

India in the Arctic: Science, Geopolitics and Soft Power

*Perspectives on Contemporary
Indian Foreign Policy*

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Master's Thesis in South Asia Studies
Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages
60 credits

University of Oslo

Spring 2016

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<http://www.duo.uio.no>

Print: Reprosentralen, University of Oslo

Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of contemporary Indian foreign policy from the vantage point of India's recent engagements in the Arctic. By analysing what is argued to be an 'Indian Arctic discourse' that emerged between India's first expedition to Svalbard in 2007 and the following accession to observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013, this thesis explores how this discourse frames the Arctic within a broader Indian foreign policy perspective. The Indian Arctic discourse establishes India as a stakeholder in the Arctic and envisages India as playing an active role in Arctic affairs. Studying this discourse unveils central principles and themes in Indian foreign policy, and offers new perspectives on contemporary Indian foreign policy. This is the first study to use soft power theory to discuss how the Indian Arctic discourse views India as an emerging power on the global stage and how India pursues its interests internationally, and in the Arctic region in particular. As this thesis shows, soft power has increasingly become a part of contemporary Indian foreign policy, both in official policy and in the academic discourse.

Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to thank my brilliant supervisors, Associate Professor Lars Tore Flåten and Research Director at the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research Geir Heierstad, for sharing their invaluable comments and insights while writing this thesis, and also throughout most of my time as a student. I would also like to thank Professor Arild Engelsen Ruud, for his positive response to my initial idea of writing about India in the Arctic.

During my two visits to Delhi in 2015, I received Mughal treatment as a guest in Johan and Margrete's residence in Chanakyapuri, along with good academic advice and tasty home-made butter chicken when needed. Pretzels are not enough to show my thankfulness. A small rupee of gratitude must also be sent to the 'Secret Chai Spot' (the location of which may never be revealed) for excellent morning chai. I am also grateful to the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo, for providing a travel stipend that funded my trips.

The South Asia Master's study group at the University of Oslo has been an indispensable platform for discussion and valuable feedback. Fazal-Ur and Emilie made the time at the department's reading hall worthwhile, through extensive breaks and gossip.

Moreover, huge thanks must be directed to Adrian Plau, whose uncompromised academic talent helped the language of this thesis, and for many wonderful moments in India, as well as with the Hindi reading seminars at the University of Oslo.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Silje, for supporting me throughout the process of writing this thesis and providing me with careful advice and love.

Oslo, May 24th, 2016

Alexander Engedal Gewalt

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1 Introduction

We are extremely interested in the Arctic region and intend to play an active role in the Arctic Council too.¹

Syed Akbaruddin, official spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs, India
(2012-2015)

On May 15th 2013, India was granted observer status in the Arctic Council, along with the Asian countries China, Japan, South Korea and Singapore. This landmark event in the 20-year history of the Arctic Council happened six years after India's first scientific expedition to the Arctic region. The decision to grant India observer status was hailed in the Indian press as a "major diplomatic achievement" and as "a rare instance of diplomatic alertness and activism paying off (...)".² In the years preceding India's accession to observer status in the Arctic Council and in the years following it, an Indian discourse on the geopolitics of the Arctic emerged, where academics and commentators argue for India's participation in Arctic affairs. Indian foreign policy has evolved significantly over the last six decades, from being based on values of idealism and non-alignment under India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to increasingly more pragmatic in its outlook on global affairs. India is now widely seen as an emerging power in international relations, prompting the necessity to understand how this potential future great power behaves in global affairs.

This thesis is an analysis of contemporary Indian foreign policy, by using India's recent engagements in the Arctic as a vantage point. Through interviews and interactions with central persons in what I argue is an 'Indian Arctic discourse', and by analysing documents written by academics and commentators, I argue that India's Arctic engagements work as a case in order to discuss contemporary Indian foreign policy issues. I explore how this discourse frames the Arctic within a broader Indian foreign policy perspective and how India is established as a stakeholder in Arctic affairs; why the Arctic is important to India; and how India can play a role in Arctic affairs. Through looking at central themes and principles in the history of Indian foreign policy, the Indian Arctic discourse offers a rich palate of larger

¹ Syed Akbaruddin, quoted in Hindustan Times 2014

² Ramachandaran 2013

Indian foreign policy issues and unveil how these issues are perceived and discussed by Indian academics and commentators. In order to shed new light and bring in new perspectives on contemporary Indian foreign policy, I use soft power theory to discuss how this discourse views India as an emerging power on the global stage and how it pursues its interests internationally, and in the Arctic region in particular. As I will argue, soft power has increasingly become a part of contemporary Indian foreign policy.

Research questions and argument

Since the arrival of Asian countries in the Arctic region and the subsequent accession to observer status for five of these states in the Arctic Council in 2013 provoked international interest, I wanted to understand how the Arctic was discussed and perceived from an Indian perspective. My immediate impression was that the level of Arctic interest remained low in the academic and popular discourse on India's foreign affairs. However, as I noticed, the discussions around India's Arctic engagements were highly vibrant, despite being small and limited. In order to understand India's interest in the Arctic, as expressed through its scientific research at Svalbard and its observer status in the Arctic Council, I had to lay out a few questions for further enquiry. The initial question to be dealt with was why India, as a non-polar state, has an interest in the Arctic, let alone in a forum such as the Arctic Council. I approach this general question through the following two research questions: how is the Arctic viewed from India, and how does India's Arctic interest relate to broader Indian foreign policy issues? My argument is that the Indian views on the Arctic offers a useful vantage point in order to understand how contemporary Indian foreign policy issues are discussed and perceived in India, and that India's soft power capacities can be seen as an important component of India's foreign policy.

By exploring India's Arctic interest, as stated in the first question, I present a compressed history of India's Arctic engagement, a necessary context for understanding the premises for the Indian Arctic discourse. Then, by analysing how the Arctic is viewed from India and how this relate to broader Indian foreign policy issues, I identify what I argue is an Indian Arctic discourse.

Previous research

The subject of India in the Arctic is an under researched subject, with little material available. This naturally has to do with how recent India's engagements in the Arctic are. Publications related to the Indian scientific research projects in the Arctic is slowly increasing, whereas on geopolitical aspects on India's Arctic venture, the literature is scant. Most of the research available on the topic of India in the Arctic is produced by different think tanks in India, such as one of India's foremost institutions on strategic affairs, the government-owned Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in New Delhi, or the non-governmental National Maritime Foundation (NMF), also in New Delhi.³ Most of these publications have a strategic focus on India's Arctic engagement, and tend to focus on India's geopolitical ambitions, security issues, resources in the Arctic and how India can play a role in Arctic affairs. In popular media, most articles dealing with the Arctic focus on aspects of climate change, especially its potential global impact, and sometimes also relate this to India. There have been a few op-eds or opinion columns written that discuss the more geopolitical implications that India's Arctic engagements have, and these provide useful information on how the Arctic is viewed from India. However, the subject of India in the Arctic is yet to be popularized in India and remains small.

With regards to thorough analysis of how the Arctic is viewed from India, only a very small amount of research has been done. P. Whitney Lackenbauer has written an article which deals with this, titled "India's Arctic Engagement: Emerging Perspectives" (2013). Lackenbauer's article explores different narratives that have emerged on Arctic affairs in India based on the writings of five Indian commentators that have been active in the Indian Arctic debate, both in the Indian media and in academic publications. Lackenbauer discusses these Indian perspectives against the background of the following three questions: "On what grounds do Indian commentators claim a right to participate in Arctic governance? What are India's interests in the region? Finally, what are India's concerns with Arctic governance in its current form and how do these relate to its polar and foreign policy goals more generally?"⁴

However, Lackenbauer's analysis does not engage too deeply with larger Indian foreign policy issues, as indicated by the third question. Lackenbauer's analysis opens a new field of analysis, but leaves much space to be filled, which this thesis aims to do.

⁴ Lackenbauer 2013: 3

In a debate in the January - March 2013 issue of the quarterly *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vijay Sakhuja discusses under the sub-title “The Evolving Indian Narrative”, how India sees the Arctic region, in terms of routes and shipping; resources; politico-strategic developments; the Arctic Council; India’s polar programme; and India’s naval experience in the Arctic. In a short conclusive paragraph, Sakhuja identifies four Indian views, or narratives, on the Arctic:

There is a view that Polar Regions are “global commons” and the international efforts should be to preserve their ecology. It is also believed that if India joins the Arctic Council, it would result in accepting the rights of the Arctic littorals over the Arctic Ocean. The other narrative endorses the idea that India should build a good understanding of the evolving politico-legal-strategic developments in the Arctic region and formulate a strategy to exploit the Arctic resources. Another view argues that India being a strong advocate of nuclear disarmament, it should advocate for a demilitarized and nuclear-free Arctic. In essence, the Indian narrative on the Arctic region is still evolving.⁵

Sakhuja’s analysis is interesting, but unfortunately short and deficient. It brings a certain range of perspectives and narratives to the table, but these remain largely unexplored. It is also important to note that Sakhuja’s article discusses the narratives that were evolving before India gained observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013, and therefore may not take into consideration how these have evolved further, or changed. Both Sakhuja and Lackenbauer identify trends in the Indian views on the Arctic, but they do not go beyond 2013.

Lackenbauer’s article deals with India’s newfound observer status in the Arctic Council, but being published in 2013, it does not deal with what has surfaced later, especially in 2014 and onwards.

Sanjay Chaturvedi discusses briefly how geopolitical discussions of India’s Arctic engagement have surfaced in India in his 2013 article titled “China and India in the ‘Receding’ Arctic: Rhetoric, Routes and Resources”. But more than engaging with the different views, Chaturvedi identifies a few of them, and criticizes them for being “(...) overwhelmingly geopolitical and economic in nature.”⁶ Chaturvedi discusses further these Indian perspectives in his 2014 article “India’s Arctic Engagement: Challenges and Opportunities”. However, Chaturvedi’s article only provides a short critical enquiry into a few perspectives, and then poses his own arguments on what India can contribute to in the Arctic Council, and that “India should draft an Arctic policy document as a first step toward

⁵ Sakhuja 2013: 13

⁶ Chaturvedi 2013a: 62

establishing a bipolar strategy that emphasizes international scientific collaboration on climate change and sustainable development.”⁷

As we can see, research on how the Arctic is viewed from India remains scant. Most publications focus directly on geopolitical implications and devise policy measures concerning the melting Arctic sea ice. This thesis seeks to address this lack of scope by exploring how the Arctic is viewed from India, through a critical analysis of the different voices within this discourse that have emerged over the past few years, and placing this discourse in a broader Indian foreign policy perspective.

The Arctic

The Arctic denotes the region surrounding the North Pole, the northernmost point on earth. There are several ways of defining the Arctic, and this thesis uses one of the most common definitions. This definition is based on a specific latitude, i.e. the region above the polar (or Arctic) circle, which is around 66 degrees north. Using this definition, the Arctic region comprises eight states: The United States, Canada, Russia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Denmark (through Greenland). This is also the definition used by the key political body of the region, the Arctic Council (AC), and forms the basis for membership in the AC.⁸ Therefore, this thesis’ references to the Arctic or the Arctic region are based on the above definition. Since this region consists of both ocean and land mass, the definition implies that large areas in the Arctic are populated. The climate of the Arctic is generally harsh and uninhabitable, and has for many centuries been considered one of the world’s last frontiers. A place so remote and rough, that the famous Norwegian polar explorer Roald Amundsen concluded that not even the most excited fantasist travelled to the polar ice in hope of finding any riches.⁹ This does not apply to the whole of the Arctic region, and large areas in the northern parts of Canada, the United States (through Alaska) and Russia are populated and rich in natural resources. Even more so, some parts, such as Norway, are privileged with being connected to the Gulf stream currents, which sends warm seawater from the Gulf of Mexico all the way to the Norwegian coast, making the climate there more pleasant and inhabitable.

⁷ Chaturvedi 2014: 78

⁸ Hough 2013: 3-4

⁹ Amundsen 1972: 13

Geopolitics of the Arctic

Historically, the Arctic has been thinly populated and situated at the outskirts of most geopolitical developments elsewhere in the world. Apart from imperialistic expeditions that placed claims on various territories during the 17th to 19th centuries, the Arctic was viewed as a place of myth and legend. During the 20th century scientific research, such as meteorology, made its incursions into the region, as did the discovery of rich reserves of natural resources. These developments made the Arctic states more aware of the region's importance, acknowledging the need for a political reorientation towards the region.¹⁰ In 1985, the political scientist Oran R. Young wrote in an article that "(...) the world is entering the age of the Arctic, an era in which those concerned with international peace and security will urgently need to know much more about the region (...)"¹¹ Young saw the Arctic as a potential area of conflict between the two superpowers at that time, the United States and the Soviet Union, both situated on the Arctic rim. In recent years this region has also experienced an increased interest from countries outside of the Arctic region. Due to melting sea ice caused by the rise of global temperatures, the region has become far more accessible than only a few decades ago. In a melting Arctic, new shipping lanes and access to natural resources such as oil and gas have created a domain for geopolitical thinkers, journalists and commentators to project larger political issues onto the region, with some labelling the region as a stage for great power politics or predictions of the Arctic to emerge as a scene for a new "Cold War",¹² and even having the potential of becoming the new Middle East of geopolitics.¹³ As the Arctic ice melts, the argument goes, the scramble for resources is unravelling, setting the scene for possible conflicts between great powers such as Russia and the United States. The situation is of course multifaceted, and viewed differently from different places. The view from outside the Arctic region tends to have a more conflict-driven, high-tension perspective on the Arctic, whereas the view from within the Arctic region emphasises cooperation and peaceful co-existence. Scholars on the field of Arctic affairs, often located within the Arctic region themselves, are careful about using bold terms, such as 'Arctic Cold War'. As the former diplomat and now Senior Adviser and Head of Centre for Asian Security Studies at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, Jo Inge Bekkevold argues, "even though both traditional and non-traditional security issues will continue to linger in the Arctic region, and

¹⁰ Hough 2013: 9-10; see also Emmerson 2011: 11-34

¹¹ Young 1985: 160

¹² The Guardian 2015

¹³ Nature & Cultures: The American University of Paris Geographic Webzine 2013

as such conflict cannot be excluded, cooperation seems more likely to prevail.”¹⁴ Bekkevold therefore concludes that the Arctic is a ‘low tension area’, where most disputes are either solved or being solved through diplomacy and the already existing institutional and legal frameworks in the region.

These differing views have formed an Arctic discourse within the community of geopolitical and strategic thinkers, commentators and academics. Most of this Arctic discourse is composed within the Arctic region itself, but in the era of rapid globalisation of knowledge, Arctic affairs have followed suit, now being discussed outside of the Arctic region, including in Asian countries like India. The interest of India and other Asian countries has caused international attention, with commentators speculating in and assessing what India’s intentions in the Arctic region may be. A centrepiece in many of these analyses have been to discuss why India and other Asian countries, as non-polar states, have interests in the Arctic region, let alone to be observers in the Arctic Council and establish research facilities in the region. These analyses seem to place non-Arctic states’ engagements and interests in the region within the spheres of strategic and geopolitical considerations.¹⁵

Rooted in the geophysical changes that the Arctic region now is undergoing, these analyses stress the Arctic as economically viable and strategically important. There are particularly three fields of interests that have caught the eyes of many commentators, namely the *resources* uncovered by the melting ice; the opening up of *new shipping routes* through the Arctic ocean; and the more supranational field of interest and attention: *Arctic governance*. These three fields will be discussed briefly below, as they are important elements in how the Arctic is viewed from India.

The melting of the sea ice has enabled *resources* to be extracted from the Arctic region, particularly oil and gas. Estimates of how much oil and gas the Arctic contains varies and according to a study by the US Geological Survey in 2008, undiscovered oil in the Arctic region amounts to 90 billion barrels. Further, the same survey noted that the Arctic contains a whole 22% of the undiscovered fossil fuels in the world.¹⁶ Most of these resources are located offshore, which means that a high level of technical expertise is necessary in order to extract them. Therefore, energy projects in the Arctic are progressing slowly and there is much anticipation and insecurities attached to how these will develop further.¹⁷

¹⁴ Bekkevold 2016: 63

¹⁵ See for example Njord Wegge’s discussion on China’s interest for the Arctic region. Wegge locates China’s interest as economic, strategic and scientific. Wegge 2014

¹⁶ Hough 2013: 19

¹⁷ Dadwal 2014

The *new shipping routes* that are envisaged to pass through the Arctic waters after the ice has receded have caused much interest. There are currently two routes that are seen as most likely to be used in the near future, namely the Northwest Passage (NWP) and the Northern Sea Route (NSR). The NWP goes through the Arctic waters of Canada, and certain parts became ‘ice free’ in 2007. The NWP cuts the sailing distance from New York to Shanghai with approximately 3850 kilometres, bypassing the Panama Canal. Likewise, the NSR is also opening up, and several vessels have already sailed through. Sailing through the NSR, which follows the Russian Arctic coast, reduces the distance between London and Yokohama by an estimated 7359 kilometres.¹⁸

What then follows is how these issues should be dealt with and administered by the Arctic littorals and the international community. Since large portions of the Arctic is constituted by both land and ocean, the legal framework that most effectively applies at the moment, is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Also, the Arctic Council, though not a legal body, provides a platform for intergovernmental discussion. Yet, governance issues still linger in the Arctic region and are frequently debated by scholars and commentators.

Science in the Arctic

The Arctic is a favoured place for scientific research on climate changes and there are numerous research stations scattered around the Arctic Ocean. The Svalbard archipelago, which is under Norwegian jurisdiction, has become a hub for polar research attracting scientists from across the globe. Ny-Ålesund, situated approximately 100 kilometres north of Svalbard’s administrative centre, Longyearbyen, is one of four research communities at Svalbard and, according to The Research Council of Norway, also the largest and most international of the communities. There are 14 permanent research stations run by ten different nations in Ny-Ålesund: China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, South Korea and the United Kingdom.¹⁹ The Ny-Ålesund research community is administered by Kings Bay A/S, originally a coal mining company, now a real estate corporation owned by the Norwegian Ministry of Trade and Fisheries. Kings Bay A/S holds a large area around Kongsfjorden and facilitates research activities and development in the area.²⁰ India and other Asian countries have now become a part of this ‘exclusive’ polar

¹⁸ Hough 2013: 21-22

¹⁹ The Research Council of Norway 2015

²⁰ Kings Bay A/S

research club at Svalbard. Scientific research on climate change is at the moment the main thrust for most nations present in the Arctic region, including India.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into six main chapters. In chapter two I discuss the methodological approach applied in this thesis, along with a discussion of my source material. The third chapter forms the theoretical base for the thesis, where I present central principles and themes in the history of Indian foreign policy, along with a discussion on how India's foreign policy has evolved, as this will form our background for understanding central foreign policy issues in the Indian Arctic discourse. I then engage with India's previous polar history, through its expeditions to the Antarctic continent from the 1980s, as well as a discussion of the "Question of Antarctica", which was first raised by India in the UN General Assembly in the years 1956-57. This intervention in the UN is an excellent example of how India's ideologically driven foreign policy under India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was manifested in practice, ultimately failing to produce any fruitful outcome. I here provide a short discussion on how this was interpreted by commentators in order to provide tools for analysing how the arguments are presented and discussed in the Indian Arctic discourse. Then follows a discussion on how to theorise India's foreign policy along with a discussion on the concept of soft power, and whether or not this can be a useful tool in order to bring in new perspectives on Indian foreign policy.

Chapter four explores India's Arctic engagements, analysing the Indian Arctic programme through its scientific mission and the geopolitical aspects related to India's observer status in the Arctic Council. I then, in chapter five, analyse a selection of the most dominant voices on Arctic issues that have emerged in India, and contextualise these in a broader Indian foreign policy discourse. Finally, chapter six concludes this thesis, and summarises important points and arguments that have been made and also suggest topics of further research.

2 Methodology

My project's rationale

It is difficult to recall the first time I encountered the topic of India in the Arctic. This must have been during my years as a Bachelor Student at the University of Oslo, where I did my Bachelor's degree in South Asian studies with Hindi as my major. Being a Norwegian student practising my faltering Hindi in Varanasi back in 2011, I had heard many Indians who knew Norway describing it as a place of ice and snow, with 24 hours of daylight in the summers, possibly also, some suggested, situated near the North Pole. A couple of years later, at a hotel in New Delhi in January 2013, a waiter asked me how we Norwegians were able to quench our thirst, since all our lakes of drinking water obviously were frozen, in this land of ice and snow. In other words, this place was as exotic and mysterious as I first saw India, a place of myth and otherworldliness. At that time, imagining India to have any interest in a place so far in the back of the consciousness of most Indians, other than tourism and salmon, never crossed my mind. Later that year, back in Varanasi, I read in an Indian newspaper that India had been admitted as an observer to the Arctic Council. Apart from mentioning this peculiar piece of information to my co-workers, who expressed some curiousness and astonishment over why India would be interested in this, I hardly paid any further attention to it. Then, in 2014, as I was initiating my Master's studies, I noticed a small, but growing, academic literature on the subject of Asian countries' interest for the Arctic region. Coming across a special issue on Arctic affairs in *Strategic Analysis*, published by the Delhi-based government think tank Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, my interest in Indian foreign policy was catapulted towards the Arctic.

In this chapter I discuss the methodological approach used in this thesis. I discuss my use of sources and selection of the material, and then discuss my role as a researcher and access to the field of study. I then conclude by discussing some ethical considerations.

