

# **India's Strategy of Energy Security in Central Asia: A Case Study of Kazakhstan (1991-2020)**

## **ABSTRACT**

**Thesis Submitted to Jadavpur University for the Degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy (Arts)**

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**2022**

In the matter of a nation's growth in terms of its economy military might and human development index, India presents a paradox that has attracted much scholarly and popular discourse in recent year. On the one hand, India has been noted as a poor, third-world country with unsatisfactory human development and social inclusion. On the other hand, India is seen as dynamic centre of innovation and entrepreneurship that is energised by a pool of brilliant graduates and a fast-growing entrepreneurial middle class. These stark contradictions have drawn much scholarship and commentary with regard to the country's global comportment and international relations. In this context, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature in this field, and offer relevant insights into India's strategy to achieve energy security with reference to Central Asia in general and Kazakhstan in particular.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and its aftermath in respect of the newly independent, mineral rich states of Central Asia have been the subject of keen interest to scholars and international observers. It soon became apparent that these Central Asian Republics, given their abundant energy resources and strategic location in the heart of Asia, has emerged as a playground for multinational rivalries and the start of a New Great Game. A host of geopolitical complexities in the region have been exposed through the process of observation and analysis. While there is so gainsaying the importance of the region's location and enormous wealth of resources, there is at once a tricky mix of authoritarian political regimes, religious orthodoxy, terrorism and narcotics trafficking. The major external powers engaged in the region must-willy-nilly contend with such a complicated matrix of realities in order to gain control over the largely untapped energy resources, such as oil, natural gas and uranium. After the September 11, 2001 terror strikes in the U.S, the world has witnessed rapidly shifting geopolitics, particularly with

regard to region having strategic importance. The sovereign Republics of Central Asia became increasingly sensitive to the attention being bestowed on them by energy-hungry big powers. They were conscious of their rapidly swelling wealth from the stock of resources and accordingly, tightened their control over those resources. They also made it clear that they were no longer finger-puppets in the hands of outside powers. This dissertation takes these geopolitical perspectives into account and accordingly presents its findings, arguments and reasoning.

Most of the scholars and policy makers in India and the west are agreed on the importance of Central Asia to India's strategic and energy security agenda. They identify the region as vital to the expansion of India's economic sphere of influence. The region is not only a destination in itself but also acts as a bridge to greater Eurasia. India and the Central Asian region have the advantage of regular historical linkages and strong civilizational and cultural affinities. This study explains how the Central Asian Republics (CARs) can benefit from India's experience of successful political transformation in the post-colonial period, as also from a mutually productive relationship with a fast emerging regional and global power.

The Asian security scenario presents a troubled geopolitical environment. India as a rising power has to contend with two hostile neighbors, namely, Pakistan and China. All three nations possess nuclear arsenals, and India has fought wars with both the other two. This reality contributes to instability in South Asia. To compound the complexities, Afghanistan has come to pose a very new threat of the re-emergence of radical Islam and rampant terrorism in the wake of the withdrawal of western forces from that violence-ridden country. In the ongoing scenario, India's security concerns emanate from its north and west. In their turn, the Central Asian Republics are

likewise affected by Afghanistan's volatility given its location in South and Central Asia. Further, they too have previous experiences with religious extremism and radicalism.

In the spheres of energy and economic growth, India's policy influencers and policy makers commonly identify Central Asia's hydrocarbon and mineral resources as important for meeting the nation's energy security needs, particularly in the context of the desirability of diversifying its energy sources. Again, on economic considerations India views Central Asia as a lucrative market for its goods and services. Moreover, the region has the potential to serve as a conduit for trade and communication with the larger Eurasian landmass. This is significant since India ends to establish overland connectivity with other parts of Asia and Europe. The Central Asian Republics in turn, stand to gain from India's capacity to counterbalance the pressures extended by Russia and China, who currently dominate the region. Policy makers and scholars in Central Asia have expressed their awareness of India's growing presence in the region being less intrusive than that of other major external powers.

The influential elite in the Central Asian Republics are particularly conscious of India's status as a democratic multi-ethnic, multi-religious, pluralist, inclusive and secular federal republic. On the other hand, key Indian personages often refer to the country's cultural heritage being significantly link to the larger Eurasian region. They continue to emphasise the cultural commonalities and civilizational affinities between the two regions, that date back to the ancient Silk Road and spread of Buddhism. They also mention the popularity of Bollywood cinema among the people of Central Asia and Russia. Central Asian leaders are agreed on these realities. The elite of both regions

jointly support this narrative that helps them to look beyond India's currently limited engagement with Central Asia and perceive a great future partnership that would echo the historical successes.

This work attempt to explore the principal argument in the discourse and their applicability to the dynamics of India's contemporary energy security strategy in relation to the Central Asian Republics in general and Kazakhstan in particular inasmuch as it constitutes a part of the main research objectives. Basing on this premise, this study analyses India's energy and economic engagements with Kazakhstan and the larger Central Asian Region. Given the background and other considerations enunciated above, this study proposes to spell out the problems relating to India's trade and energy relations with that region and offer reasoned solutions. This study aims to critically examine the circumstances that have created major kindness and challenges in the way of advancing the relations between India and the Central Asian region. A Significant challenge is posed by China's growing influence in Central Asia and the competition for control of the energy resources in Kazakhstan and the contiguous Republics. This study acknowledges the institutions of relevant forums for promoting trade, cultural and other ties between India and Kazakhstan. This study proposes to discuss the direction of India's foreign policy strategy with regard to Central Asia in general and Kazakhstan in particular. In the process it will highlight the areas in which the energy policies of India and Kazakhstan converge and create the potential for further cooperation between the two nations. This study will necessarily trace the evaluation of India's energy Security needs. It will also spell out the recent developments and the impact of political, economic, and military factors that improve or impede in international energy transactions in Kazakhstan. This work will attempt to assess India's geopolitical perspectives and the impact of Kazakhstan on energy security and the formulation of a strategy for the future. The study will examine the factors

that have encouraged India to launch many initiatives in the Central Asian region, as also the factors that have limited India's success in achieving its objectives. A concurrent and ancillary objective of this study is to examine India's existing and potential engagements in the international energy scenario and its relations with the Central Asian Republics and the other competing powers in the region. Finally, the study will examine the possibilities emanating from India's energy security strategy in Central Asia, particularly Kazakhstan, as well as India's interactions with the two dominant players in the region, namely, Russia and China.