-à-vis Bangladesh.

The moral standing and commitment to human rights of a large neighboring country like India are very important to the people of Bangladesh. India's dual strategy, discussed above, places India's regional leadership on grey lines and at the point of many untold diplomatic discords. Therefore, this study indicates that justice, human rights, democracy, and sensitivity to the people of neighboring countries should be the principal focus of India's future foreign policy. Not only political strategy, but also a sense of moral responsibility and humanitarian values can establish India as a truly responsible regional power with regional credibility suitable for a major power status.

Moreover, the moral cost of this strategic silence was high. The entire younger generation of Bangladesh, who have seen India as a force for democracy until now, may have the possibility of losing trust in India. Alarming, regional civil society, human rights organizations, and analysts have by now expressed concerns about India's dual role, which may slowly but steadily degrade India's regional leadership image, and, if not addressed early, may lead to the total collapse of its regional great power status.

8.0 Conclusion

In this study, we observed that India's silence left a deep mark on the minds of the people. When the students and the youths of neighboring countries are fighting for their lives to bring back democracy, it is painful for a big country like India to remain silent. People want someone to stand by them. It is not just a political equation but also a demand of the time to stand for humanity and justice. These dual behaviors of India have reduced people's trust in it. This revolution has taught us that leadership is not just about power; it is about working for the people. India can take this incident as a big lesson. If they really want to be a responsible leader of South Asia or the Global South, they need to put humanity, justice, and democracy at the top of their foreign policy agenda.

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Authors' Declaration

We declare that the submitted manuscript is our original work and has not been published, nor is it under consideration for publication elsewhere. All sources have been appropriately cited, and the work is free from plagiarism, falsification, and fabrication. Any use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in preparing this manuscript has been transparently disclosed, and full responsibility for the content rests with the authors.

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