Hermeneutics and discourse

I approach the material that constitutes this thesis' research data from a hermeneutical perspective. The hermeneutical approach is an important element in academic disciplines within the field of humanities, as it is a theory of interpretation. However, hermeneutics does not provide any clear sets of rules to be used in interpreting the research material. A hermeneutical approach emphasises the researcher's own interpretations of the material, by

focusing on the context in which the material has been produced.¹ In this process, the researcher must be mindful of his or her background and preconceptions of the research subject, and how this will have an impact on the interpretation of the material. How does my interdisciplinary background from the field of Area Studies at a Norwegian university affect my understanding and interpretation of the material? The information acquired from the informants and the written sources that constitute this thesis is analysed within a broader context of Indian foreign policy issues. I do not argue for the thesis' conclusions to represent any final truth about India's Arctic engagement or the discourse analysed, it only represents my own interpretations of the material. An important point in the hermeneutical approach, is the relationship between what is termed 'part' and 'whole'. This is called the 'hermeneutical circle'² and implies that my understanding of a subject is informed by preconceptions of the context in which the subject is part of. For example, in order to understand how the Arctic is viewed from India, I need to have a sound understanding of the context where this discourse is produced. As previously mentioned, much of the Indian Arctic discourse emanates from the strategic community in India and this may therefore influence their writings and how they relate to the subject. This also affected how I perceived my informants and the written material, making it important for me to reflect over and be attentive towards these issues.³

When working with the material provided by my informants and the written sources, I have drawn a few elements from the field of discourse analysis. Since the term 'discourse' is frequently used in academic publications and debates, often with different meanings, a definition is here needed. Jørgensen and Phillips define discourse as a way of presenting and understanding the world⁴ and when I use the term discourse in this thesis, it rests on this simple definition. I have chosen to term the academic and popular debate that has emerged on Arctic issues in India as the 'Indian Arctic discourse'. This discourse, I argue, is constituted by a set of different voices. These voices present the Arctic in certain ways and have their own understanding of Arctic issues. When I explore this discourse it therefore entails analysing how these voices see and understand the Arctic and how the Arctic relates to different foreign policy issues. There are several theoretical directions within the field of discourse analysis, and this thesis borrows a few elements from two of these directions. I would like to stress that this thesis do not use a fully discourse analytical approach, but by invoking the term 'discourse', a short discussion is in place. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal

¹ Thagaard 2003: 37

² Jordheim, Rønning, Sandmo & Skole 2008: 229

³ Jordheim et al. 2008: 235-237

⁴ Jørgensen & Phillips 1999: 9

Mouffe argue that a discourse constructs the social world's meaning, and this meaning is never constant due to the instability of language. It is therefore important to Laclau and Mouffe's theory that there is a 'discourse struggle', where different discourses 'compete' to establish a hegemony.⁵ In what I term the Indian Arctic discourse, there are clearly different voices with opposing views on what role India should play in Arctic affairs. One can argue that these views compete with each other in order to establish a hegemony in how the Arctic should figure in Indian foreign policy. For example, while some argue for India to take part in resource exploitation in the Arctic region, others argue for the Arctic to be treated as a 'global common', protected from these exploitations and possible conflict. However, I argue that these different views are all part of the same discourse, and that this discourse is held together by what Laclau and Mouffe term "nodal points",⁶ that works as signifiers or reference points to organise the discourse. Examples of nodal points in the Indian Arctic discourse are 'resources', 'shipping routes' and 'governance'. These are central points of references which organise the Indian Arctic discourse. A central aim of this thesis is to analyse how these points are discussed and perceived by the different voices.

I also borrow elements from critical discourse analysis, where the linguist Norman Fairclough's theory is central. Fairclough's theory has similarities with that of Laclau and Mouffe, but Fairclough stresses the importance of discourse being but one of several ingredients that constitute the social world. Where Laclau and Mouffe's theory operates without a reality outside of the discourse itself, Fairclough see discourse as one of several aspects that shape the social. Fairclough also emphasises the intertextuality and changes of discourses, where discourses interact and change due to alterations of language.⁷ In my thesis, the context of the Indian Arctic discourse is important, as it is influenced and shaped by larger Indian foreign policy issues. There are also changes within the Indian Arctic discourse and some voices have for example argued for India to push for the Arctic to be treated as a 'global common'. After India's accession to observer status in the Arctic Council, however, this term appears to have changed into 'global knowledge commons'.

These discourse analytical approaches are based on a social constructivist basis. Social constructivism constitutes a range of premises on how knowledge relates to culture and society. According to Vivian Burr, a prominent scholar of social constructivism, there are four common premises that constitute the field of what we call social constructivism. Firstly, a

⁵ Jørgensen & Phillips 1999: 9

⁶ Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 112

⁷ Jørgensen & Phillips 1999: 15-17

critical position towards knowledge, where knowledge about the world should not be seen as an objective truth. In this thesis, I use this critical position to explore how the Arctic is framed, not to conclude what is the ultimate truth about the Arctic. Secondly, history and culture influence our perceptions of the world, and are objects of change. My background, as previously discussed, affects how I view my research topic and I am aware that these elements may change over time. Third, the ways in which we see the world are held up by and produced by social processes. Here, my understanding of Indian foreign policy and how this relates to the Arctic, have been shaped and constructed through interacting with the informants and engaging in social settings. And fourthly, the connection between knowledge and social practices pronounce what we think of as natural or unnatural ways of social behaviour.⁸

Sources and material

This thesis builds on four categories of material: *fieldwork*, *newspaper articles*, *academic publications* and *official documents*. In order to acquire a deeper understanding of my research subject I have spent time in India, where I attended conferences on Indian foreign policy and Arctic issues and interviewed and engaged with experts on the field. In addition, I have used a wide variety of written sources, written and published by experts on the field of Arctic issues, along with official documents and literature on Indian foreign policy.

Fieldwork

A central part of my research was to spend time in India. The purpose of my visits to India was to meet and interact with people with expertise in the subject. In addition, I wanted to conduct interviews and attend conferences. Tove Thagaard writes that working in the field means establishing connections and engaging with informants in order to acquire knowledge of the different dimensions of the milieu in which the informants are part of.⁹ This was particularly important in order to acquire a deeper understanding of the Indian Arctic discourse.

My first visit was in February 2015 and lasted two weeks. During this visit I attended the 17th Asian Security Conference 2015, titled “Asian Security: Comprehending the Indian Approach”, held at Institute for Defence studies and Analyses in New Delhi. Here I met with

⁸ Jørgensen & Phillips 1999: 13-14

⁹ Thagaard 2003: 63-65

people linked to the strategic community in Delhi. This proved to be very fruitful and I quickly made valuable contacts that I used at a later stage in my project.

My second visit was in late September to mid October 2015, and lasted for three weeks. During this visit I conducted most of my interviews and attended the third Science and Geopolitics of Arctic-Antarctic-Himalaya conference (SaGAA III) held over two days at the India International Centre, New Delhi. During this visit, I spent most of the time in Delhi, with a short three-day trip to Vasco da Gama, in the state of Goa, to visit the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR). I chose Delhi as my primary domain for conducting my fieldwork, since Delhi possesses India's most vibrant strategic affairs community, in addition to being India's capital. Some of India's top think tanks are located in Delhi, as well as many of the foremost commentators and experts on the field of foreign affairs and Arctic issues.

Interviews and selection of informants

I have conducted my interviews in a qualitative, semi-structured form, allowing my informants to speak as freely about the interview topic as possible. A semi-structured qualitative interview highlights a series of topics to be addressed, along with a set of arranged questions. This does not imply that the interview must follow a specific path or sequence – it also allows the informant and interviewer to explore new directions that may materialise during the interview session.¹⁰ I formulated all my questions in advance through an interview guide in order to be as prepared as possible and I used most of the same questions in all my interviews in order to acquire comparable research data. However, in many of my interviews I only had to ask a small fraction of my pre-produced questions as my informants would keep talking relatively easily without my interference. My experience was therefore that my informants displayed little to no hesitancy in answering my questions or talking freely about the subjects presented to them. Most of my informants belong to what can be termed as 'elites'. This means that my informants are experts in their fields as well as possessing high or even powerful positions. Steinar Kvale writes that interviewing elites poses different challenges such as obtaining access to informants as well as the need to be prepared. Kvale writes that, "An interviewer demonstrating that he or she has a sound knowledge of the interview topic will gain respect and be able to achieve an extent of symmetry in the interview relationship."¹¹ On the topic of access to informants, some of my desired informants proved to

¹⁰ Kvale 2007: 56-57

¹¹ Kvale 2007: 70

be too difficult to obtain. This was the case with high-ranking officials working for the Indian government, with whom I tried to get interviews. For example, my attempt to get through to the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), who have the main responsibility of the scientific part of India's Arctic programme, produced no reply. On the other hand, when I finally managed to seal an interview agreement with a senior Indian diplomat, the only date and time possible for the interviewee to meet with me was at the exact time my flight back to Oslo departed from Delhi. Most of the informants I ended up using were quite easily accessible and were contacted through e-mail and telephone. All of my informants showed great willingness and openness to meet and engage with me and I was generally met with respect and interest. Therefore, all the meetings and interviews were conducted in a very comfortable and relaxed mode.

I have emphasized my informants' opinions and assessments on the subject of India in the Arctic and Indian foreign policy in general. I have made eight interviews, in which seven have been recorded with my digital recorder or my mobile phone. The length of the interviews varies, all from 20 minutes to a full hour. Often the conversations have continued for a longer period of time after I have turned off my recorder and packed away my pen and notebook. As an example is my meeting with Dr. Krishnan, head of the Arctic Department at the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR) in Vasco da Gama, Goa. I interviewed Dr. Krishnan in his office, and the interview lasted for approximately 60 minutes. After I had turned off my recorder, Dr. Krishnan took me for a tour around the Arctic Department and the NCAOR's premises. During this 'grand tour', we also sat down with another scientist, whom I coincidentally had met a week earlier in Delhi during the SaGAA III conference, and we all had a cup of office-made chai and biscuits, while indulging in light *gapshap*.¹² Also, during the two conferences I attended in New Delhi in February and October 2015, I took extensive notes, in addition to recordings of key speakers.

I have used English as my interview language. I have a basic proficiency of Hindi, as I have studied Hindi at University level, in addition to wide practice in India. However, most of my informants were to a high degree fluent in English, making it the preferred language of communication. That being said, I did have much use of my knowledge of Hindi, as I have experienced time and again the door-opening effects of language. For instance, during my two visits to India in 2015, I spent a considerable amount of time at the Press Club of India in New Delhi, informally engaging with several seasoned journalists and members of the Indian

¹² *Gapshap* is a Hindi word used to describe gossip or casual, informal talk.

press. Through displaying my Hindi capacities, I was readily incorporated into the heated discussions about topics such as freedom of the press in India, as some of the discussants with less mastery of English could express themselves directly to me in Hindi. I experienced the same in other situations with scholars, where Hindi allowed a certain degree of intimacy in our conversations, as well as providing useful information on different topics.

Academic publications

In recent years, academic literature on the subject of India in the Arctic has increased, although it remains, as previously discussed, a fairly limited field of research. Much of the literature has been produced from think tanks, both governmental and non-governmental. While the amount of literature is limited, it still provides interesting perspectives on how the strategic community think around and relate to these issues, and these publications often contain policy suggestions. This thesis actively engages with these writings, and in many places they are at the centre of my analysis. There are particularly two publications in this regard that I want to highlight here, which hold special importance for this thesis. First of all, as I mentioned, the special issue of *Strategic Analysis* on the Arctic published in 2014 (which later was printed as a book published by Routledge) was my door opener to the subject. This special issue was a result of a conference held at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in Delhi in 2013, in conjunction with the Fridtjof Nansen Institute (FNI), the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies (IFS) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). Then, in 2015, another book was published, titled *Asian Countries and the Arctic Future* (first published in Chinese), which was a result from a joint research project by the FNI and Shanghai Institutes of International Studies (SIIS). Both of these books deal with some overlapping issues, such as how the Arctic is governed and how Asian states' interests in the region will have an impact on this. In addition to this, the books also discuss in detail the different Asian states' policies and outlooks in the region. These publications (except for the Routledge book-version of *Strategic Analysis*) were part of a FNI- and IFS-driven research project initiated in 2012 called "The AsiArctic Programme", with several partners from Norway and Asia, including IDSA.¹³

¹³ The AsiArctic Programme

Newspapers

In my work I have made an extensive use of newspapers. These have mainly been Indian newspapers, but also international newspapers. Indian newspapers have reported widely, in relative terms, on Arctic issues. These reports have been in form of op-ed commentary articles and news articles. Large Indian English language newspapers such as *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *Daily News and Analysis (DNA)* and the *Times of India* have all published articles on the Indian engagement in the Arctic. International online publications such as *The Diplomat*, have also published articles on Arctic issues, as well as providing in-depth analyses on Indian foreign policy issues. Many of the contributors on Indian foreign policy in Indian newspapers are distinguished experts in the field, such as C. Raja Mohan, who frequently writes for *The Indian Express*. The reason why I have not utilized any Hindi newspapers is the lack of relevant articles published in some of the online newspaper editions I frequently visit. There are of course Hindi articles published that deal with the Arctic, and especially with regards to climate change. For example, searching through the web archives of India's largest Hindi newspaper, *Dainik Jagaran*, produces articles like "kabhi Arctic men rahte hain unt" ("At some time there lived camels in the Arctic"), or "2058 tak barfvihin ho jaega Arctic!" ("The Arctic will become snow free by 2058"). These are of course interesting articles, and given *Dainik Jagaran's* readership of about 15.5 million, allegedly twice the number of *The Times of India*, one should not underestimate the importance of newspapers published in Indian languages.¹⁴

Official documents

The Arctic has become a part of India's foreign affairs, implying that official stances and decisions are taken within the political establishment. The government has released some official documents, which makes clear what India aims for towards the Arctic region, in terms of policy issues. The documents I have used are all available through government sites on the internet, albeit a relatively small, and a less communicated part of India's foreign policy priorities. These documents offer valuable primary sources of information about the official policy towards the Arctic. The quantity of available official documents remains sparse. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) released an online document in June 2013, which states the official Indian objectives in the Arctic region.¹⁵ Likewise, the webpage of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) has also published an article explaining the "Indian Scientific

¹⁴ Joshi 2015: 262

¹⁵ Ministry of External Affairs 2013

Endeavors in the Arctic”¹⁶, along with a five-year budget requirement. In addition to this, both the MEA and the MoES frequently provide press releases, such as the “Joint Statement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of India: Shared Trust, New Horizons”, published by the MEA in December 2015, which highlights the importance of cooperation between India and Russia in Arctic matters, both scientifically and in the Arctic Council.¹⁷

My position as researcher and access to the field

How does my position as a researcher from a Norwegian university influence my informants, as well as my access to the field of study? This is an important point to bear in mind, and I will here discuss the different implications this may have had for my fieldwork. The written sources used in this thesis will here be omitted. As mentioned, gaining access to informants only caused minor problems, with most informants being more than happy to meet with me for an interview. However, being a researcher may have influenced how my informants have met me or presented the information I wanted to extract from them. In the initial phase of contact, through e-mail and telephone, I was thorough in presenting myself as a MA Student from the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages at the University of Oslo, whose project was to analyse India’s engagements in the Arctic. I then requested for an interview where I asked the informants to share their opinions on the subject. Most of my informants quickly replied to this request, showing no objections to my topic of research, or even any reservations about meeting me. Many of my informants have been closely associated with the Indian government in some way or the other, either by being employed by government-owned think tanks or by previously having possessed other ranks within the civil service administration. This may of course have affected the outcome of the interviews and political agendas may have influenced their statements. For example, and this I will elaborate further on later in this thesis, Norway’s key position as an Arctic state proved decisive in India’s bid for observer status in the Arctic Council. As a Norwegian representing a government-funded public University in Oslo, could this have affected the answers from my informants? This may well be the case, and it is difficult for me to assess whether or not this happened. Steinar Kvale writes that there is an asymmetry of power between the interviewee and the interviewer, where there are many factors at play. This can be the interviewer’s scientific competence; how the interviewer holds the monopoly of interpretation of the interview and how the interview in itself is an instrumental dialogue, where conversation

¹⁶ Ministry of Earth Sciences 2015

¹⁷ Ministry of External Affairs 2015

itself is not the main goal, but extracting information from the informant.¹⁸ Nevertheless, I would like to stress that all my informants were highly educated persons, some with academic backgrounds, and therefore necessarily comprehended my position and mandate as a researcher. As discussed above, my intention was not to correct any of my informants' views, or even validate the truth behind their statements. My task was not to critically challenge any alleged loyalties or ties between my informants and the Indian government, as this was not the purpose of the interviews, let alone this thesis itself. Preferably, I wanted to engage with the different voices within the discourse by paying particular attention to the informants' own views.

Ethical considerations

By conducting interviews, some ethical issues may arise that must be discussed. There are Indian foreign policy issues that can be judged as sensitive, and therefore cause ethical challenges, both for the informants and the interviewer. This was taken into account when I worked out the questions. I wanted to engage in discussions with my informants, yet not to the extent that my informants would feel uncomfortable or even refuse to participate. During the interviews, however, I experienced most of the informants as outspoken and freely engaging with the questions asked. Most answered without hesitation on topics which I considered to be sensitive, such as relations with China and how this could play out in the geopolitics of the Arctic region. Only a few of my informants told me beforehand that there might be questions they did not want to answer, and I then replied that they were not obliged to answer these questions, and that they were free to stop the interview if sensitive topics should occur. Many of my informants represent an authoritative 'core' in the Indian Arctic discourse, and are frequently invited to conferences, seminars and other events to lecture on this very topic, both in India and abroad. Accordingly, most of my informants are used to circumstances of more or less critical enquiry and are familiar with daunting questions. I received verbal consent from all my informants in order to use the interview in this thesis, and none objected to this when I asked for permission.

¹⁸ Kvale 2007: 14-15

3 Indian foreign policy: History, Theory and the 'Question of Antarctica'

Peace can only come when the causes of war are removed. So long as there is the domination of one country over another, or the exploitation of one class by another, there will always be attempts to subvert the existing order, and no stable equilibrium can endure. Out of imperialism and capitalism peace can never come.¹

Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister (1947-1964)

India's Arctic engagement is part of a larger Indian foreign policy discourse. Naturally, there are several ways of analysing Indian foreign policy and I have chosen two broad entrance points to this endeavour: *principles and themes in Indian foreign policy* and *theory*. I will also give an overview of India's first encounter with polar science, through its Antarctic expeditions from the early 1980s onwards, and discuss how the Antarctic continent surfaced in the Indian foreign policy discourse already in the mid 1950s, only to disappear a few years later. This 'Question of Antarctica' works as an interesting case where central themes and principles in India's then ideologically driven foreign policy were applied in practice.

With *principles and themes in Indian foreign policy* I will identify the main trends, principles and themes that have been applied by scholars in order to characterise different phases of Indian foreign policy, from independence from the British in 1947 until today. This, I argue, is necessary in order to understand how contemporary Indian foreign policy unfolds. In the section *theory* I will discuss the difficulties of theorising Indian foreign policy, along with a discussion of the concept of 'soft power', which is central to this thesis. The amount of literature on soft power with regards to Indian foreign policy is increasing and the concept itself gives interesting perspectives on how to interpret India's foreign policy. As I will argue, soft power is an important element in the Indian Arctic discourse. In order to understand how the Arctic is framed and perceived in India, it is necessary to understand these themes and principles and how these have evolved during the history of independent India. These two entrance points form the basis for a further analysis of India's Arctic engagement and the currently developing Indian Arctic discourse.

¹ Jawaharlal Nehru in 1936, quoted in Sagar 2015: 73

Principles and themes in Indian foreign policy

Indian Foreign policy is often divided into several historical time periods in order to identify certain trends and themes, and scholars commonly operate with three broad historical periods. Chris Ogden uses three “phases” to distinguish between historical trends: from 1947 – 1962; 1962 – 1991; and from 1991 – to present.² David M. Malone also operates with almost these same distinctions, although with the time periods being slightly broader.³ Both Malone and Ogden employ many of the same terms and themes in describing the features of these different periods. In the following historical overview of the key developments in Indian foreign policy since India’s independence, I will draw heavily on these demarcations, as they will provide useful tools for further analysis. Historical periods are not watertight bulkheads, as many phenomena and characteristics can be the same from one period to another, without necessarily marking any clear break from the previous period. Also, these periodical classifications are analytical tools, and therefore subject to change – they do not represent an absolute historical reality.

Idealism and the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) 1947 – 1962

India gained its independence from the British in 1947 and the subcontinent was carved into two entities: India and Pakistan. Due to this partition the first years of independence were marked by tumults, conflicts and instability. Even though 1947 marks a break from the colonial era under British rule (‘Raj’), the foreign policy of independent India had to cope with the legacy of the Raj in many ways. Among the main issues the foreign policy establishment faced were the highly delicate and contentious border disputes between India and China and, of course, between India and Pakistan. These are issues that still loom to this day, with India’s northern border being labelled ‘the most dangerous border in the world’.⁴ In addition, India was trying to find its own voice in international affairs.

Under the leadership of India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s foreign policy had a moralistic and ideological outlook on world affairs. As will be discussed below, Nehru occupied a central position in the making of Indian foreign affairs from independence until his death in 1964. Therefore, Nehru’s influence and importance in shaping India’s foreign policy in this period should not be underestimated. The important themes in India’s foreign policy under Nehru were, broadly speaking, non-alignment, decolonization and Third

² Ogden 2014: 4-10

³ Malone 2011a: 47-53

⁴ Mahajan 2015: 62

World solidarity. For Nehru, a multi-polar world order was to be preferred and by taking leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) India further heralded this view. The principles of *swadeshi* ('of ones own country', applied to goods made in India), *ahimsa* (non-violence) and neutrality from the Cold War politics of the United States and the Soviet Union formed a basis for how India would approach international affairs.⁵ In this period therefore, leading up to the war with China in 1962, India was seen as having a moralistic and ideological foreign policy. Through NAM, which comprised former colonised and underdeveloped countries such as Ghana, Egypt, Indonesia and Yugoslavia, India maintained its position as a promoter of multi-polarity and independence in global affairs. Nehru envisaged India taking a leading role in the anti-imperialist NAM. In the wake of World War II, the newfound independence of many previously colonised nations had created new spaces in world politics. And India, according to Nehru, had a special role in this discourse as he "saw the star of India rising far above the horizon and casting its soothing light . . . over many countries in the world, who looked to it with hope, who considered that out of this new Free India would come various forces which would help Asia."⁶

This 'forces' came in the form of India's unique experience with anti-imperialism and peaceful removal of the British. Nehru's vision was that a new world order could be established through solidarity with other developing nations. This idea was further embodied by the NAM. At the Bandung Conference in 1955, where former colonised nations gathered to frame and promote cooperation and better relations between countries in Asia and Africa, Nehru's idealistic approach to foreign policy became evident as he criticised the recently established US-backed security constellation South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). For Nehru, this went against the principle of non-alignment and would therefore reinforce the bloc politics that Nehru so firmly opposed.⁷ In a speech at the conference, Nehru pointed out that

If I join any of these big groups I lose my identity; I have no identity left, I have no views left. (. . .) Therefore every step that takes place in reducing that area in the world which may be called the unaligned area is a dangerous step and leads to war (...) It is an intolerable thought to me that the great countries of Asia and Africa should come out of bondage into freedom only to degrade themselves or humiliate themselves in this way.⁸

⁵ Ogden 2014: 5-6

⁶ Singh 2011: 55

⁷ Singh 2011

⁸ Singh 2011: 62

It is clear from this quote that for Nehru, the principle of non-alignment constituted the very backbone of his political identity.

Realism and intervention 1962 – 1991

Even though India had employed hard power in the conflict with Pakistan in 1947-48, the idealism of Nehru prevailed in the following years. However, the war with China in 1962 abruptly warned the Indian policy establishment that India was not vaccinated against aggression from its neighbours. The Chinese attack came as a complete surprise on the Indians, even though scholars argue that the cause of China's invasion was rooted in Nehru's Forward Policy and therefore a reaction from China should have been expected or at least taken into account. The ill-prepared and badly equipped Indian army's humiliating defeat at the hands of China came as a shock to many, not least Nehru himself. The credibility of Nehru's foreign policy suffered a substantial blow due to China's invasion of the disputed Indo-Sino border areas. As Nehru himself put it, "We were living in a world of illusion . . . we were getting out of touch with reality in the modern world and we were living in an artificial world of our own creation. We have been shocked out of it."⁹

In many ways, the war with China in 1962 was a reality check to India. This led to a reorienting of India's foreign policy and India was to a degree 'socialized' into the international order.¹⁰ Nehru's death in 1964 paved the way for his daughter, Indira Gandhi, to enter into politics and in 1966 she became Prime Minister. Under Gandhi, India's foreign policy turned more pragmatic and realist. Its grip on non-alignment became somewhat looser, as the 'Peace, Friendship and Cooperation Treaty' with the Soviet Union signed in 1971 illustrates. This treaty provided India with aid and arms from the Soviet Union as well as more leverage towards its neighbours, i.e. China and Pakistan. The same year, in 1971, India intervened in the East Pakistan conflict, which resulted in the carving out the independent state of Bangladesh. This manoeuvre clearly formulated a new role for India, breaking away from earlier Nehruvian principles such as non-interference. In the South Asian region, India emerged as a dominant power with strong military capacities and capabilities. What has been termed 'The Indira Doctrine' sought to establish this hegemony by claiming the Indian Ocean as India's natural sphere of influence and that anyone who penetrated these waters should acknowledge India's predominance. However, this doctrine became difficult to enforce due to the state of the Indian Navy and therefore constituted more of an ambition than actual

⁹ Quoted in Mukherjee 2010: 253

¹⁰ Ogden 2014: 7

reality.¹¹ In 1974 India carried out its first successful nuclear test, the ‘Peaceful Nuclear Explosion’, which resulted in India being sanctioned by Western countries, especially the United States.¹² However, domestic debates and political ambiguity over India’s nuclear weapons decelerated India’s process towards becoming a nuclear weapons state.¹³

Indira Gandhi’s premiership represents a shift towards a more populist approach in Indian politics, in contrast to that of her father and predecessor, Nehru. Surjit Mansingh argues that while Indira Gandhi’s foreign policy in deed could be labelled as realist, she was not a ‘hard realist’, but rather a pragmatic and non-ideologue who, in many cases, was reluctant to fully commit to secure national interests.¹⁴ According to Mansingh, Indira Gandhi’s Indo-Soviet Treaty does not necessarily read as a breach with Nehruvian principles, but in fact “acted to protect national security and assert India’s strategic autonomy as the core of non-alignment.”¹⁵ Despite being a controversial figure, Indira Gandhi is still revered as a strong and heroic leader in India amongst certain strands of the Indian population.¹⁶ Towards the end of the 1980s however, economic crisis forced India to rethink and drift away from its heavily nationalised and protectionist policies, and to reach out to the West.

Liberalization, pragmatism and the ‘Hindu Bomb’: 1991 – today

In the years leading up to the end of the Cold War in 1991, India had taken steps in order to open up its economy and allow foreign companies to invest. Even though 1991 is seen as a watershed in Indian foreign policy, Srinath Raghavan argues that a significant change within the foreign policy establishment, in addition to a change of political attitude, in reality had been initiated during Rajiv Gandhi’s time in office (1984-1989).¹⁷ However, Indian foreign policy from 1991 and onwards is, roughly speaking, marked by liberalization, pragmatism and, while looking East, a slight tilt towards the West.

Under Rajiv Gandhi, India had taken its first steps towards a rapprochement with the United States. These ties had deteriorated after independence, partially a result of India’s ideologically driven foreign policy. In 1991, Manmohan Singh, then Finance Minister, presented economic reforms that sought to open up the Indian economy and make it viable for the global market. Due to a faltering economy in the late 1980s, India had been compelled to

¹¹ Mansingh 2015: 109-110

¹² Ogden 2014: 7-8

¹³ Cohen 2001: 157-197

¹⁴ Mansingh 2015: 114-115

¹⁵ Mansingh 2015: 114

¹⁶ The Hindu 2009

¹⁷ Raghavan 2015: 117

seek loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to sustain itself and now many argued the necessity of an opening of the economy.¹⁸ This also meant further integration into the international order in which India had struggled to take part, due to the intervention in East Pakistan in 1971 and the nuclear tests in 1974.¹⁹ During the 1990s, India also turned its attention towards South East Asia, through its “Look East” policy (LEP). In addition to this, India sought better ties with countries in Western Asia, such as Iran, along with resuming diplomatic relations with Israel, despite the Israel’s strained relations with Iran. As mentioned, relations with the United States improved, further highlighting India as a pragmatic actor in global affairs, willing to cooperate and engage with almost everyone. India’s earlier idealist stance was played down, in order to achieve more diverse international relationships.²⁰

In 1998 India conducted its second nuclear test, the so-called Pokhran II, nicknamed ‘The Hindu Bomb’²¹ by commentators due to the then ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The reactions from the outside world were harsh, with the United Nations Security Council demanding an immediate stop to India’s nuclear programme. However, the reactions were of more short-lived character than in the 1970s, due to increased Indian efforts of engaging with great powers, especially the United States. India joined the Community of Democracies in 2000, and came a few years later, under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, to an agreement with the United States regarding India’s nuclear programme, separating the civilian and military programmes. This paved the way for India to attain a more dominant role in global affairs, by being recognized as a nuclear state as well as being viewed as a potential future power balancer towards China in Asia.²² In addition, India’s role as a regional power was further heightened during the 1990s by the ‘Gujral Doctrine’, named after Prime Minister I. K. Gujral, which aimed towards peaceful relations with India’s South Asian neighbours.²³

Recently, many commentators have argued that a new turn in India’s foreign policy is evolving under Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the BJP. Modi, who was instated as Prime Minister after winning a landslide victory in May 2014, has shown much energy through busy itineraries and high-level talks. Modi’s policies have been labelled the ‘Modi Doctrine’, and Harsh V. Pant argues that Modi has renounced the rhetoric of non-alignment and that instead “He will work with anyone and everyone to secure Indian interests, the most important of

¹⁸ Corbridge & Harris 2000: 143-172

¹⁹ Ogden 2014: 8

²⁰ Malone 2011a: 51-53

²¹ Heierstad 2010: 229

²² Mohan 2015: 132-140

²³ Mohan 2015: 132-140

which for him is to take India on the path of rapid economic growth.”²⁴ In addition to this, a renewed energy in relations with India’s South East Asian neighbours could be traced during External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj’s visit to Vietnam in August 2015, where Swaraj reportedly said that India “... must Act East and not just Look East”.²⁵ As summed up in a televised debate on Modi’s foreign policy after his first year of tenure, three foreign policy experts argued that three ‘pillars’ have become evident in Modi’s foreign policy: the prosperity of India; security of India; and the status of India abroad.²⁶ It is perhaps too early to make historical judgements on how to characterize the current foreign policies of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Yet, there is particularly one trend that stands out from, but does not break with, previous policies, which is the focus on India’s status abroad, India’s *visibility*. This falls directly under India’s soft power, which will be discussed in detail below.

Identifying these different trends in India’s foreign policy demonstrates how Indian foreign policy has evolved since independence. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that even though Indian foreign policy has undergone major shifts over the last six decades, India still occupies a unique position in international relations. Still, shadows of Nehru’s non-alignment loom and have created many dilemmas, as well as opportunities for India as a global actor. Indian foreign policy has evolved from what Malone calls “preacher to pragmatist”,²⁷ implying a transformation from the role as an ideologue under Nehru to a more realist and pragmatic driven foreign policy in recent years. Nevertheless, C. Raja Mohan argues that “the concept of ‘strategic autonomy’ has largely replaced ‘non-alignment’ as the moniker of India’s foreign policy.”²⁸ This strategic autonomy is to be understood as a means for India to engage with whichever country it wants, not dissimilar to Nehru’s NAM, but in a different climate of great power politics than during the Cold War.

There are a few important remarks to be made regarding who executes and shapes India’s foreign policy. This constitutes an interesting aspect in the evolution of Indian foreign policy, and it is necessary to have a basic understanding of how it works. In the history of independent India one cannot look at the making of Indian foreign affairs without mentioning Nehru, as we have seen previously. Nehru is credited for being the ‘Father’ or ‘founder’ of Indian foreign policy and during his tenure as Prime Minister he also served as the Minister of External Affairs. Nehru’s tenure illustrates how Indian foreign policy was created and

²⁴ Pant 2014

²⁵ The Economic Times 2014

²⁶ Rajya Sabha TV 2015

²⁷ Malone 2011a: 47

²⁸ Mohan 2015: 142

executed throughout much of independent India's history: by a small elite based around the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Nehru's dominant role in Indian foreign affairs created what has been termed the "Nehruvian consensus",²⁹ meaning less influence from other voices, from both within and outside the government on foreign policy making. This consensus broadly revolved around the Nehruvian principles discussed above and which outlived his death in 1964. Thereafter, the trend of the foreign policy being executed by a small elite attached to the PMO continued through the Indira Gandhi years but have for the last two decades been subject to change due to what has been called a 'democratization' of Indian foreign policy.³⁰ From being a primary activity confined to the PMO, foreign policy decisions have been more or less diversified, leaving a larger space for public discussions of the Indian state's priorities in foreign affairs. Yet, contemporary Indian foreign policy is still mainly framed and executed by a small elite based around the PMO in Delhi.³¹

Towards the Southern Continent and the 'Question of Antarctica'

Many commentators have highlighted that India's Arctic endeavour is a direct result of India's Antarctic experience. Consequently, this must be taken into account in order to understand the interest in the Arctic region, and how India views itself as a rightful stakeholder in polar affairs. India has been present on the Antarctic continent for many decades, since the early 1980s, and has therefore established themselves as a polar research nation. In addition, before India's first expedition, the Antarctic actually became a part of a broader Indian foreign policy discourse, included in Nehru's vision for peace and cooperation, as a part of the Indian opposition to global power politics and cold-war rhetoric. As I have highlighted previously in this chapter, on the historical trends and principles in India's foreign policy, Nehru's views on Antarctica, which India tried to raise in the UN in 1956-57, were clearly rooted in ideas of non-alignment, anti-imperialism and "larger concerns for world peace and well being of humanity".³²

India's Antarctic programme was initiated in 1981, when India launched its first scientific expedition to the 'frozen' continent. Before this, a few Indian scientists had occasionally joined other international expeditions during the 1960s and 70s, such as the Naval Lieutenant and meteorologist Ram Charan, the first Indian on Antarctica, who went as

²⁹ Ogden 2014: 13

³⁰ Heierstad 2010: 213-230

³¹ Ogden 2014: 31

³² Chaturvedi 2013b: 303

an observer for the Indian government on an Australian expedition in 1960.³³ In December 1981, the Norwegian-chartered ice-breaker vessel “The Polar Circle” set out from Goa to Antarctica and landed on the Antarctic continent on January 9, 1982. 21 Indian scientists, led by Dr. S.Z. Qasim, spent only ten days, out of the 25 days planned, on the continent, reportedly due to logistical issues.³⁴ The expedition landed in the Norwegian sector of Antarctica, known as Queen Maud Land, and during the short stay the Indian scientists managed to establish an unmanned weather station powered by solar energy.

The purpose of the expedition was mainly scientific, and as stated in the official annual report 1982-83, produced by the then newly established Department for Ocean Development, the concrete goals of the first Indian expedition to Antarctica were,

1. To initiate studies, build facilities and expertise in different oceanographic disciplines.
2. To continue and strengthen programme of routine data collection and studies.
3. To identify scientific programmes of significance to the Indian context in scientific and economic terms and pursue these as thrust areas to establish a position of Indian science in this sector.
4. To set up a base of operation on Antarctica.³⁵

This first mission was deemed a success and a landmark in Indian science. Indira Gandhi herself sent congratulatory messages to the team while on the Antarctic ice and even the Indian Posts & Telegraphs Department paid tribute, by issuing a special stamp with a picture of the Indian expedition in camp.³⁶

The dispatch of Indian scientists to Antarctica caused international attention, as testified by a report in *The New York Times* in February 1982, which read that “A scientific expedition from India has landed on the coast of East Antarctica. Its stated purpose was to perform oceanographic, seismic, climate and other scientific research on the remote ice-locked continent.”³⁷ The report also allowed a portion of speculation on the Indian expedition’s real purpose: “The action, however, inevitably raises political questions about India’s ultimate intentions in the Antarctic, which is the focus of mounting international tension over who should control its potential energy and food resources.”³⁸ It is interesting to note the tone of the article, in which India’s motives are questioned. The article then provides a short analysis of how the Antarctic mission could be interpreted, along with emphasizing

³³ Dey 1991: 88

³⁴ Beck 1983

³⁵ Department of Ocean Development 1983: 10

³⁶ Department of Ocean Development 1983: 10

³⁷ Reinhold 1982

³⁸ Reinhold 1982

how the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi, personally viewed the endeavour: “The effort appears to be part of India’s growing interest in building its scientific prowess and prestige. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi took a personal interest in the expedition, calling it the “fulfilment of a lifelong dream.”³⁹

After Japan, India was one of the first developing Asian countries to successfully venture into the Antarctic continent in order to perform scientific research. At that time, this was a significant feat, and it is not difficult to understand why it attracted international attention. India then continued with another expedition in the following year, in 1982-1983, which was followed by India’s accession to full membership in the Antarctic Treaty system in 1983, as the first developing country in Asia.⁴⁰ The Antarctic Treaty system consists of several agreements and protocols that seek to regulate activities on the Antarctic continent, with the key document being the Antarctic Treaty itself. This treaty came into being during the International Geophysical Year 1957-58 (IGY), and was signed by 12 countries in 1959. The treaty then entered into force in 1961. Since then, many nations have followed suit, and as of today (2016) more than 50 countries have signed the treaty. The Antarctic Treaty consists of 14 articles, which mainly pronounce the Antarctic continent to be utilized for peaceful purposes only, freedom of scientific endeavours and with the general purpose of benefitting the humankind. In not signing the treaty until 1983, India was also the first nation to have embarked on major expeditions to the Antarctic continent without being a party to the treaty.⁴¹ Pioneering in many regards, by acceding to the treaty, India joined what was then seen as an exclusive club of developed and rich nations.

India’s interest in the Antarctic continent stretches further back in time and was discussed long before any scientific expeditions were launched. Nehru played an important role in bringing up what is called the ‘Question of Antarctica’, where India addressed different issues related to Antarctica at the United Nations General Assembly in 1956, preceding the IGY. The main thrust behind Nehru’s concern for Antarctica was entrenched in the power politics of the Cold War and Nehru feared the Antarctic continent might be used as a battleground between the two super powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, in addition to falling victim to disputes between territorial claimants such as Britain, Chile and Argentina, whose overlapping claims on the Antarctic Peninsula were a source of

³⁹ Reinhold 1982

⁴⁰ Dey 1991: 87-92

⁴¹ Shapley 1983: 362

contention.⁴² Then, at the UN General Assembly in 1956, India's permanent representative to the UN, Arthur Lall, passed a letter to the Secretary General where the issue of Antarctica was inscribed. The main person behind the letter was Nehru's trustee and diplomat, Krishna Menon. The letter read:

Antarctica, a region covering about 6 million square miles of territory, has considerable strategic, climatic and geophysical significance for the world as a whole. With the development of rapid communications, the area might shortly come to have further practical significance to the welfare and progress of nations. The mineral wealth of landmass is believed to be considerable and its coastal waters contain important food resources...the government of India considers that in order to strengthen universal peace it would be appropriate and timely for all nations to agree and affirm that the area will be utilized entirely for peaceful purposes and for the general welfare.⁴³

The Indian proposal must be seen in the light of the Bandung Conference and the creation of the NAM in 1955, where Nehru opposed colonialism and great power politics, and expressed a genuine distress towards the use of nuclear weapons. In addition, the proposal from India suggested bringing the Antarctic under UN leadership. This 'intervention' in the UN caused debate, and several countries vehemently opposed the Indian proposal, particularly the territorial claimants Britain, Argentina and Chile.⁴⁴ The Indian proposal, however, did not question any of the territorial claims that had been made in the Antarctic, but, as Chaturvedi argues, "(...) it did pose a serious challenge to the self-assigned authority and legitimacy of a handful of Antarctica powers to conceptualize and construct the nature-science-sovereignty interface for "peaceful" utilizations of Antarctica."⁴⁵

In the following year, 1957, India abandoned the Antarctica issue, and the 'Antarctic Question' was not raised in the General Assembly due to the resistance. Krishna Menon did, however, continue to bring up the topic in lower levels of the UN until 1959, when the Antarctic Treaty came in place. Clearly disappointed with the lack of enthusiasm to discuss the matter of Antarctica in the UN, Nehru threw in the towel when he told the Indian parliament in 1958 that,

We are not challenging anybody's rights there. But it has become important more specifically because of the possible experimentation of atomic weapons and the like, that the matter should be considered by the UN ... the fact that Antarctica contains many very important minerals – especially atomic energy minerals – is one of the reasons why this area is attractive

⁴² Howkins 2008: 36

⁴³ Cited in Chaturvedi 2013b: 305

⁴⁴ Chaturvedi 2013b

⁴⁵ Chaturvedi 2013b: 311-312

to various countries. We thought it would be desirable to have a discussion about this in the UN.⁴⁶

The historian Adrian Howkins argues that had this Indian intervention not failed in the UN, it would have had an important impact on how the establishment of the Antarctic Treaty turned out a few years later. As Howkins argues, the exclusive club that came to constitute the initial 12 signatories to the treaty, might not have been able to carry this out if the ‘Question of Antarctica’ had been discussed openly in the UN General Assembly.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, India did not seriously question the contents of the treaty, although reportedly feeling left out, and chose to remain outside of it until 1983.

India established the year-round permanent research station *Dakshin Gangotri*⁴⁸ during the third expedition to Antarctica in 1984-85, and has since established two more stations, *Maitri* (‘friendship’) in 1989 and in 2012 the third station, *Bharati*,⁴⁹ was commissioned and currently (2016) awaits its official opening. As of 2016, India has carried out more than thirty expeditions to the Antarctic continent, meaning one expedition per year since the 1980s, and Indian scientists have contributed substantially to Antarctic research, published in internationally acclaimed science journals.⁵⁰ Universities and research institutes from all across India contribute to the Antarctic programme, which is coordinated through the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR) in Goa. Since 1983, India has been a consultative party to the Antarctic Treaty System, implying the right to participate in decision-making processes in the yearly Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings (ATCM). From April 30th to May 11th 2007, New Delhi hosted the 30th ATCM. Here, a number of agreements and decisions were made. From India, this was seen as a historic moment, as it was the first time India hosted an ATCM, coupled with the correspondence of India’s 25 year anniversary of joining the Antarctic Treaty. Moreover, this event also corresponded with the International Polar Year, stretching from March 2007 to March 2009, being the fourth polar year ever to be held. The fact that India’s first expedition to the Arctic was executed in 2007, followed by the opening of a research station there a year later, accentuated a very eventful year in India’s polar history. At the closing session of the 30th ATCM, the then External Affairs Minister, Pranab Mukherjee concluded the event by saying that, “India remains

⁴⁶ Chaturvedi 2013b: 312

⁴⁷ Howkins 2008: 42

⁴⁸ Gangotri is the name of a town in the Indian Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, and is one of the several places considered to hold the source of the river Ganges. ‘Dakshin’ means ‘south’, and therefore ‘Dakshin Gangotri’ means something like ‘the southern source of the Ganges’

⁴⁹ Bharati is the Hindu goddess of knowledge and music, also known as Sarasvati.

⁵⁰ Walwalkar 2005: 684-685

committed to scientific research and technical cooperation in the Polar Regions. Antarctica being a common heritage of mankind and the foremost symbol of peaceful use and cooperation needs to be protected for posterity.”⁵¹

So as we can see, India has a long polar history by doing science in Antarctica since the 1980s and discussing geopolitical issues related to this southern continent in the UN already in the 1950s. As will become evident later, these aspects are important parts of how the recent Arctic engagement is seen and perceived from India.

Theory: Soft Power – A means to assess Indian foreign policy?

In the present era, which can be considered an era of knowledge, our roles and responsibilities have increased. We have to emerge as a *vishwa* guru, not only to give new direction to the world, but also to protect our own heritage.⁵²

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India (2013 - present)

How can Indian foreign policy be explained? As the previous section has sought to demonstrate, India’s foreign policy has evolved significantly over the past five decades. The discipline of International Relations (IR) is the study of world politics, which tries to explain the rationale behind state behaviour through different models of interpretation. IR theories emphasize different aspects, such as the IR theory *realism*, which emphasises an anarchic world order and self-interest as a main drive for state behaviour. IR theories enable different lenses to be used for analysis, which can provide useful tools for understanding why states act as they do on the global stage.⁵³

But do IR theories provide adequate answers to how India’s foreign policy works? Some Indian scholars argue that these theories are too immersed in Western concepts, emanating from societies and cultures different from India and therefore inhabit frameworks not applicable to an Indian context of foreign policy. Theorizing Indian foreign policy can be difficult, especially to find a suitable label that explains how Indian foreign policy is shaped. Because modern IR theories are mainly formulated by Westerners, a post-colonial enquiry

⁵¹ Ministry of External Affairs 2007

⁵² Narendra Modi, quoted in Martin, 2015

⁵³ Jackson & Sørensen 2010: 29-30

would ask how non-Western scholars of IR view their own states' foreign policies.⁵⁴ The Indian international relations scholar Deep K. Datta-Ray argues that Indian diplomacy works outside of traditional 'modern' Western conceptions of diplomacy, which, according to Datta-Ray, are rooted in violence and anarchy. Further, Datta-Ray argues, the practice of Indian diplomacy is unique, removed from Western diplomatic practices, and rooted in an Indian context that is non-violent in nature.⁵⁵ One interesting IR debate in this regard, which can serve as an example, is whether or not India's foreign policy can be characterized as either *realist* or *idealist*, or as some have termed it, Kautilya versus Ashoka.⁵⁶ While the Nehruvian tradition emphasized idealism and ideology as the main principles of India's foreign policy, some argue that Indian foreign policy making is steeped in classical realism, and that Nehruvian principles prove flexible when necessary.⁵⁷ However, most seem to argue that India's foreign policy is somewhere in between. The Indian foreign policy expert Stephen P. Cohen observes that,

India has for many years projected an image of indecision as it has oscillated between grand proclamations of idealism and actions that appear to be motivated by the narrowest of realpolitik considerations. It has treated some of its neighbours as vassals, while declaring its support for the equality of all states; it has bowed low before totalitarian regimes, while professing an eternal commitment to democracy.⁵⁸

This thesis will not contribute any further to the discussion on how India's foreign policy should be labelled, but these issues are interesting insofar as they surface in contemporary foreign policy discourses, such as in the Indian Arctic discourse.

This next section seeks to discuss the role of soft power in Indian foreign policy and how this relates to India's Arctic engagements. As mentioned earlier, the division between science and geopolitics is not always clear-cut, and may at times compliment each other as a way for reaching the same goal. A growing literature on soft power theory has emerged over the last years, which discusses the role of soft power in India's foreign policy. Consequently, as I will discuss later in this thesis, since India's main thrust towards the Arctic region is in

⁵⁴ Mallavarapu 2015: 39

⁵⁵ Datta-Ray 2015

⁵⁶ Kautilya, also known as Chanakya, was a royal advisor to Chandragupta Maurya, who founded the Maurya Empire (322–185 BCE). Kautilya is often credited as the author of the *Arthashastra*, a work on statecraft. Although debated, Kautilya is often compared with Machiavelli; Ashoka was an emperor in the Maurya Empire, who after the brutal conquest of the Kingdom of Kalinga in about 260 BCE, converted to Buddhism and advocated non-violence throughout India. While Kautilya is seen as a pragmatist, Ashoka is seen as an idealist. For further discussion, see Solomon 2012

⁵⁷ Solomon 2012: 74-75

⁵⁸ Cohen 2001: 308

scientific research on climate change, it is necessary to contextualize the term soft power, in order to further engage in the Indian Arctic discourse; a discourse which, as I argue later, takes India's soft power capabilities into account when discussing India's role and place in Arctic affairs.

'Hard' versus 'Soft' Power

Traditional definitions of power in interstate relations have been confined to the use of 'hard power', meaning force. This hard power is often reflected through a display of military strength, economic sanctions or confrontational coerciveness.⁵⁹ As the Indian proverb underlines: "jiski lathi, uski bhains" ('the one who has the stick owns the buffaloes'), the use of hard power is generally believed to be the most efficient way to get one's will. The American political theorist Robert Dahl defined 'power' in his 1957 article "The concept of power", as simple as "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do".⁶⁰ The 16th century political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli, considered as the founder of political science, underlined the very importance of the army and hard power. In his famous work *The Prince* he wrote: "A ruler, then, must have no other aim or consideration, nor seek to develop any other vocation outside war, the organization of the army and military discipline."⁶¹ Machiavelli is seen as a champion of the realist perspective in international relations theory, where the world is threatened by anarchic forces and states act in self-interested ways. Here, a strong army capable of displaying hard power is important, not to say necessary, in order for a state to survive. A section in the *Arthashastra* states that "Power is threefold: power of counsel comprising the strength of intellect, power of might comprising the strength of treasury and army, and power of effort comprising strength of valor."⁶² As Machiavelli, Kautilya also emphasises the importance of strength in acquiring power, even though both theorists acknowledge the value of diplomacy and other peaceful means to obtain peace and stability.

There are other ways of exercising power, as not all aspects have to include military prowess or governmentally controlled policies such as economic sanctions to gain influence. The political scientist Joseph S. Nye Jr. formulated the term 'soft power' in his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (1990). Even though Nye certainly is not the first to have engaged in and utilized aspects of this alternative source of power, he is often

⁵⁹ Changhe 2013: 2

⁶⁰ Quoted in Lukes 2015: 262

⁶¹ Machiavelli (transl.) 2009: 57

⁶² Quoted in Olivelle 2013: 275

credited for the phrase. Nye later elaborated on the term more thoroughly and distinguishes between three types of power that are most prevalent in contemporary interstate relations: *military power*, *economic power* and *soft power*.⁶³ This chapter will only discuss the latter aspect of power, as this is central to this thesis. Nonetheless, in India's case one might argue that all three of these categories of power should be applied to how India projects itself internationally. Nevertheless, due to space and time, that needs to be discussed elsewhere. Also, even though the *term* soft power was theorized by Nye, it is important however to bear in mind that soft power as a political strategy and an actual element in interstate relations has existed for a long time. Already in 1939 the British international relations theorist E.H. Carr wrote about "power of opinion" as a category of international power.⁶⁴ Therefore, I should add, Nye did not *invent* soft power - he coined the phrase.

According to Nye there are three main sources of soft power, namely *political values*, *culture and foreign policies*. Nye's short definition of soft power is "getting others to want the outcomes that you want"⁶⁵ through attraction rather than the use of coercion or force. Through *political values* states can accumulate soft power capital and become attractive to others due to the functioning of their political systems. An example of political values that can act as soft power are democracy and rule of law. Many countries find these values attractive, and therefore seek closer ties with democratic countries and perhaps also promote these values on to others. Although India's democratic credentials can be debated, especially with regards to the Emergency years in 1975-77, India's democratic traditions have recently been well appreciated by great powers like the United States. In 2010, the US President Barack Obama stated in the UN General Assembly that "I will visit India, which peacefully threw off colonialism and established a thriving democracy of over a billion people".⁶⁶

Likewise, a state's *culture* could also be an object of admiration and attraction. Many foreigners find 'typical' Indian cultural components like Bollywood, yoga and Indian food highly likeable. This will therefore also contribute to how India is perceived internationally. To give an example of a display of Indian culture abroad: when the annual "International Yoga Day" was celebrated across the globe in 2015, in Norway, allegedly, more than 1200 people attended a yoga class in Telenor Arena, a large event hall on the outskirts of Oslo. This shows how aspects of Indian culture can be attractive to people from outside of India, contributing to establish a 'soft image' of India.

⁶³ Nye 2004: 31

⁶⁴ Nye 2004: 8

⁶⁵ Nye 2004: 5

⁶⁶ NDTV 2010

Foreign policy is perhaps the most visible way in which states promote themselves abroad. If states pursue what others perceive as aggressive foreign policies, as the US did in Iraq, or China's invasive land-grabbing in the South China Sea, they can become unpopular among many. On the contrary, positive foreign policy measures such as disaster relief could be ways of projecting desirable policies and increase states' reputation and attractiveness. States that execute what other states perceive as favourable foreign policies are often objects of attraction. Nehru's role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which provided an alternative forum for previously colonized nations, established India, or perhaps more so Nehru himself, as a "high moral authority in international affairs."⁶⁷

It is important to emphasize that soft power is more than a mere weapon of power utilized by governments. It works outside of and despite government control. During a TedTalks session in Mysore in 2009, the famous Indian statesman and writer Shashi Tharoor noted that, "(...) probably Hollywood and MTV and McDonald's have done more for American soft power around the world than any specifically government activity."⁶⁸ Tharoor's argument borrows heavily from Nye in explaining how civil society and non-governmental actors and activities are important for a state's soft power capabilities. People-to-people interaction and availability of information through a variety of channels such as travel, education, cultural exchanges, independent media etc. are often more powerful and effective in shaping people's perceptions than state-led initiatives. Measuring or defining a state's soft power capacities and capabilities is difficult and it is not a precise scientific endeavour. It is more straightforward to assess a state's military or economic clout, as one can add up the numbers of weapons, troops and/or GDP etc., and arrive at a reasonably figure of a nation's power capabilities. Soft power does not work in this exact way and is often left to qualified speculations and assumptions. Some lists with soft power rankings do get published, such as "The Soft Power 30", made by the British PR company Portland Communications, in cooperation with Facebook, that uses different sets of data. Then, based on calculations and international polling, the world's top 30 nations with the highest score of soft power are ranked. In 2015, the United Kingdom was at the top spot.⁶⁹ Interestingly, India does not appear on this list at all.

⁶⁷ Wagner 2010: 339

⁶⁸ Tharoor 2009

⁶⁹ Portland Communications 2015; the global affairs and lifestyle magazine *Monocle* also publishes an annual soft power survey, ranking the top 30 countries. In the 2014/2015 list, the United States was at first place, while India was not included. China was ranked at 19th place.

Soft Power in Indian Foreign Policy

The role of soft power as a political strategy in India, especially in its foreign policy, is increasingly more articulated. Malone argues that India's deployment of soft power in its foreign policy has been particularly evident in connection with its relations with other Asian countries. Malone notes that,

From Nehru onwards, civilisational and other historic links were much emphasised in India's declaratory neighbourhood diplomacy, but it is perhaps only recently that India's "pull" has become a strong one, with its economic progress, unmatched to date in most of the neighbouring countries.⁷⁰

Ajaya Kumar Das argues further, that India's successes in building strategic and economic ties with East Asian states through its Look East Policy (LEP) in the 1990s, was due to India's soft power strategy. By emphasizing the cultural and civilizational bonds that connects India with Southeast Asia, such as waiving visa fees for Thai monks on pilgrimage to India, or assisting in the restoration of the Ankor Wat in Cambodia, India managed to outperform China in the region.⁷¹ The emphasis on India's cultural and civilizational authority is a very interesting element in the promotion of India's soft power abroad, which recently has gained impetus under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. Modi has been a key proponent of India's cultural heritage in order to revitalize India's image internationally, through what some have called "Yoga Diplomacy", by promoting yoga as "India's gift to the world"⁷² in the UN, which resulted in the appointment of June 21st as World Yoga Day. In a recent Q&A session between Narendra Modi and the Facebook entrepreneur Mark Zuckerberg at the Facebook's head quarter in San Jose, California, the latter introduces the session by telling how he got an advice during the troubled start of Facebook from the deceased Apple leader Steve Jobs. Zuckerberg explains:

I went and I saw one of my mentors, Steve Jobs, and he told that in order to reconnect with what I believed as the mission of the company I should visit this temple that he had gone to in India early on in his (Steve Jobs) evolution of thinking about what he wanted Apple and his vision of the future to be. And so I went and travelled for almost a month and seeing the people, how people connected and having the opportunity... Feel how much better the world could be if everyone had a stronger ability to connect, reinforced for me the importance of what we are doing. And that is something I have always remembered over the last ten years as we built the Facebook.⁷³

⁷⁰ Malone 2011b: 37

⁷¹ Das 2013: 171-173

⁷² Martin 2015

⁷³ Modi 2015

Zuckerberg's story of India being important to the Facebook Company invokes great applause from the audience and especially from Modi himself. This is a telling example of how India can be interpreted as a keeper of both tradition and modernity, and more importantly, as a source of attraction and inspiration. In this context the Indian government has frequently deployed soft power strategies in public diplomacy, in order to increase India's global reputation and stance abroad. Several government-driven initiatives have been launched over the years, with the aim of 'branding' India internationally to attract investments as well as elevate India's profile. As a consequence of India's liberalization of its markets in the 1990s, the last two decades have seen campaigns such as the "Incredible India" tourism campaign, or the more recently "Make in India" – to attract foreign investment and businesses. These are all initiatives that seek to enhance India's status and to promote India, both domestically as well as internationally.⁷⁴

In the TedTalks session, Tharoor discusses how India has entered the global stage and is portrayed as a future great power in global affairs, through its soft power capabilities. Tharoor rejects traditional notions of economic and military capabilities being prerequisites for states, and India in particular, to achieve great power status in today's modern world. Instead Tharoor argues that India inhabits something more valuable than hard power in the 21st century, namely the power of attraction, soft power, through its culture, political values and foreign policy. For Tharoor therefore, it is through the 'power of attraction' that states really can and should gain influence.⁷⁵

Scholars of international relations have engaged in the discussion on India's soft power capabilities and literature on the field is increasing. It is debatable just how effective soft power strategies are in the conduct of foreign policy. As Rohan Mukherjee argues, assessments of India's soft power capabilities has reached a consensus that India does have plenty of soft power resources emanating from its "universalistic culture, democratic political institutions and tradition of leadership among developing nations."⁷⁶ However, Mukherjee is highly sceptical about the effects of soft power in Indian foreign policy, due to India's domestic political situation, and inconsistencies in its conduct of foreign policy. Mukherjee sees the current attempts to incorporate soft power in India's foreign policy as more focused

⁷⁴ Thussu 2013: 154-181

⁷⁵ Tharoor 2009

⁷⁶ Mukherjee 2014: 47

with “image management than building long-term relationships.”⁷⁷ Scholars who argue that India holds soft power resources emphasize different aspects. Christian Wagner for instance, argues that India holds potential soft power capabilities, but that there is a difference between India’s soft power capacities and capabilities on a regional and global level. While India has tried to deploy soft power strategies in the South Asia region through regional initiatives such as The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) or The South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), whose successes are debatable, India has been much more reluctant internationally. Wagner uses the term “defensive soft power”⁷⁸ in order to explain India’s stance in employing soft power outside of India’s natural domain, i.e. the South Asia region, and that these strategies at the moment are only confined to attracting investors and creating an image.⁷⁹

It is not this thesis’ aim to determine the successes or failures of India’s soft power strategies in its foreign policy. However, the concept of soft power in an Indian foreign policy context is important to understand, as many of the voices in the Indian Arctic discourse argue on the premise that India is a soft power in international relations and has considerable soft power capabilities. Moreover, voices in the discourse argue that India’s civilizational heritage of science, non-violence and moral authority in global affairs should establish India’s rightful position in Arctic affairs, as a stakeholder and with a leading role.

With the central principles of Indian foreign policy in mind, along with India’s previous polar history and its focus on soft power, we now turn towards the north and the Arctic.

⁷⁷ Mukherjee 2014: 56

⁷⁸ Wagner 2010: 341

⁷⁹ Wagner 2010

4 Breaking the Ice: India's Arctic Endeavour

The High North, with Svalbard, the northernmost part of Norway, situated close to the 80th parallel, offers a unique front row seat to observe both climate change and other major meteorological and atmospheric changes. India is seizing on this opportunity. In 2008 India opened the Himadri research station in Svalbard. Since then, activity at the station has been increasing, and new research scientists arrive at regular intervals.

We envisage the emergence of new shipping routes. Last summer, two German vessels sailed from Asia to Europe through the Northeast Passage. The polar explorers dreamed of using this route more than a hundred years ago. Have no illusions: conditions in this region will continue to be rough and icy despite global warming. But things are definitely changing, opening up fascinating scenarios of exchange between continents.¹

The above quote is from a speech made by the former Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jonas Gahr Støre, during a Indo-Norwegian seminar on maritime safety in New Delhi in March 2010, arranged jointly by the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies (IFS) and the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA). The quote is two-fold and draws a clear picture of what Uttam Kumar Sinha cunningly has described as 'an antithesis'² of how the Arctic is perceived: as a laboratory of climate science, necessary in order to understand and diminish the negative effects of climate change, yet an exciting (or 'fascinating', to use Støre's words) place where the effects of climate change will open for new strategic interests to take place, with economical development and increased human activity in the region.

This chapter provides an overview of what the Indian Arctic engagement contains, from India's first expedition in 2007 to its accession to observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013. This thesis operates on the premise that India's Arctic engagement is divided into two distinct domains: a scientific domain and a geopolitical. This delineation is by no means definite, but I contend the importance of this division nevertheless, in order to better comprehend the subject and to understand how India's Arctic engagement is structured. I will first give an overview of what India's scientific mission in the Arctic is about, before exploring the geopolitical domain of India's Arctic engagement through its observer status in the Arctic Council.

¹ Støre 2010

² Sinha 2013: 34-39

India in the Arctic: Science

The Indian scientific mission in the Arctic falls under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES). MoES was established as late as in 2006, when the Ministry of Ocean Development was merged with the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), and the Earth Risk Evaluation Centre (EREC).³ The MoES is currently (2016) headed by Harsh Vardhan of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), who is the minister for both the Ministry of Science & Technology and the Ministry of Earth Sciences. The stated vision of the ministry is “To excel as knowledge and technology enterprise in the earth system science realm towards socio-economic benefit of the society (sic).”⁴ Further, according to the website of MoES the mission of the ministry is,

To conduct scientific and technical activities related to Earth System Science for improving forecasting of weather, monsoon, climate and hazards, exploration of polar regions, seas around India and develop technology for exploration and exploitation of ocean resources (living and non-living), ensuring their sustainable utilization.⁵

Both of India’s polar engagements fall under the MoES, and it is evident from the strategy plans released from the ministry for the period 2007-2012 and for the current plan, 2012-2017, that polar science is a focus area for the MoES. And that, according to the ministry itself, India should strive to make “Front ranking research in Polar Science”.⁶ In this vision, the Antarctic mission appears to have first priority and therefore gets more funding. The size of the Arctic programme is currently small and still under development, with a total annual budget of rupees 2 crores. The Antarctic mission, meanwhile, operates with much larger numbers, with an annual budget of approximately rupees 45-50 crores.⁷

Research at Svalbard

In 2007 India launched its first official expedition to the Arctic region when five Indian scientists were dispatched for a month to Ny-Ålesund at Spitsbergen, the largest island in the Svalbard archipelago. The Indian Newspaper *Live Mint* reported on August 4th 2007, that the goal of the expedition was to do scientific research: “The scientists will be specifically

³ Ministry of Earth Sciences 2015

⁴ Ministry of Earth Sciences 2015

⁵ Ministry of Earth Sciences 2015

⁶ Goel 2006: 4

⁷ A crore is ten million. Indian Journal of Marine Sciences 2008: 345

studying the impact of aerosols, which are solid and liquid particles that stay suspended in the atmosphere, (sic) on global warming. They will use this knowledge to understand environmental changes taking place in India.”⁸

The purpose of the first Arctic expedition was to study bacterial life and measure environmental changes in the Arctic. By doing so, the scientists also hoped to establish a link between the Arctic region and India, where glacial melting in the Himalayas has gained remarkable impetus over the past few decades, sparking debates over the negative effects of global warming.⁹ Another reason for India’s scientific presence in Svalbard, is that, according to some scientists, there is a hypothesized teleconnection between the changing climate in the Arctic and the Indian monsoon. This means that changes in the Arctic climate directly affects the monsoon weather system, which consequentially will have an impact on India. This hypothesized teleconnection between the Arctic and the Indian monsoon system was a pronounced issue during the third Science & Geopolitics of Arctic-Antarctic-Himalaya (SaGAA III) conference I attended in New Delhi in September 2015. The monsoon rains are crucial to India, and instabilities in its performance have major impacts on the Indian economy, especially in the agricultural sector.¹⁰ Therefore, this teleconnection-theory is one of the most important and articulated aspects of the Indian scientific programme in the Arctic.

According to the Live Mint article, when asked whether India would follow nations like South Korea, China and Japan in establishing a research base on Svalbard, the director of India’s Antarctic and Arctic research activities at the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Ajai Saxena said “There are no plans yet for establishing an Indian research station, or oil-exploration, centre in the area.”¹¹ Nevertheless, one year later, on July 1st 2008, the Indian research base *Himadri* (‘the abode of snow’) was opened, located in Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard. Present at the inauguration of *Himadri*, were the then Minister of Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, Kapil Sibal, along with representatives from Norway and other countries.¹² The cost of establishing the research station in Ny-Ålesund amounted to rupees 1.25 crore.¹³ As the crow flies, the distance from India’s capital New Delhi to Longyearbyen, the largest city on

⁸ Koshy 2007

⁹ The melting of glaciers in the Himalayas is somewhat debatable, which became clear during the third Science & Geopolitics of Arctic-Antarctic-Himalaya conference in New Delhi in September 2015. Here, a scientist from the Norwegian Polar Institute (NPI) presented satellite images showing that in certain parts of the Himalayas, especially in the Western part, the Karakoram mountains in Pakistan, the amount of snow and ice had in fact increased in the recent years. This led to a debate, and there was clearly a matter of difference in the methodological approaches applied in measuring the ice covers that created this divergence.

¹⁰ Raj & Nalin. 2016: 97-112

¹¹ Koshy 2007

¹² National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research

¹³ Ministry of Earth Sciences 2010

Svalbard, is more than 6000 kilometres. Nevertheless, not only India but also several Asian countries have shown great interest in doing research at Svalbard over the last two decades. But due to the sheer distance, how do Indian politicians argue for the importance for India to be present? In an interview with the *Indian Journal of Marine Sciences* in December 2008, shortly after India had opened its research base in Ny-Ålesund, Kapil Sibal expressed great pride and excitement for India's polar programme, and argued for the importance of India doing research in the Arctic. Sibal argued that,

Polar Regions offer an exceptional environment to study the natural processes operating on the earth, which cannot be recreated on main land. The research on microbial-diversity, climate change processes are going to have a large impact on our existence. Any investment in polar research is therefore essential for answering fundamental questions that are linked to human survival itself.¹⁴

Sibal's arguments on the importance of doing science in the Arctic transcend the region. By bringing in this larger perspective, Sibal establishes a solid fundament for why polar science is necessary, also for India.

India's official scientific engagement in the Arctic is summed up at the website of the MoES and the scientific objectives in the Arctic are comprised of two main points:

1. Continuation of the scientific programs in the Arctic in the fields of atmospheric sciences, climate change, geoscience and glaciology, and polar biology.
2. Ensuring a prominent and sustained presence of India in the Arctic through initiation of scientific research in some of the frontier realms of polar science.¹⁵

Further, the MoES states what can be achieved through the Arctic scientific research programme as the following:

The scientific studies proposed and being carried out by Indian scientists in the Arctic will be contributing significantly to the global community's ongoing efforts in understanding the climate change phenomena. In addition, the studies would be providing a wealth of data in such diverse but inter-related fields as earth sciences, biology, atmospheric sciences and climatology.¹⁶

It is clear from this document, that the emphasis in the Arctic is laid on performing scientific research on climate change processes, and that the Arctic provides a natural arena for this type

¹⁴ Indian Journal of Marine Sciences 2008: 345

¹⁵ Ministry of Earth Sciences 2015

¹⁶ Ministry of Earth Sciences 2015

of research. In accordance with Sibal's arguments, the ministry also emphasizes the global reach of scientific research in the Arctic. Moreover, these statements also underline that through participating in the scientific ventures at Svalbard, Indian scientists will not only participate, but also contribute to important scientific research on climate change processes.

National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR)

There are several universities in India that do polar research, which all are coordinated through the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR) in Vasco da Gama, Goa. NCAOR is an autonomous research and development institute under the MoES and is located on top of a hill overlooking the city, as well as offering breath-taking views of the Indian Ocean. Due to NCAOR's location, it allows a direct access to the Indian Ocean, which works as a marine highway to the Antarctic continent.

At the NCAOR, I met with Dr. K. P. Krishnan, the head of NCAOR's Arctic department, and he told me in detail how India's Arctic programme was managed and executed in practice, emphasising the scientific goals of the mission. According to Dr. Krishnan, only a handful of scientists, around eight persons, are dispatched for a period of approximately 30-40 days, before being rotated with a new group. The research station in Ny-Ålesund is manned from March to November, being closed for the rest of the year. The composition of scientists is diverse, with a wide difference in disciplinary backgrounds such as biology, chemistry and glaciology. Dr. Krishnan explained that the main thrust for the Indian research was the teleconnection between the Arctic and the monsoon system. He then made an interesting point: "Both poles are equally important, but the Arctic has its own priorities because things happens first and faster in the Arctic."¹⁷

The fairly young age of India's Arctic programme was further emphasised by the new premises in which Dr. Krishnan and the other 'Arctic' scientists have their offices and the fact that the word 'Arctic' itself is not represented in the institute's name, coupled with the predominance of cargo containers outside carrying the "Indian Antarctic Programme" logo. Dr. Krishnan showed me around the premises, and took me to see the different laboratories that constitute the Arctic department. In the hallways were informative plaques filled with pictures and figures, explaining the different scientific expeditions and techniques used in Arctic research projects. During the tour around the Arctic department at NCAOR, Dr. Krishnan took me to a couple of freezer rooms, where core samples from the Arctic ice are

¹⁷ Interview with Dr. Krishnan 2015

analysed. The temperature inside these rooms was sub zero, with the coldest room being minus 20 degrees Celsius. Interestingly, several of the Styrofoam boxes within the freezer room carried inscriptions of permanent marker on the sides with the Norwegian word “frys” on them. I asked Dr. Krishnan about this and he confirmed that these boxes were in deed acquired from the Norwegians in Svalbard.

Representing the apolitical part of India’s Arctic engagement, Dr. Krishnan emphasized the difference of perspectives between the Ministry of Earth Sciences, which NCAOR falls under, and the Ministry of External Affairs, under which matters related to the Arctic Council are treated. He emphasized that NCAOR’s Arctic programme is purely scientific. I asked if Indian scientists did encounter any competition or suspicion from the other Asian states present in Ny-Ålesund. Dr. Krishnan dismissed that anything like this was happening at Svalbard and explained that there is a high frequency of scientific projects that require cooperation between the nations present in Ny-Ålesund, such as a joint Indo-Norwegian project measuring particle levels in Kongsfjorden. Dr. Krishnan told that there were few joint projects with the other Asian nations present in Ny-Ålesund, but, as Dr. Krishnan added, India is a part of The Asian Forum for Polar Sciences (AFOPS). AFOPS was established in 2004 in order to facilitate better cooperation between Asian countries in polar sciences. This forum offers a platform for scientific collaboration among its members: China, Japan, South Korea, India, and Malaysia. In addition to the members there are four observers: Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and Vietnam.¹⁸

India is also a part of the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), which is a non-governmental organization that facilitates and advocates cooperative research between all countries active in Arctic research. Here, India has a representative in the IASC Council, which is the policy and decision-making body of the organization.¹⁹ India’s representative in the IASC council is currently (as of May 2016) M. Ravichandran, which is the director of NCAOR.

India in the Arctic: Geopolitics

The geopolitical side of India’s engagement in the Arctic is administered by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). In addition to the focus on science, this geopolitical aspect forms much of the basis in the Indian Arctic discourse. Here, the intergovernmental forum Arctic Council becomes central. India’s interests in the Arctic region are pronounced through the

¹⁸ The Asian Forum for Polar Sciences

¹⁹ International Arctic Science Committee

website of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs: “Today India’s interests in the Arctic region are scientific, environmental, commercial as well as strategic.”²⁰ Further, these interests are explained as the following:

The impact of rapid changes in the Arctic region goes beyond the littoral states and any legitimate and credible mechanism to respond to these challenges calls for active participation of all those actors who have a stake in the governance of global commons. The interplay between science and policy has the potential to contribute to the better handling of the complex issues facing the Arctic. India which has a significant expertise in this area from its association with the Antarctic Treaty System can play a constructive role in securing a stable Arctic. India in its new role as a permanent observer in the Arctic Council is committed to contribute to the deliberations of the council to develop effective cooperative partnerships that can contribute to a safe, stable and secure Arctic.²¹

Although the Ministry stresses India’s constructive role in Arctic affairs, the official policy from the Ministry of External Affairs do not state what the exact purpose of being present in the Arctic region is or should be.

In May 2013, a few years after India acquired its first research station in Ny-Ålesund, it was announced at the Kiruna Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council that India was given observer status in the Arctic Council (AC), along with four other Asian countries: China, Japan, Singapore and South Korea. For many, this marked a watershed in the history of the Arctic Council, by admitting Asian states as observers for the first time. Despite its name and regional focus, the AC has in fact admitted several non-Arctic states as observers earlier, such as Poland, Italy and France. However, opening the council to Asian states as observers did cause a certain amount of international attention, especially because of China’s admission. The Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* reported in May 2013 that the Arctic Council was now opening its doors to China, with just a short mentioning of the other Asian states that also acquired observer roles.²² The focus on China in this regard must be seen in connection with the granting of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo in 2010, which created a massive stir in Sino-Norwegian relations. In granting China observer status in the Arctic Council, some even suggested Norway to be actively pleasing the Chinese in order to normalize relations, an argument that the then Foreign Minister of Norway, Espen Barth Eide, discarded.²³ Meanwhile, many commentators saw this as an opportunity for the AC to renew

²⁰ Ministry of External Affairs 2013

²¹ Ministry of External Affairs 2013

²² Pedersen 2013

²³ Blindheim 2013

itself, increase its legitimacy in Arctic affairs and get rid of its stamp of being as an ‘exclusive club’. As Page Wilson argued in a *The Diplomat*,

The admission of the five new Asian observers will thus be seen as an important moment in the evolution of the Council. Perhaps more significantly, however, by committing the major Asian economies to playing by its set of rules, the Council has achieved a major watershed in the wider battle of ideas in, and over, the Arctic.²⁴

The Arctic Council is a multilateral high-level forum formally established in 1996 through the Ottawa Declaration, which was signed by eight countries: United States, Russia, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Canada and Finland. These countries are seen as the “member states” in the Arctic Council.²⁵ The structure is three-tiered, and in addition to the member states, the Arctic Council is made up of permanent participants, i.e. indigenous communities, and observing members. As of today (May 2016) 12 states comprise the roles as observers, all of them non-Arctic states. The Arctic Council is not a legal body that can implement policies, but an intergovernmental high-level forum which provides guidelines and proposals for policies to be followed for the member states.

Even though the focus of the Arctic Council is strictly regional, it is also, as previously mentioned, open for non-Arctic states to participate as observers. As Kabir Taneja notes, “It is a rare regional parliament open to international participation, and an inclusive approach to regional diplomacy rather than an exclusive one.”²⁶ The purpose of the Arctic Council is, put briefly, “promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic states, Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.”²⁷

The Arctic Council is therefore a multilateral forum in which several of the world’s great powers meet, offering a valuable platform for discussions on Arctic affairs. To be a part of this forum means an alternative platform for access to countries such as United States, Canada and Russia, which are all Arctic as well as global great powers. However, observers have a limited role in the work of the council. The Arctic Council formulates the role of the observers this way: “The primary role of Observers is to observe the work of the Arctic

²⁴ Wilson 2013

²⁵ The Ottawa Declaration 1996

²⁶ Taneja 2016

²⁷ The Arctic Council 2015

Council. Furthermore, Observers are encouraged to continue to make relevant contributions through their engagement primarily at the level of Working Groups.”²⁸

Observers are not entitled to participate in any decision making and have in fact very restricted roles. Reading the Observer Manual implemented at the Kiruna meeting in 2013, it becomes clear that even the status as an observer is subject to changing circumstances and is dependent on whether “consensus exists among Ministers.”²⁹ The Observer Manual is quite clear on decision making and states that “Decisions at all levels in the Arctic Council are the exclusive right and responsibility of the eight Arctic States with the involvement of the Permanent Participants. All decisions are taken by consensus of the Arctic States.”³⁰

India’s, and other Asian states’, accession to observer status in the Arctic Council was in fact met with some resistance from some of the Arctic countries, especially Canada. According Lackenbauer, Canada’s resistance mainly came from an anxiety of losing exclusivity in decision making for the eight member states, coupled with potential hidden agendas from the Asian states. Along with Canada, Russia also allegedly expressed some of the same concerns.³¹ Correspondingly, a survey conducted by the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada in 2013 showed great distrust towards Asian countries from Canadian stakeholders in the Arctic, where an enlarged role by India were opposed by 74% of the respondents. Other Asian countries, including China, Singapore and South Korea almost received the same amount of scepticism.³²

Sinha, a Research Fellow at the Indian think tank Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in Delhi, points to the fact that Canada was about to take up the chairmanship in the Arctic Council after Sweden and that Canada had some issues they wanted to settle with the United States first. Allegedly, Canada felt that many of the issues that were emerging in the Arctic region were best left to be dealt with within the current configuration of the Arctic Council, rather than to expand it and bring in more actors.³³

As Sinha told me, and as Lackenbauer also mentions, India’s observer status was heavily supported by the Nordic countries. Then foreign minister of Norway, Espen Barth Eide, openly supported the Asian countries’ applications and warmly welcomed them when observer status was granted.³⁴ In a press release from the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, Barth

²⁸ The Arctic Council 2013: 7

²⁹ The Arctic Council 2013: 5

³⁰ The Arctic Council 2013: 6

³¹ Lackenbauer 2014: 24-25

³² Lackenbauer 2014: 25

³³ Interview with Sinha 2015

³⁴ Pedersen 2013

Eide was quoted saying that “Research on the Arctic is important for both Norway and India. Indian researchers have been working in Svalbard for a number of years, and India’s interest in the Arctic is likely to increase further now that it has gained observer status in the Arctic Council.”³⁵

Sinha was instrumental in how I first encountered my research topic, and we first met in February 2015 during the Asian Security Conference at the IDSA. I met with Sinha again eight months later at the IDSA in Delhi in October 2015, to discuss India’s engagements in the Arctic and how this can be interpreted in a broader scope of Indian foreign policy. Sinha has met and engaged with many high ranking officials involved in Arctic affairs and following India’s accession to become an observer in the Arctic Council, Sinha told that there had been some hectic backroom diplomacy, and that Norway was very supportive towards India. Sinha explained that,

Norway was in fact one of the prime backers for India’s position in the Arctic Council as an observer. It was intense competition, the Chinese had once again applied, I got to know that they applied earlier, they weren’t exactly rejected, but ignored, to an extent. So the Chinese had pitched themselves high this time, for a stake in the Arctic Council. The Indian diplomacy was in a sense via the Norwegian channel and at the Kiruna meeting the Norwegian Foreign Minister did speak very strongly for India’s participation.³⁶

The exact turn of affairs here is complicated, as there are differing stories of who supported whom in granting observer status to Asian countries in the Arctic Council. According to Kabir Taneja, a researcher and a journalist, the matter is open to debate:

There are various versions of it. From what I know, Russia and Sweden promoted India’s candidature, after they realized that China was going to be brought into the Arctic Council as an observer. (...) If you talk to the Norwegians, they will say that they had a larger role in it, and if you talk to the Swedes they will say that it was them and Russia.³⁷

A year later, in 2014, successor to Barth Eide as Norwegian foreign minister, Børge Brende, emphasised Norway’s strong support of India’s observer status, and stated in *The Hindu* at the occasion of India’s president Pranab Mukherjee’s visit to Norway that “With strong Norwegian support, India made a successful bid for permanent observer status to the Arctic Council last year.” Moreover, Brende argued that Indo-Norwegian cooperation in scientific endeavours was of utmost importance. According to Brende, “India would be an ideal partner

³⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Norway) 2013

³⁶ Interview with Sinha 2015

³⁷ Interview with Taneja 2015

in international efforts on integrated ocean management and environmental protection”, and that “Norway is very pleased that President Mukherjee is visiting Norway, and proud to be India’s trusted partner in Arctic matters.”³⁸ This serves as an example of how India was received by one of the stakeholders in the Arctic region and that concerns over deepening engagements by Asian states in the Arctic region propounded by countries such as Canada were not shared by everyone, especially the Nordic countries. The role of Norway in supporting India, argues Sinha, could be explained through the growing Indo-Norwegian bilateral relationship in the years before 2013.³⁹

The Nordic support was also evident during the third International Conference on Science & Geopolitics of Arctic-Antarctic-Himalaya (SaGAA III) in New Delhi in late September 2015. Here, scientists and policy makers were gathered to discuss different topics related to what can be termed as the ‘three poles’, namely the Arctic, Antarctica and the Himalayas. This rare, yet highly interesting, blend of people triggered many engaging discussions, ranging from the potential and prospects of krill utilisation in the Southern Ocean (the waters surrounding Antarctica), to how India should relate to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which provides the legal regime in the Arctic. One of the first speakers at the conference was Iceland’s ambassador to India, Thórir Ibsen, who explained Iceland’s view of increased Asian attention to the Arctic region. Ibsen contended the notion of a ‘heating’ Arctic in terms of the geopolitical situation, by arguing that scientific cooperation in the Arctic region had bridged the conflicting interests after the Cold War. In this context, Ibsen maintained that Iceland supports an open and inclusive Arctic Council that is not only confined to the Arctic littorals and permanent participants, but also non-Arctic states such as India. Ibsen then added that Iceland strongly supported India’s bid for observer status in the AC, on the basis that Indian scientists can make important contributions to Arctic research.⁴⁰

Jesse Guite Hastings, a scholar at the National University of Singapore, argues that Iceland was indeed positive to Asian interest in the Arctic both political and economically, especially since investment in the Icelandic economy were of crucial importance after the hard-hitting impact of the financial crisis in 2008. However, as Hastings further argues, there is a difference in how the political elite and the public has reacted to Asian interest in the region, as the case of the Chinese investor Huang Nobo’s bid to acquire a huge chunk of land

³⁸ Brende 2014

³⁹ Brende 2014

⁴⁰ Thórir Ibsen. “The Arctic Experience and the Third Pole: A Perspective from Iceland”, talk at the SaGAA III conference, New Delhi (29.09.15)

on Iceland for an eco-tourism project. This case received much media attention, both nationally and internationally, and displayed how many Icelanders reacted to Chinese investments with a great deal of resistance, and, according to Hastings, linking the possibility of Chinese land acquisition with loss of Icelandic sovereignty and national identity.⁴¹ Nevertheless, despite differences over whether or not to grant observer status to the five Asian countries, Canada and Russia eventually supported the consensus of admitting the Asian states.⁴² At the moment (as of May 2016), India is represented by two persons in the Arctic Council, both Joint Secretaries from the United Nations Economic & Social (UNES) division of the Ministry of External Affairs.

This chapter has discussed how India's Arctic engagements are structured, with a distinction between the scientific mission under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and the geopolitical mission under the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). While the MoES provides clear visions and goals for their Arctic programme, the MEA has not yet stated any precise Arctic policy. This leaves an open space to discuss and assess what India's policies towards the Arctic region should be and what role India can play. In the next chapter I will investigate this space, by analysing how the Arctic is viewed and framed from India and explore the Indian Arctic discourse that has emerged over the past years and how this discourse relates to broader Indian foreign policy issues.

⁴¹ Hastings 2014: 228-229

⁴² Lackenbauer 2014: 24

5 The View from India: The Indian Arctic Discourse

The Arctic may seem distant, but the evolving situation in this ecologically pristine zone cannot but have a huge impact on India and the world. There may be an intensification of global warming, exacerbating all the adverse effects already being witnessed and anticipated on virtually every aspect of our livelihoods. Should five countries, which, as an accident of geography, form the Arctic rim, have the right to play with the world's ecological future in pursuit of their economic interests?¹

Shyam Saran, former Foreign Secretary

It will thus be seen that if the Vedic evidence points to an Arctic home, where the ancestors of the Vedic Rishis lived in ancient times, there is at any rate nothing which would warrant us in considering this result as a priori improbable.²

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Indian politician, scholar, activist and lawyer, 1903.

The two above quotes from Saran and Tilak might seem utterly irrelevant to each other. However, both are constitutive elements in how the Arctic is viewed from India: as both a distant, but important region, coupled with a sense of familiarity with Indian culture and history. With the 'Indian Arctic discourse', I mean, as discussed in chapter two, a set of different voices and opinions of geopolitical character that have emerged in academic circles and popular media in India and that have communicated and discussed a wide variety of issues related to Arctic affairs. The quote from the famous Indian scholar Bal Gangadhar Tilak does not imply that this chapter engages with any Vedic *rishis* in the Arctic, even though this piece of Vedic historical scholarship is intriguing, and in fact, as we shall see later, surface in the Indian discourse on the Arctic. This chapter analyses a selection of different voices within the Arctic discourse that have emerged in India over the past years, in the wake of the opening of the Indian research station at Svalbard in 2007 and the granting of observer status to India in the Arctic Council in 2013.

The analysis will locate this discourse within a broader Indian foreign policy perspective. From this, a whole range of perspectives emerge, on how India's Arctic interest is read and interpreted; how the Arctic is viewed as either an important or insignificant region

¹ Saran 2011

² Tilak (Vijay Goel, 21st Century Edition) 2015: 35

and field of interest for India; and whether the Arctic should be seen as a case which represents a new outward-looking trend in Indian foreign policy. I argue that the Indian discourse on the Arctic can work as a site for discussion of broader Indian foreign policy issues, and reveals how soft power has become an important element in contemporary Indian foreign policy.

Locating the discourse

Situating the Arctic region within the scope of India's foreign policy interests brings out a whole range of different challenges. Firstly, as will appear more evident below, India's Arctic engagement is fairly small, and not very high on Delhi's agenda. Secondly, India's interest in the Arctic region lacks a clear geopolitical strategy, and therefore any speculations of what India's real intentions are may not bear fruit or provide satisfactory answers. Consequently, I do not try to uncover or pronounce what India's real intentions or strategies are in the Arctic region. Instead, I will explore the different positions and arguments that are presented and comes forth in the Indian Arctic discourse. For instance, one prevalent argument is to locate India's position and stake in different multilateral forums, such as the Arctic Council, as rightful due to the nature of India's developmental path towards being an important global power. Sinha observes why the Arctic is a natural place for India to be present, by arguing that "An immediate impression is that India's geoeconomic ascendancy readily converges with the opportunities that the geophysical changes in the Arctic presents."³ This view implies that India is a natural stakeholder in the Arctic region, in light of being an emerging economy and emerging global power. India's rightful place in the Arctic therefore rests on its presumed capacities and capabilities as a state on the geopolitical scene, as a significant power in global affairs - quite simply, a state to be reckoned with. This assumption is a centrepiece in many analyses and debates about India's role on the global stage, where India is to be viewed as an "emerging power".⁴

But why does this assumption entail that India has a rightful place, or being a 'stakeholder' in the Arctic? A stakeholder in this regard denotes a party, such as a state/country, but also NGOs, indigenous groups etc., who is "affected by the institution or are capable of influencing its performance".⁵ Olav Schram Stokke argues that Asian countries do have notable stakes in Arctic governance issues, but that their priorities or the importance

³ Sinha 2016: 184

⁴ See for example Cohen 2001; Malone 2011

⁵ Stokke 2014: 770

placed on these stakes vary substantially with regard to what issues are at play. For instance, Stokke argues, even though Asian states can not legitimately claim to play a role in the exploitation of Arctic resources, since most of the energy resources in the Arctic are placed within zones of coastal jurisdiction provided by the UNCLOS, Asian states dependant on energy imports such as China and India have shown interest in, and even placed their stakes in, resource exploitation in the Arctic. This has been done by providing technology and expertise in energy projects in the Arctic region. For example, Indian investments have been placed in Russia's Sakhalin field and the Chinese company China National Petroleum Corporation have a 25-year-old agreement with Rosneft, Russia's largest oil company. In order for Asian states to have stakes in and play a role in energy exploitation in the Arctic, they are dependant on regional actors such as Russia to realize their objectives. On the other hand, when it comes to shipping through the Arctic Ocean, Asian states may operate more freely and even have legitimate claims to Arctic navigation due to the provisions in the UNCLOS.⁶

Since much of the debate revolving around India's engagement in the Arctic is confined to the media, scientific articles and special forums, it would be an exaggeration to claim that a wide public debate on the Arctic is going on in India, as most people would lack knowledge or interest in the topic. Several events and forums for Arctic matters have taken place and been established over the last years in India. These have sought to enhance understanding of the Arctic as well as providing platforms for discussions. This was evident during my visit to India in February 2015, when I visited the Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi, which had hosted several events discussing India's Arctic engagements. The Norwegian Embassy has been active in facilitating these events and forums, which have attracted scientists, diplomats and government officials, and confirmed a small but growing Indian interest for Arctic issues, especially scientific research collaborations with Norwegian universities and institutes in the Arctic region.⁷ Nevertheless, these events are often small and exclusive, with many of the same speakers and participants attending. The Indian Arctic discourse is therefore shaped by a handful of people, mostly scholars and journalists. Despite this, or perhaps, because of this, there are several interesting differences and nuances emerging on Arctic issues, which both contrast and compliment each other. Lackenbauer has tried to sum up some of these emerging Indian perspectives on the Arctic by arguing that "Indian commentators seem to rely heavily on the 'polar race' narrative, anticipating regional

⁶ Ibid., 770-783

⁷ Interview with representative from the Royal Norwegian Embassy, New Delhi 2015

tension and even conflict, rather than expectations of a ‘polar saga’ promoted by other Western commentators.”⁸ What Lackenbauer then sees is a narrative of conflict, competition over resources and regional tensions. In addition to this, according to Lackenbauer, some of the commentators argue for India and other non-Arctic states to take more active part in the region in order to promote a demilitarized and nuclear-free Arctic. Moreover, he argues, some of the commentators seem to take a more realist position, arguing for India to be ready for possible strategic and security implications in South Asia due to melting sea ice.⁹ But, as previously mentioned, Lackenbauer’s analysis is confined to the writings of five Indian commentators on Arctic affairs. My analysis here expands these perspectives by including more voices and brings the discussion up to date from Lackenbauer’s 2013 work. This nuances the discourse. A useful point that Lackenbauer makes, and which it is necessary to keep in mind, is the claim that the Indian policy discourse “has yet to produce a coherent or ‘dominant’ opinion on the country’s place in Arctic affairs.”¹⁰ As will be discussed below, the Indian Arctic discourse is far from conclusive and will evolve gradually as India’s engagements are strengthening in the region.

Over the recent years, a few academic books and articles, along with newspaper articles, in form of op-eds, that discuss the role and future for Asian states in the Arctic, have emerged. This literature has contributed in shaping a discourse of Asian states’ engagements and interests in the Arctic region. However, the focus on India remains small. As previously discussed, many of the Indian discussants are connected to think tanks, such as the government-owned Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) and the non-governmental National Maritime Foundation (NMF). Some of the researchers and scholars at these institutes have backgrounds from the Indian military and the institutes also sometimes work closely with the Indian government. The Arctic discourses produced and communicated at these institutions therefore falls into categories of security and defence analysis, which in turn results in a strong focus on the geopolitical implications the Arctic can have for India, including opinions on possible future policies for India in the region. In the following section, I will explore and analyse a selection of different voices within this discourse, from some of the foremost Indian commentators and analysts on the field. This analysis will draw on both articles written by the scholars and commentators, as well as interviews with some of them.

⁸ Lackenbauer 2013: 13

⁹ Lackenbauer 2013

¹⁰ Lackenbauer 2013: 1

In order to make the following analysis as organized as possible, delimitations are necessary. Arvind Gupta and Uttam Kumar Sinha identify four points of attention for India in the Arctic, namely geopolitical considerations and the importance of understanding the ground reality in the region; the legal regime: what set of rules and laws that applies to the Arctic; resources and the challenges of extracting these in extreme conditions; and sea routes - with melting ice, how India should relate to the opening up of new shipping routes.¹¹ When it comes to discourse, Sakhuja maps the different positions taken by commentators and scholars regarding India's Arctic engagement. According to Sakhuja, four sets of narratives or perspectives emerged as India acquired more knowledge and started to show increased interest for the Arctic region. First, the science perspective, on the lines of the official government policy; the second view stressed the 'global commons' position, based on a moral high ground perspective; the third view focused the potential for energy resources to be made available through exploration as a path for India to pursue; and fourthly, a view highlighting the importance of just being there as a rising, emerging power, implying elements of both political and strategic concerns.¹²

Inspired by the points above, I have framed the analysis into four main thematic divisions, which constitutes the following sub-chapters: first, how the discourse establishes India's Arctic interests – from the origins to the current engagements; strategic and geopolitical significance – what the Arctic implies for India in terms of shipping, resources and other geopolitical considerations; India's role in Arctic affairs – what role does the different voices in the discourse envisage for India in the Arctic? And fourthly: science and soft power in the Arctic region - India's interests in the region are both strategic and economic, and most seem to argue on the premise that science is India's main thrust towards these targets. Does this imply science as an integral part of Indian soft power, and that this can be viewed as a strategy towards the Arctic region?

Moreover, as will become evident below, some of the voices have changed during the course of India's Arctic engagement, especially with regards to India's accession to observer status in the Arctic Council.

¹¹ Sinha & Gupta 2014

¹² Interview with Sakhuja 2015

Establishing India's Arctic interest: From the Vedas to the Svalbard Treaty

India's official engagement in the Arctic started with its first expedition to Svalbard in 2007, during the International Polar Year. Yet, some locate India's interest and engagement with the region further back, to both colonial and pre-colonial times. These arguments locate India, as a non-polar state, within the domain of Arctic affairs, and establish historical grounds for India to be viewed as a rightful player in the Arctic and how India is linked to the Arctic region itself. Sinha, together with Deputy National Security Adviser for the Government of India, Arvind Gupta, trace India's 'Arctic roots' back to the Vedic era, by referring to Bal Gangadhar Tilak's work *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*. This 1903 book tried to establish a link between India and the Arctic region by propounding the idea, based on astrological observations found in Vedic texts, that the Aryans¹³ in ancient times lived in the Arctic region and migrated to Europe and the Indian subcontinent. Further, Gupta and Sinha highlight the fact that India, during British rule, was a signatory to the Spitsbergen (or Svalbard) Treaty in 1920. Therefore, as Gupta and Sinha argues, "The Arctic is not alien to India."¹⁴ And, that for India, "The Arctic has a racial memory and a colonial participation".¹⁵ Along the same lines, Sanjay Chaturvedi also brought up India's Arctic Vedic roots at the SaGAA III conference in Delhi in September 2015. While rounding up his talk on India's polar challenge, he reminded the audience present that,

(...) Bal Gangadhar Tilak wrote a book, "Arctic home in the Vedas". Now, whether the Vedas were written in the Arctic, one can continue to debate forever, but what was important in that book was, the role of imagination and devotion and dedication to the pursuit of knowledge. And I think that is something which I have always found very inspiring in India's polar engagement, and I hope that that particular nuance stays.¹⁶

India's current Arctic presence and engagement is fairly new, only a decade old. But linking Tilak's 1903 book with contemporary Indian foreign policy priorities is interesting and adds a certain element of entitlement and a naturalization of India's Arctic engagement by establishing a prehistoric bond between India and the Arctic region. That India should have this rightful place in Arctic affairs is perhaps not obvious to many, due to its distance from the region and the scant Indian presence. But by invoking Tilak's Vedic scholarship, these bonds are seemingly strengthened, providing a cultural link to the region itself. Arguments of this

¹³ The Aryans were an ethnic group that immigrated over several periods to the Indian subcontinent from Central Europe, starting nearly 4000 years ago.

¹⁴ Sinha & Gupta 2014: 877

¹⁵ Sinha & Gupta 2014: 878

¹⁶ Chaturvedi. "India's Polar Challenge". Talk at the SaGAA III conference in New Delhi 29.09.15

kind are not unique, and linking contemporary foreign policy issues with India's cultural and civilizational heritage regularly surfaces in debates and discourses on Indian foreign policy. One intriguing debate in the contemporary Indian foreign policy discourse concerns India's 'grand strategy'. Grand strategy in foreign policy can be defined as "(...) the combination of national resources and capabilities – military, diplomatic, political, economic, cultural and moral – that are deployed in the service of national security."¹⁷ Many scholars and foreign policy experts argue that India does not have a grand strategy in its foreign affairs, and that India lacks a strategic culture. Georg Tanham, an American political scientist and strategic thinker, stirred debate when he argued that India "(...) has produced little formal strategic thinking and planning."¹⁸ Tanham attributed this lack of strategic thinking to India's troubled history and lack of political and cultural unity. Many have agreed with Tanham's analysis, amongst who is one of India's most influential strategic thinkers, K. Subrahmanyam. On the contrary, some of those who argue that India has a strategic culture have referred to India's rich historical and cultural legacy as basis for making their arguments. Swarna Rajagopalan, for instance, traces Indian strategic thinking back to the great epics, by arguing how a grand strategy discourse can be found in the Indian epics Ramayana and the Mahabharata. According to Rajagopalan, even Nehruvian principles in India's foreign policy are rooted in the epics. Rajagopalan writes that,

We are able to trace remnants of this legacy in the Indian context. The Indian penchant for claiming the moral high ground in international relations and the idealism of the Nehruvian era clearly carry traces of the importance given to dharma as the foundation and purpose of political action.¹⁹

Likewise, at the 17th Asian Security Conference at IDSA in 2015, Santishree Pandit argued that India's role as a norm builder and norm contributor in Asia and the world were rooted in its cultural values, and that central to Nehru's non-aligned foreign policy, along with the Look East Policy (LEP) and the current Act East Policy (AEP), was the Buddhist conception of the middle path and non-attachment. Further, the participant also criticized the notion of India lacking a strategic culture, and argued that India had a long tradition of strategic thinking, as a consequence of its sublime civilizational culture and heritage.²⁰ Another aspect that is brought forth by several scholars and commentators in order to establish India's position in Arctic affairs, as Sinha and Gupta also mentioned, is the fact that India was a signatory to the

¹⁷ Bajpai, Basit & Krishnappa 2014: 31

¹⁸ Tanham 1992: 50

¹⁹ Rajagopalan 2014

²⁰ Pandit 2015

Svalbard Treaty (also called Spitsbergen Treaty) of 1920. This treaty established Norwegian sovereignty over the Svalbard archipelago and was signed in Paris in February 1920 by The United States, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden and what was then termed “Great Britain and Ireland and the British Overseas Dominions”. On behalf of India, then under the British Raj, the treaty was signed by “His Majesty the King of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, Emperor of India: The Right Honourable the Earl of Derby, K.G., G.C.V.O., C.B., His Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary at Paris”.²¹ After India gained independence in 1947, it automatically remained a party to the treaty, and therefore enjoys the rights and commitments this treaty lays out for its signatories, such as the right to engage in commercial activities. As Vijay Sakhujia notes, by referring to the signing of the Svalbard Treaty: “India’s engagement in the Arctic dates back to nearly nine decades”,²² and “By virtue of the Svalbard Treaty, India is a ‘stakeholder’ in the region.”²³ This is also highlighted in official documents released by the Indian Government, which also traces India’s engagement back to colonial times.²⁴

The most prevalent argument that establishes India’s connection to the Arctic region, relates to its Antarctic history. As discussed in chapter three, India has a long history of polar science in the southern continent, as well as the attempt to promote the “Question of Antarctica” in the UN in the years 1956-57. It is through these “Antarctic Eyes”²⁵ most of the voices in the Indian Arctic discourse see India’s recent venture into the Arctic region, where its Antarctic experience has instituted India’s significance in polar affairs. Sinha observes that Antarctica has been crucial to India’s now Arctic attention, by arguing that the Antarctic has been “(...) the laboratory of India’s polar research, gradually giving it the capability and capacity to engage in the Arctic.”²⁶ Sinha and Gupta also emphasise the importance of polar science to India, in that the current Arctic engagement is part of “(...) an enduring commitment to scientific research and technical cooperation in the polar regions, starting with Antarctica in the mid-1950s.”²⁷ This, as we have seen, was to some extent a part of Nehru’s vision for an Antarctic continent free from nuclear activity and power politics, but did not last long and disappeared quickly from the Indian foreign policy discourse.

²¹ The Svalbard Treaty

²² Sakhujia 2010: 3; see also Sinha 2014; and 2016

²³ Sakhujia 2010: 5; see also Chaturvedi 2012; and Sinha 2016

²⁴ Ministry of External Affairs 2013

²⁵ Lackenbauer 2013: 3

²⁶ Sinha 2016: 188

²⁷ Sinha & Gupta 2014: 877

The Antarctic link is also visible in official policy documents released and through statements from government officials. At the SaGAA III conference, this link, along with a connection to the Himalayas, was already pronounced in the title. Even more interesting, a message in form of a letter to the conference, from the minister of Earth Sciences and Space and Technology, Dr. Harsh Vardhan, pointed out that, “Today, Indian scientists, in their unrelenting search for knowledge, have transcended both the poles and have successfully illustrated our presence in the Arctic Council since 2008 (sic).”²⁸ Vardhan probably refers to the Arctic region, not the Arctic Council, when he explains India’s presence since 2008. Nevertheless, both the poles are here connected, through scientific endeavours, which, as we have seen, started in the Antarctic continent. These historical connections attributed to the Arctic region reveal how the discourse sees India as a stakeholder in the Arctic. Here, India’s presence in the Arctic region is based on its early experience from polar regions and its historical legal rights to participate as equal in Arctic affairs.

Strategic and geopolitical significance of the Arctic – implications for India

The strategic implications of a melting Arctic are one of the key elements that are debated in the Indian discourse on the Arctic. Here there are clearly different assessments and views on what this will mean to India. Most tend to see the Arctic as currently a low priority area for India, not figuring high on the external affairs agenda of New Delhi. However, they also seem to agree that sometime in the future, the Arctic may become more important. Sinha argues that,

It’s an important and interesting area. It’s an area of science on climate changes, so it’s important. But in terms of priority the Arctic falls down on the scale. But that should not take away the fact that the region does require attention from our side, or that we are now officially an observer in the AC. We should actively participate in some of the discussions in the AC. And actively participate in some of the working groups of the Arctic council. Learn, contribute and suggest. The priority is low, but that doesn’t stop us from actively participate in the council.²⁹

²⁸ From Dr. Harsh Vardhan’s message to the SaGAA III conference in New Delhi 2015, reprinted in the “SaGAA III Book” (2015)

²⁹ Interview with Sinha 2015

Researcher and journalist Kabir Taneja offers a similar view as Sinha, that India's strategic interest in the Arctic at the moment is purely scientific. However, Taneja also holds the possibility for India to engage more geopolitically at a later stage. According to Taneja,

(...) the geopolitical role at the moment is hundred per cent concerned with climate negotiations and climate research. There is no other motive for India to be in the Arctic, at the moment it is pure science. And it's going to be political when the climate change will be a bit more of an issue globally. Yesterday during a debate with Hillary Clinton, she highlighted India as one of the main polluters. So more pressure is going to be built up, and the Arctic is that place where climate change is visible, where you can see it.³⁰

Taneja has written widely on Arctic matters, and has energy and security policy as his focus areas. In analysing the interest for the Arctic, Taneja has a pragmatic approach to what joining the Arctic Council and being present in the Arctic region actually means for India. I first met Taneja in the spring of 2015 when he was a visiting researcher at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Lysaker, right at the outskirts of Oslo. Half a year later, in October 2015, we met a couple of times in Delhi, to discuss what the Arctic means for India. Taneja argues that the strategic significance of the Arctic for India is difficult to ascertain at the moment. As he observed, "It's too early to say, because the Arctic will not be India's immediate concern. It's too far, and it's too many immediate concerns in the Indian neighbourhood."³¹

At the Arctic Frontiers Conference in Tromsø in January 2016, Taneja, who had been present, told me that hardly any Indian officials attended. Only India's ambassador to Norway, former Air Chief Marshal NAK Browne was present, in addition to a researcher from NCAOR. The Arctic Frontiers is an annual event held in Tromsø, which gathers people from academia, government and business to discuss Arctic issues. This is an important event in the Arctic affairs calendar, and ministers and officials from all the Arctic states are present, give speeches and socialise. That India does not send more than two people is a good example of how low the Arctic is on India's current agenda, a fact that is acknowledged by Indian commentators and experts on Arctic affairs.

The maritime domain

Undoubtedly, the opening up of the Arctic Ocean will have an impact on the future of global shipping, as it will reduce the travel distance between many countries in the Eastern part of Asia with Europe and America. But whether this will have any implications for India, and if

³⁰ Interview with Taneja 2015

³¹ Interview with Taneja 2015

so, to what extent, is debated. Vijay Sakhuja, director of the National Maritime Foundation (NMF), was one of the first Indian commentators to write about the Arctic. Among Sakhuja's focus points is how the melting of the sea ice in the Arctic will affect maritime activities, such as new shipping routes across the Arctic ocean for commercial traffic and also strategic implications for naval activity in the region. Sakhuja is a former Indian navy officer and therefore possesses detailed insights into India's maritime domain. Sakhuja does not only write about India's role in the Arctic, but frequently discusses general topics such as the opening up of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and Arctic energy projects. When I met Sakhuja in his office at the NMF in Delhi in October 2015, he elaborated on why the Arctic is important to India. Stating the obvious, Sakhuja opened by saying that India is indeed geographically very far from the Arctic, with a huge landmass of Eurasia to the north in between. However, Sakhuja added, to the south of India lies the sea, which works as a medium for India to access the polar realms as well as every part of the globe.³²

But the question remains whether the melting of the Arctic sea ice would have any implications for India, providing access to new routes to Europe or America. Since Sakhuja has a background in the Indian Navy, I asked him about potential strategic implications for India due to the melting of Arctic sea ice. Sakhuja said that this would not really have any impact on India and highlighted that the NSR "does not serve our purpose. It makes sense for China. It makes a lot of sense for Japan and Korea. For us? No."³³ According to Sakhuja, this has to do with the sheer distance from India to the NSR, making it not viable for India to pursue shipping goods through this alternative route. However, as Sakhuja added, India does follow these developments closely: "No strategic route is open for New Delhi, but we are watching this very carefully." When I asked whether traffic through the NSR could lead to a shift in the power balance in the Indian Ocean (often termed the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)), as some have suggested, Sakhuja dismissed this, by saying that,

(...) since India is not a transshipment hub, moving of goods through the NSR will have little impact on Indian harbours. There are other hubs in the IOR, such as Colombo, Dubai, Singapore. Will a disturbance in the power balance spill into the Indian Ocean? Not really, it will be more locally.³⁴

Sakhuja also argued that India have no military aspirations or ambitions in the Arctic, and that the Northern Sea Route (NSR) will not make any difference to India since it does not shorten

³² Interview with Sakhuja 2015

³³ Interview with Sakhuja 2015

³⁴ Interview with Sakhuja 2015

the distance to any of its trading partners in Europe or in America. Then Sakhuja made an interesting observation: India's Navy has in fact what Sakhuja terms 'Arctic sea legs', meaning that "Most of the Indian military personnel have been trained with Russian equipment. Much of this has come from the Arctic. The Aircraft carrier is from Russia, the nuclear submarine, and surveillance aircrafts. These have now been tropicalized."³⁵

Russia has historically been an important partner for India in terms of military equipment and technology. Even though, as we have seen, India propounded non-alignment in international affairs, ties between the then Soviet Union and India flourished, through extensive bilateral engagements. Nehru himself visited the Soviet Union in June 1955, the same year as the eventful Bandung Conference, where the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) saw its inception.³⁶ Moreover, the treaty signed with the Soviet Union in 1971, the so-called 'Friendship Treaty', established India's tilt towards the Soviet as a matter of fact. During the collapse of the Soviet Union following the end of the Cold War in 1991, ties between India and (now) Russia were slightly less prioritized from Russia's side due to internal and external political challenges. This changed, however, with the advent of Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and a couple of years later, Vladimir Putin, who both sought to re-establish its historic ties with India as a strategic partner. Since 2007, India has been Russia's largest arms import partner, surpassing even China.³⁷ In 2010, the then Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh explained this 'special' relationship, by saying that

Relations with Russia are a key pillar of our foreign policy, and we regard Russia as a trusted and reliable strategic partner. Ours is a relationship that not only stands independent of any other, but whose significance has grown over time. Our partnership covers areas such as defence, civil nuclear energy, space, science and technology, hydrocarbons and trade and investment.³⁸

Sinha also brings in Indo-Russian ties in assessing the geopolitical importance of the Arctic maritime domain. As Sinha argues,

The big geopolitical concerns for India in the region would be Russia. We've had historic, strategic partnership and relationship. We participate in many of the naval exercises in the Murmansk region, the Barents Sea. Submarine training happens. We would like to participate in that, from a naval perspective, to learn something different. Our sea is different from the

³⁵ Interview with Sakhuja 2015

³⁶ Sachdeva 2011: 213-214

³⁷ Sachdeva 2011

³⁸ Cited in Sachdeva 2011: 213

Arctic seas. In the sense of naval knowledge of things, it is important to have a link with Russia. We would like to learn from Russia.³⁹

Sinha then adds an important point, namely what can be termed the ‘China Factor’ in Indian foreign policy, by noting that “the larger geopolitical lesson will be how does the Sino-Russian relationship converge or diverge in the Arctic.”⁴⁰ The ‘China Factor’ is a common theme surfacing throughout the discourse, recurring in one way or the other. Ties between China and India have been under great distress since India’s independence, reaching its zenith during the 1962 war. After the Chinese troops withdraw from Indian territory after approximately a month, the relationship between the two giant Asian neighbours has been based on mutual distrust and occasional border skirmishes. As of today (2016), the border dispute between India and China still remains unsolved, and large border areas to the East and West of Nepal and Bhutan are under high military surveillance by both countries. This ‘China factor’ continues to linger in Indian foreign policy issues, and although steps have been taken by both India and China to normalise relations, a deep sense of mistrust remains.⁴¹ The basic idea of this ‘China factor’ is that whatever China does, India has to follow and that China is the main rival in the region. Many commentators have termed the 21st century the ‘Asian Century’, a time where India and China will rise to become global great powers and that the relationship between these two countries will have wide-ranging consequences for the rest of the world.⁴² Also, the relationship between China and Russia is interesting for India in another aspect, namely the so-called ‘strategic triangle’ between India, China and Russia. The former Russian Prime Minister Primakov was the architect behind this idea, which saw a strategic triangle around the axis of Moscow-Beijing-New Delhi. But although this triangle has been inconsequential in terms of deeper cooperation between the three countries, it is still perceived in the international political discourse as a ‘power balancer’ towards the United States in propagating a multi-polar world order.⁴³

Retired Commander in the Indian Navy, Neil Gadihoke, brings in an interesting perspective, that in some measures counters Sakhujā’s on the melting sea ice’s maritime implications for India. Gadihoke argues that opening up of the NSR will divert traffic from the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), where India’s strategic stakes are high.⁴⁴ The IOR is a high-

³⁹ Interview with Sinha 2015

⁴⁰ Interview with Sinha 2015

⁴¹ Acharya 2015

⁴² Pant 2011: 233-234

⁴³ Pant 2012: 39-40

⁴⁴ Gadihoke 2012

priority area in Indian security policy, and India's geographical location makes it a centrepiece in the IOR. More than 60 per cent of global container traffic and 70 per cent of petroleum products are shipped through the IOR,⁴⁵ and the region is rife with security issues such as piracy and terrorism. Some have even labelled the region as a stage for a 'new great game'. The American author and political analyst Robert D. Kaplan observes that "The Indian Ocean is where the rivalry between the United States and China in the Pacific interlocks with the regional rivalry between China and India, and also with America's fight against Islamic terrorism in the Middle East, which includes America's attempt to contain Iran."⁴⁶ The IOR has therefore gained much attention internationally and, naturally, from India, which sees the IOR as a historically natural sphere of Indian influence. But the IOR has to some extent been neglected by policy makers in India over the last couple of decades, and bilateral relationships between many of the littoral states have been going on low gear. When Narendra Modi became Prime Minister, he quickly embarked on a 'tour' of the IOR, visiting the Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka, signing agreements on trade, infrastructure and military cooperation. This renewed focus on the IOR is also seen by scholars and commentators with regards to China's more active engagements in the IOR, as the maritime part of their grand trading project "One Belt One Road", which seeks to establish a 'new silk route' of trade.⁴⁷ Of special concern has been China's sponsorship of a new transshipment hub in Hambantota, in southern Sri Lanka. Originally an underdeveloped part of Sri Lanka, Hambantota now boasts a massive new harbour for large container ships that passes through the Indian Ocean, and even an international airport. When I travelled through Hambantota in December 2015, it was hard to miss the massive scale of the project, as large shipping cranes dotted the skyline, along with a brand new multilane highway cutting through an otherwise swampy, rural landscape. Moreover, Chinese writings on corporate buildings along the road marked the Chinese presence. But this 'China Factor' as a main driver for Indian foreign policy priorities is debated. When I asked Sinha whether he would add China as an ingredient in India's Arctic interest, he dismissed it. However, he added, "(...) but at another level China always create curiosity. I would say that China balanced it, in a way. We are there where the Chinese are, in BRICS, etcetera, so it makes sense that in some sense if China is there we will also be there. But I don't think that was the primary drive."⁴⁸ Sinha's observation indicates that although

⁴⁵ Venkatshamy 2013: 17

⁴⁶ Kaplan 2010: 9

⁴⁷ Chatterji 2015

⁴⁸ Interview with Sinha 2015

China is not always a predominant theme in India's foreign policy, it is still there to a certain extent, and perhaps also a factor for India in the Arctic.

Gadihoke makes a prospective vision, when he further argues that this traffic diversion will in turn have consequences for future Indian port projects and plans that have been launched to increase and improve India's port capacities and facilities. Gadihoke express concerns for how India will handle this, if the Arctic Ocean becomes open for navigation several months a year. Gadihoke argues that,

Given such endeavours, the Arctic melt, with its potential to divert the shipping traffic away from the Indian peninsula, will need to get factored into India's long-term maritime development plan. This is owing to the fact that the container volumes and shipping loads, handled by India's present and future ports, which are astride the main east-west sea transportation lanes in the Indian Ocean Region, may decrease for four months a year.⁴⁹

Even though Gadihoke's arguments are contested, especially by Sakhuja, it is interesting to note how issues related to the IOR are set in connection with the melting of the Arctic sea ice, and how issues in the Arctic are globalised by linking it to other regions.

Resources

The Arctic region is rich on natural resources, like minerals, fish, oil and gas. In particular, prospects of Arctic energy have been one of the key drivers behind increased Arctic attention from polar and non-polar states. India is no exception. Many have argued for this being a fundamental part of the motive for India's engagements in the Arctic. India's energy situation has been precarious for decades, with an increasing need for importing energy from abroad. According to the International Energy Agency, in 2009 India had the third largest energy demand globally, and the need for energy is prospected to increase rapidly in the years to come.⁵⁰ While coal and biomass constitute most of India's primary energy source for the households, the industrialization and opening up of the markets in India from the 1990s and onwards has caused a growing demand for hydrocarbon-related energy sources. India's total energy demand was estimated to be 775 mtoe.⁵¹ India's own energy production, all types of energy sources included, amounted to only about 523 mtoe⁵² in 2013. The necessity of

⁴⁹ Gadihoke 2012: 11

⁵⁰ Ahn & Graczyk 2012: 24-25

⁵¹ International Energy Agency 2015: 23

⁵² mtoe is an abbreviation for million tonnes of oil equivalent, a measurement used for defining the amount of energy released by the burning of a thousand tonnes of crude oil. 1 mtoe = 1000000 tonne. Average per capita annual energy consumption for India in 2013 was 0.62 toe (tonnes of oil equivalent). See International Energy

importing energy therefore becomes clear when looking at the numbers, and India's total energy imports in 2013 were at almost 255 mtoe. Consequently, to provide safe access to energy is a high priority issue in Indian foreign policy. India relies heavily on what can be described as an intricate web of energy suppliers, with most imports coming from West Asia and Africa. As part of India's increased interest in diversifying its energy suppliers, India has sought cooperation with countries in Latin America, in addition to deepen its energy ties with Russia.⁵³ This diverse web of energy suppliers is of course vulnerable to breakages in the supply lines due to political instabilities and other security concerns and India has tried to meet these challenges by building up a buffer supply of oil in the case of disruptions. India's push towards renewable energy sources is advancing slowly, indicating that for the foreseeable future, India is dependant on importing much of its energy.⁵⁴

Since the Arctic allegedly holds vast reserves of oil and gas, many discuss India's possibilities of partaking in the utilization of Arctic energy. Due to the location of these energy sources, as discussed by Stokke, for India to be able to benefit from the Arctic energy they would need partners. In this regard, Russia has played an important role in enabling joint Indo-Russian cooperation in energy projects. Currently (as of May 2016), none of these projects have been directly located within the Arctic, and despite the difficulties of extracting energy from the harsh climate in the Arctic region, nothing suggests that this is not on the future agenda of the Arctic rim states. India's state-owned oil company Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited's (ONGC) international branch ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) has invested in Russian energy projects, such as the Sakhalin 1-project in 2002.⁵⁵ As recent as last year, OVL signed an agreement with the Russian state-owned oil company Rosneft, in the Vankor field in Siberia. Both Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were present at the signing, and accordingly, as reported in the Indian newspaper *Daily News and Analysis*, the two oil giants signed a Memorandum of Understand which emphasized "cooperation for geologic survey, exploration and production of hydrocarbons onshore and on the continental shelf of the Russian Federation."⁵⁶

Parallel to the strengthening of Indo-Russian ties, India has also sought closer relations with the United States. Historically, Indo-US ties have not been without its frictions, and a normalisation of relations first came during the late 1990s and the early 2000s. But engaging

Agency's detailed statistics, <http://www.iea.org/countries/non-membercountries/india/statistics/> (accessed 02.05.16)

⁵³ Sharma 2007: 161-163

⁵⁴ Sharma 2007: 167-171

⁵⁵ Taneja 2015

⁵⁶ Daily News and Analysis 2015

with these two former superpowers does not necessarily come without costs, and as Taneja interestingly observes,

Now Indo-US ties have become deeper. India buys more military equipment from the US than Russia now. The new Prime Minister has already been twice to the US. When Putin came to India in September, he was intended to stay for three days, but he left after 20 hours. So India still tries to stay in that balancing act.⁵⁷

The emphasis put on extracting energy from the Arctic region varies across the discourse. Gadihoke sees Arctic energy as an important part of India's necessary diversification of energy supply sources. Gadihoke cites numbers from the US Geological Survey and the Norwegian oil company Statoil, whose assessments of the Arctic energy reservoir quantifies to 25 per cent of the undiscovered oil and gas deposits remaining in the world. Gadihoke adds that some experts even estimate it to be up to a whole 40 per cent. Gadihoke use the term 'Petroleum Province' on the Arctic and argues for oil exploration in the region based on the feasibility new technology has made for Arctic oil exploration as well as the apparent consent shown by the indigenous people living in the region. Further, Gadihoke sees clear benefits with Arctic energy by arguing that "The advantage in Arctic resource exploitation is the fact that it is situated in a region where conflict and political instability does not threaten secure and reliable delivery."⁵⁸ Gadihoke then argues for the need for India to join in this resource exploration, because there is,

Without doubt, the Arctic energy reserves have the potential for a substantial impact on India's energy dynamics. Currently the world's 11th largest economy (fourth in terms of purchasing power parity), India could occupy the third slot after the United States and China in 25-30 years, if she manages to sustain her economic growth rate.⁵⁹

Here, Arctic energy forms a vital key component in order to propel India's economic growth even further, since consumption itself is linked with growth. This argument clearly resonates with earlier climate debates, where India's often reluctant attitude towards any binding climate agreements on mitigating emissions have been rooted in concerns about growth and development. Recently, during the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in 2015, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi contended the right for developing nations to progress, emphasizing the need for energy in this process, and that the

⁵⁷ Interview with Taneja 2015

⁵⁸ Gadihoke 2012: 4

⁵⁹ Gadihoke 2012: 4

developed countries must take the largest responsibility for cutting carbon dioxide emissions.⁶⁰

Vijay Sakhuja also agrees to the prospect of India benefitting from the Arctic's energy resources. In a policy brief published by the Indian Council of World Affairs in 2014, where Sakhuja then was research director, he argues that "India's energy requirements are expected to grow in the future and the Arctic region has the potential to enhance its energy security."⁶¹ He points to the fact that India is in deep need of energy and that India has embarked on joint projects with the Russian oil company Gazprom. Sakhuja adds that India lacks experience from the harsh Arctic conditions. This is an important point that may be part of the explanation for why some of the energy projects with Russia have progressed slow. However, Sakhuja further argues that this should not hinder any ambitions for India to explore the possibilities Arctic resources may bring, since India "(...) has a rich work stock of people competent in data management and technology."⁶² The frequently used terms for the scramble for Arctic resources as a scenario of a 'Cold War' or a 'new Middle East' in global energy politics is debated and many scholars and even politicians from the Arctic countries are very dismissive of such terms. The reason being that disputes in Arctic region are dealt with within what they see as robust legal regimes like the UNCLOS or discussed in the Arctic Council. From India, the view is different, and these scenarios are often employed to describe the situation in the Arctic. I asked Sakhuja if he thought such terms overplayed the ground realities in the region, on which Sakhuja disagreed: "It's not exaggerated. The cost of production for oil is too high at the moment. The resource driven power balance will be very dynamic."⁶³ This analysis is straightforward and pragmatic, and Sakhuja's point is thought-provoking insofar as it differs from how the Arctic is viewed from the Arctic itself.

India's role in Arctic Affairs

As we have seen earlier, India's strategy towards the Arctic region is not clearly pronounced by official sources and documents. This allows a certain space to be open for geopolitical interpretations and debates regarding what India should or should not pursue in the Arctic. Interestingly, in the Indian Arctic discourse policy objectives for India to follow are framed and suggested. There are different views on how India should behave in Arctic affairs, as well

⁶⁰ Chauhan 2015

⁶¹ Sakhuja 2014: 3

⁶² Interview with Sakhuja 2015

⁶³ Interview with Sakhuja 2015

as differing assessments over what can be achieved through institutions like the Arctic Council. Most suggest India to play an active role and contribute to Arctic governance issues, whereas others are more or less sceptical of what India actually can achieve. Gupta and Sinha argues for India's thrust to mainly be on scientific research on climate change, but that India also should pay attention to the Arctic as a strategic domain and where active participation in the Arctic Council is central.⁶⁴ Here Chaturvedi agrees, by arguing that India should pursue an active role in the Arctic Council to promote the idea of the Arctic as a 'global knowledge commons', which means that the Arctic should be a place of international cooperation. Further, Chaturvedi argues, India needs to develop a clear strategy that includes both poles – the Arctic and the Antarctic – that should focus on 'global knowledge commons'. In order to achieve this Chaturvedi concludes that India should appoint a "polar ambassador",⁶⁵ whose role will be to "(...) facilitate cooperation between the relevant Indian authorities and their counterparts in member states of both the Arctic Council and the Antarctic Treaty, as well as articulate India's stand on various issues related to science, diplomacy, and governance."⁶⁶

In an article published in June 2013, a month after India's accession to observer status in the Arctic Council and that therefore does not discuss this, Chaturvedi argues that governance in the Arctic region should not be confined only to the rim states, since climate change in the Arctic affects not only the rim states, but also the globe as a whole. Chaturvedi also emphasises that the rise of Asia, i.e. China and India, means a more active participation from these states in global affairs. Therefore, according to Chaturvedi, the Arctic Council will strengthen its "legitimacy, authority and effectiveness in Arctic governance"⁶⁷ by laying the foundation for more cooperation and communication between the Arctic rim states and the non-Arctic Asian states.

The Indian media has also provided reports on issues related to India's role in the Arctic. As Lackenbauer argues, the presence of an 'Arctic race' narrative from Indian commentators has to some extent been the case in the Indian media, but media reports also carry nuances. For example, when Salman Khurshid, former External Affairs Minister, visited Ny-Ålesund in 2013, a month after India became an observer in the AC, one of India's largest television channels, NDTV made a reportage from his visit. Despite Khurshid's emphasis on the scientific aspects of India's Arctic programme, the report on NDTV went further, with rapid shifts of scenes underscored by swooshing sound effects. While the reporter was talking

⁶⁴ Gupta & Sinha 2014

⁶⁵ Chaturvedi 2014

⁶⁶ Chaturvedi 2014: 79

⁶⁷ Chaturvedi 2013a: 63

about the rapid effects of climate change, the shifting text on the screen reminded the viewers that not only was India interested in expanding its Arctic engagement but also in achieving a greater role in the Arctic Council.⁶⁸ However, a certain discrepancy is interesting here. While the TV report contained elements from the ‘Arctic race’ narrative, the online published written article that accompanied the TV report, had a more nuanced take:

When asked if India was also planning to be part of the 'New Great Game' as several think tanks are calling the increased interest over potential energy resources in the Arctic, Foreign Minister Khurshid said, "India is not here with a selfish interest... whatever is available to humankind, India is willing to share and contribute to, our focus is to understand our planet better and work to protect it."⁶⁹

The article discusses how rising fuel prices and a melting Arctic may trigger conflicts over resources, along with how fragile the ecological situation in the region is. But interestingly, towards the end of the article examples of cooperation are emphasized, such as the global seed vault outside Longyearbyen and the international scientific community present at the archipelago.

Gadihoke also provides some interesting observations and arguments on how India can play a role in Arctic affairs. Gadihoke’s 2012 article “Arctic Melt: The Outlook for India” precedes India’s accession to observer status in the Arctic Council and Gadihoke clearly sees it as a forum in which India should be included. He emphasizes the Arctic Council’s necessity of“(…) widening the scope of Arctic Council’s charter and increasing its members.”⁷⁰ Gadihoke’s argument in this regard is based on the transnational consequences of a melting Arctic that implies global economical and climatic impacts. Gadihoke argues therefore that the Arctic rim states by no means should have exclusivity in dealing with these issues, and calls for a collaborative approach for both extracting energy and managing shipping through the Arctic region. Gadihoke strongly argues for India’s participation and role in this multinational work:

India has the resources and the influence to contribute positively to the evolving Arctic. To this end, it may broaden cooperation with the Arctic nations and establish bilateral dialogues and discussions to understand the evolving politico-strategic developments in the Arctic region, including participation in Arctic resource assessment and exploitation studies. In addition, regular expeditions to the Arctic to consolidate scientific research and developing technological capability to exploit Arctic living and non-living resources need to be

⁶⁸ Pandey 2013

⁶⁹ Pandey 2013

⁷⁰ Gadihoke 2012: 11

engendered. The need of the hour is for the Indian strategic thinking community to stay intellectually engaged with this issue, so as to anticipate the emerging linkages between the Arctic melt and India.⁷¹

The Indian media does not only report on the Arctic with flashy news reports; they also provide space for commentators to discuss and assess India's Arctic engagements. Some commentators in the Indian media have actively engaged in discussing India's role in the Arctic Council, as well as India's role in the Arctic in general.

One particularly interesting argument, which carries a certain form of idealism and connection with Nehru's early visions for Antarctica, is the 'global commons' or the 'global heritage of mankind' position on how the Arctic should be handled. Shyam Saran, a former Foreign Secretary under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, has written several articles regarding India's role and engagements in the Arctic in the Indian media, where he sees the idea of the Arctic to be propounded as 'global commons' or a 'common heritage of mankind' by India. In his article in *The Hindu*, dated February 1st 2012, Saran asks a rhetorical question regarding the Arctic: "Will it be the next geopolitical battleground or remain the common heritage of humankind?"⁷² Saran points to what he calls the 'element of irony', where the Arctic littorals scramble for resources uncovered by the melting ice – the same resources that caused the sea ice to melt in the first place. Saran's 'element of irony' statement resembles Sinha's later 'antithesis' argument. Due to the environmental impact of a melting Arctic sea, which affects the whole globe, Saran argues that the Arctic region should not only be managed by the Arctic littorals, but through an international regime equal to that of the Antarctic Treaty System. Saran therefore rejects any territorial claims made by the Arctic littorals. Further, Saran asserts, India should play a constructive role in promoting a view internationally of the Arctic not only as a reservoir of hydrocarbon-based energy, but as a 'common heritage of mankind', which requires a deep necessity of ecological preservation. Saran then interestingly argues that India should be cautious about joining the Arctic Council as an observer, since this implies an acceptance of the sovereign rights of the Arctic region claimed by the member states in the Arctic Council.⁷³

Although Saran was clearly sceptical about India joining the Arctic Council, he obviously has a pragmatic approach to the issue. One year later, after India's accession to observer status in the Arctic Council, Saran argues in *The Hindu*, under the headline "India's

⁷¹ Gadihoke 2012: 11

⁷² Saran 2012

⁷³ Saran 2012

date with the Arctic”, that since India now has become an observer in the Arctic Council, it should use this status to work towards reducing international tensions related to the competition of finding and extracting natural resources in the Arctic region. In a similar fashion as a year earlier, Saran points out that, “Instead of joining the race to commercially exploit this pristine region, New Delhi must use its position in the regional council to push for a global mechanism to prevent an unseemly gold rush.”⁷⁴ However, as Saran points out, that by acceding to observer in the Arctic Council, “India has, therefore, no more room to argue that the region be treated in the same manner as the Antarctica.”⁷⁵ A critique of the Arctic Council surfaces in Saran’s article, as he is sceptical about how the council will work towards preserving the fragile Arctic environment. According to Saran, the rich countries that comprise the Arctic littorals ultimately seek to extract hydrocarbons from the region, and through the Arctic Council they have made themselves legitimate claimants to venture into an energy ‘gold rush’ that the Arctic offers. Saran then concludes by urging India to use its status as observer to push for bringing the Arctic under the U.N. in order to create a global regime, and therefore reiterating the ‘global commons’ position in Arctic affairs.⁷⁶

In accordance with, but preceding, Saran, Retired Colonel and Research Fellow at IDSA, P.K. Gautam, argued emphatically on the Arctic to be treated as a ‘global common’ in his 2011 IDSA Issue Brief. Discussing the potential devastating effects of climate change, Gautam portrays the Arctic as a stage for potential conflict over resources and that the Arctic discourse is dominated by the five Arctic states, Russia, Norway, Canada, Denmark and the United States. Gautam argues that, “Although ideas on cooperation abound, in reality ecology is given low priority. There is an urge and a rush to lay claim to areas which are beyond the 200 nautical mile (nm) EEZ and the 350 nm extended continental shelf.”⁷⁷ He then observes that “(...) narrow national perspectives have chosen to ignore long term ecological impacts.”⁷⁸ Gautam brings in the case where Russia planted a flag at the North Pole sea bed in 2007, and how Canada tries to establish the North West Passage as their territorial waters, as examples of how territorial disputes are present in the Arctic region, adding to the picture of a tensional Arctic. Further, Gautam argues that the Arctic region is undergoing a heavy militarisation, a development he clearly sees as a concern. As a way of dampening these potential sources of conflict, as well as protecting the fragile environment of the Arctic,

⁷⁴ Saran 2013

⁷⁵ Saran 2013

⁷⁶ Saran 2013

⁷⁷ Gautam 2011: 3

⁷⁸ Gautam 2011: 3

Gautam suggest the Arctic region to be declared a ‘common heritage of humankind’. This idea stems from the Declaration of Principles document that was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, in order to govern spaces that exceed national boundaries. Paragraph 1 of the declaration states the following: “The sea-bed and ocean floor, and the subsoil thereof, beyond the limits of national jurisdiction (hereinafter referred to as the area), as well as the resources of the area, are the common heritage of mankind.”⁷⁹ Gautam then applies this principle to the Arctic, as he is critical of the current legal configurations like UNCLOS to sufficiently protect the Arctic. As a conclusion, Gautam brings India into the discussion, as he argues for a stronger participation for non-Arctic states, and developing countries in particular, in Arctic governance issues. It is here important to note that Gautam’s article precedes India’s observer status in the Arctic Council. The Arctic must be lifted higher on India’s policy agenda, argues Gautam, and devises that,

It is time that a policy on this issue is debated and evolved in India. The first step in this regard will be for India to become an ad hoc observer to the Arctic Council. At the same time, India’s ‘strategic community’ needs to take the lead in articulating the debating the idea of including the Arctic in the discourse on global commons.⁸⁰

Also arguing for the Arctic to be treated as a ‘global common’ is Kishore Kumar, a consultant at the Centre for Ocean and Environmental Studies in New Delhi. Kumar is critical of how acquiring observer status in the Arctic Council means accepting the Arctic states’ sovereignty in the region and therefore making it difficult to propagate or even claim the Arctic region to be a global common. In a highly critical tone, Kumar assesses that “The Arctic nations may be having territorial disputes among themselves, but have the common objective of keeping out non-Arctic states.”⁸¹ Kumar refers to India’s research station *Himadri* at Svalbard, and that establishing scientific presence in the Arctic, has “(...) propelled India to the forefront of polar research in the world.”⁸² Moreover, Kumar advances a strong criticism towards the Indian voices that have propagated for India to join the Arctic Council, whose aim Kumar perceives to be to “join the international scramble for Arctic resources”⁸³ and therefore legitimize the Arctic states’ unrestrained economic exploitation as well as ecological neglect of the region. Kumar then argues for India to abandon such selfish motivations and, “Instead, India needs to use its growing international economic and technological status to push for the

⁷⁹ Cited in Noyes 2011: 449

⁸⁰ Gautam 2011: 10

⁸¹ Kumar 2013: 21

⁸² Kumar 2013: 21

⁸³ Kumar 2013: 22

global commons theory, for which it will receive widespread international support and acclaim.”⁸⁴ Even though the ‘global common’ position is interesting, it is most evident in the Indian Arctic discourse in the period before India was granted observer status in the Arctic Council. Sinha observes that, “The view of Arctic as a global common is not useful anymore. And this is well settled in the Indian global policy sector. We don’t make these claims in the Arctic, but we still see it that way in the Antarctic.”⁸⁵

Nevertheless, in an article published in 2013, after India’s accession to observer status in the Arctic Council, Anuradha Nayak, assistant law professor at the University of Petroleum and Energy Studies (UPES), in Dehradun, argues that India should play an active role in still pushing for the Arctic to be regarded as a global common. Nayak writes that, “As an upcoming major power India should not focus only on regional interests or regional issues, but on pan-Arctic issues.”⁸⁶ Nayak points to how India acted in the UN with the Antarctic question, and that this should inspire its policies towards the Arctic. The Indian intervention in the UN, Nayak argues,

(...) supports that India was inclined towards the ideology of peaceful approach and support towards ‘global heritage / common heritage of Humankind’, and now it should emphasize on a similar approach for the Arctic, through its well laid principles in its policy: sustainable development through intergenerational equity.⁸⁷

Nayak acknowledges that the push for global commons in the Arctic should not interfere with the sovereignty claims made by the Arctic states and she is aware of the regulations and limits provided in the Observer Manual. Nayak then concludes with how the Arctic Council (AC) regime can provide India with a useful platform to increase its impact in the Arctic region:

The AC has given India an opportunity in the form of an observer status. India has been quite active in the Antarctic through research and its consultative party status. Now it has to prove the same at the Arctic, by playing a major role in Arctic affairs. It is time that the volatile international situation analyzed (sic). India should draft an Arctic policy which would reflect on a bigger role.⁸⁸

Exactly what this Arctic policy of India should pursue, is not discussed by Nayak, and there are many open questions that are left unanswered. The role of an observer in the Arctic

⁸⁴ Kumar 2013: 22

⁸⁵ Interview with Sinha 2015

⁸⁶ Nayak 2013: 663

⁸⁷ Nayak 2013: 664

⁸⁸ Nayak 2013: 666-667

Council is limited, and it is therefore difficult to comprehend how Nayak envisions these restrictions to be overcome.

As we can see, there are several voices that argue for India to play an active role in Arctic affairs. These seem to argue on the basis of having an idealistic approach to Arctic governance, where India can contribute positively. Here, the ‘global common’ is a good example. But as we will see next, most seem to argue at the moment that a greater role for India in the Arctic could best be achieved through science.

Science and soft power in the Arctic region

“The policy is still science, science, science”.⁸⁹ This argument was made by Vijay Sakhuja, but summarises the Indian Arctic discourse in general. As we have seen, this discourse provides a rich mix of contemporary Indian foreign policy issues, such as energy security, maritime security, bilateral relationships and the economical impacts of a melting Arctic. Yet, what becomes clear is the emphasis on science and that this can provide India with leverage in Arctic affairs. Most agree that India’s Arctic engagement is not high on Delhi’s strategic agenda at the moment, and therefore falls short of being a ‘battleground’ for India, of high strategic importance and priority. The emphasis on science is the most articulate policy that has been released from official sources, and this is also the point that is highlighted the most by my informants. As discussed in chapter three, science has frequently been used as a soft power strategy in international relations, especially during the Cold War. But science does not necessarily have to be part of governmental strategies to produce soft power. Then follows the question, whether the Arctic can provide India with soft power in international relations? As we have seen, soft power strategies have become more pronounced in contemporary Indian foreign policy, not least for the past few years. The current majority Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has pronounced soft power as an integral part of India’s foreign policy ambitions. In the BJP election manifesto released before the General Elections in 2014, where the BJP won a landslide victory, India’s soft power capacities were to be deployed in India’s foreign policy:

India has long failed to duly appreciate the full extent and gamut of its soft power potential. There is a need to integrate our soft power avenues into our external interchange, particularly, harnessing and focusing on the spiritual, cultural and philosophical dimensions of it. India has

⁸⁹ Interview with Sakhuja 2015

always played a major role in world affairs, offering a lot to the World. This has been its tradition since time immemorial. The magnetic power of India has always been in its ancient wisdom and heritage, elucidating principles like harmony and equity. This continues to be equally relevant to the world today in today's times of Soft power.⁹⁰

Could Indian science in the Arctic be a part of Indian soft power? The Arctic engagement precedes the current BJP government, as it was initiated under the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance, with Manmohan Singh as prime minister. Manmohan Singh hardly expressed his opinions on India's Arctic engagement publicly, so there is little evidence to back an argument for a personal commitment, as we saw earlier with Indira Gandhi and the Antarctic. And neither have Modi. But, in India's short Arctic history, two government ministers have been to the Arctic, at Svalbard, the former Minister of Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, Kapil Sibal in 2008 and former External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid. In addition, India's president Pranab Mukherjee visited Norway in 2014, and spoke with Indian scientists at Svalbard through video link. These are all indications that India takes their presence in the Arctic serious, yet a clear Arctic strategy has never been spelt out, apart from scientific goals and participation in the Arctic Council. However, voices in the Indian Arctic discourse propound the idea that India should use soft power strategies in order to gain influence in the Arctic region.

At the SaGAA III conference in New Delhi in September 2015, Chaturvedi argued for India to deploy what he terms 'science diplomacy', meaning that through science diplomacy "India is more likely to realize the objectives that it has, in front of its polar agenda."⁹¹ Chaturvedi has particularly specialized in Antarctic affairs, but has now turned his attention also to the Arctic, to which he sees clear parallels. According to Chaturvedi, "What brings the two poles together is the domain of science diplomacy." The term 'science diplomacy' is indeed very interesting, but what does Chaturvedi mean by applying this term? Chaturvedi explains 'science diplomacy' in the following way, using three points:

First, Science in diplomacy means rejuvenating the contribution of science to foreign policy objectives, building capacity, to give and receive scientific advice. Both in Antarctica and in the Arctic, science in diplomacy is extremely important; Second, diplomacy for science. And I think this is where we find some very important challenges before Antarctic diplomacy of which India is a very important part of now. Which is how does Antarctic diplomacy, which is being played out in a very complex system, how it continues to facilitate international cooperation in different domains, including tourism; third, science for diplomacy, which is using scientific cooperation to improve international relations and also public relations within

⁹⁰ Bharatiya Janata Party 2014: 40

⁹¹ Chaturvedi. "India's Polar Challenge". Talk at the SaGAA III conference in New Delhi 29.09.15

countries. So science for diplomacy is not only to improve international scientific cooperation but also public relations, building up of economic institutions.⁹²

Further, Chaturvedi argues for the importance of science diplomacy for India by referring to how this strategy can have a larger impact, also in international forums:

Why science diplomacy? (...) ... (S)cience diplomacy is critically important both with regard to Antarctica and the Arctic. The Antarctic Treaty System and the Arctic Council, because science diplomacy hopefully will create more spaces for both science and diplomacy. And this opening up of the space, keeping the space more democratic and dialogic is extremely important given the fact that in some international multilateral negotiations and institutions, one finds shrinking of these spaces.⁹³

Chaturvedi's employment of the term 'science diplomacy' is not new. Even though Nye does not use this particular term explicitly, he argues that soft power was employed through the scientific relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Nye argues that cooperation between American and Soviet scientists were decisive, and that "Academic and scientific exchanges played a significant role in enhancing American soft power."⁹⁴ Further, according to Nye, despite American fears over possible scientific thefts by Soviet scientists, these concerned voices "(...) failed to notice that the visitors vacuumed up political ideas along with scientific secrets." And that the result of these exchanges were that "Many such scientists became leading proponents of human rights and liberalization inside the Soviet Union."⁹⁵ For Nye, science as an element in diplomacy falls under the "culture" category in the three-tier system that constitutes the different sources of soft power.

Chaturvedi's employment of the term science diplomacy as a means for India's success in Arctic and Antarctic affairs is therefore highly interesting. It should be added that Nye's contextualisation of science in soft power is mainly connected with the relationship between the USA and the Soviet Union, and thus the Cold War era. The term itself, science diplomacy, has been used frequently with regards to Antarctica and especially the Antarctic Treaty System, where science has been a key element in Antarctic governance. The Antarctic Treaty was a direct consequence of the International Geophysical Year 1957-58, an international scientific project which saw extensive cooperation between scientists from East and West during a time of cold war. Among many scientific endeavours during this year, Antarctica

⁹² Chaturvedi. "India's Polar Challenge". Talk at the SagAA III conference in New Delhi 29.09.15

⁹³ Chaturvedi. "India's Polar Challenge". Talk at the SagAA III conference in New Delhi 29.09.15

⁹⁴ Nye 2004: 45

⁹⁵ Nye 2004: 45

accumulated much interest that, according to Marie Jacobson, “helped transfer the question of Antarctica from the table of diplomacy to the table of science”.⁹⁶

That India can increase its influence in the Arctic region through science was also emphasised by my informants, and there was an agreement that what India appears to do best in the Arctic at the moment, is scientific research. The role of science in promoting a country’s foreign policy objectives can be effective. Ahmed Zewail, an Egyptian-American scientist and the winner of the 1999 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, argues that it is not Hollywood or Starbucks that provide America with soft power anymore, it is science. Zewail observes that, “The soft power of science has the potential to reshape global diplomacy.”⁹⁷ This is so, according to Zewail, and he directly relates this to the United States’ relationship with Muslim countries, because, “By harnessing the soft power of science in the service of diplomacy, America can demonstrate its desire to bring the best of its culture and heritage to bear on building better and broader relations with the Muslim world and beyond.”⁹⁸ Resembling this, and transcending the polar realms, Gupta and Sinha argues that science can play a constructive role in bilateral relations with China. By linking the Arctic and Antarctica with the Himalayas (often referred to as the ‘Third Pole’), Gupta and Sinha argues that science in the Arctic could contribute to closer engagements and cooperation with China.⁹⁹ Through India’s focus on science and climate research in the Arctic, a potential outcome of this engagement, according to Gupta and Sinha, could then be improved relations with India’s powerful neighbour.¹⁰⁰

That science has become an important part of India’s soft power, is now evident. And as Rani Mullen and Sumit Ganguly notes, the rise of India’s soft power is “not just Bollywood and Yoga anymore.”¹⁰¹ Indian technology and science has steadily replaced the spiritual as India’s main commodity and source of soft power. Yet the spiritual and cultural still remains a component that is invoked through references to Indian civilizational and cultural elements. Shastri Ramachandaran, a veteran and seasoned journalist, who mainly writes on foreign affairs, argues that

India’s soft power has been culture, even without the commodification of culture that has happened today. Today we export culture as a commodity. If we look at India’s GNP or

⁹⁶ Jacobsson 2011: 7

⁹⁷ Zewail 2010

⁹⁸ Zewail 2010

⁹⁹ Sinha & Gupta 2014: 879-883

¹⁰⁰ Sinha & Gupta 2013

¹⁰¹ Mullen & Ganguly 2012

population, there are few developing countries, not even developed countries, that contribute in that scale, with ideas, and who inspire people everywhere. Its not just what the government does, I think India's influence is also what kind of attention it attracts and what kind of engagements.¹⁰²

When the Norwegian former Foreign Affairs Minister Børge Brende writes in the Indian newspaper *The Hindu*, that "Science is the backbone of Indo-Norwegian cooperation in the Arctic",¹⁰³ it indicates that Norway views India's contribution to the scientific and technological domain as valuable and a constitutive part of the Indo-Norwegian bilateral relationship. It is clearly an acknowledgment of India's soft power qualities and capacities, and when this is utilized, according to Brende, "(o)ur collaboration in the Arctic could be a crucial contribution to the global effort to address these global challenges."¹⁰⁴ This is an example of how science can play a role in interstate relations.

When I asked Sinha how soft power can play a role in Indian foreign policy, he said that,

(...) there is a considerable thrust, one can see, that many of the programmes of this new government are to invest in knowledge, to invest in the skills that the Indians have. It allows a free movement of science and technology. It tells the world to come to India and participate in this development in science and technology. It's also to bring in India's ancient, civilizational way of seeing the world. Our civilization introduced zero and introduced several aspects of astronomy. We are also trying to bring in these rich civilization and culture of science into the progress of the world, to the well being of the world.¹⁰⁵

Sinha's observations are interesting, and they reveal how the conduct of contemporary Indian foreign policy focuses on soft aspects to obtain desirable outcomes. India's interests in the Arctic region are both economic and strategic. But India does not have, at the moment, the necessary economic clout to pursue costly endeavours abroad. It is also tied up with demanding external affairs issues in its own neighbourhood, i.e. the relationship with Pakistan, China and other neighbouring countries. Science then, can provide India with soft power in international relations. Sakhuja makes an interesting observation when he argues that India raises little suspicion about their foreign policy motives abroad: "India has enough problems, how can we bother with making problems other places?"¹⁰⁶ Sakhuja then explains that, "India carries a little bit more of a soft image. And we take much pride of the fact that

¹⁰² Interview with Ramachandaran 2015

¹⁰³ Brende 2014

¹⁰⁴ Brende 2014

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Sinha 2015

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Sakhuja 2015

we have a lot of capacities in terms of science and IT. Indians does not go places with an aggressive intent.”¹⁰⁷

Taneja also underlines that India’s primary goal in the Arctic is the pursuit of science. He also holds the possibility open for a more geopolitical interest in the region, but only after the polar ice has receded and when climate change has become more visible for India than it is at the moment. An interesting point that Taneja then brings up, resides in how the geopolitical focus of India in the Arctic region being on both climate negotiations and climate research. India is concerned with issues related to climate change and how these can impact the Indian economy. Here, issues of India’s national security come through the knowledge of processes of climate change. But India has also shown restraint in participating in any binding negotiations on for example climate gas emissions, as has been evident in many earlier international climate negotiation meetings, such as at the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, where India, along with China, were accused of sabotaging a landmark climate deal.¹⁰⁸ Even though India may be concerned with the larger impacts of climate change and, as Khurshid argued, that India is not in the Arctic for selfish reasons, India has a pragmatic approach to these issues. As Deep K. Datta-Ray argues, “(...)what India is doing in the Arctic, and that I would argue India is doing anywhere, is essentially to manage India .”¹⁰⁹ Although India has a scientific approach to the Arctic, it still is pragmatic, which, as we have seen, forms a part of the broader Indian foreign policy discourse in India.

Taneja agrees that doing science in the Arctic can be a part of India’s soft power strategy, but offers a sceptical assessment with the regards to the lack of promotion from the governmental side. As Taneja argues,

Not many countries do that kind of work in the Antarctic and the Arctic. India has a very rich history of the Antarctic, doing research there. But it is never highlighted as something we should be proud of, that Indian scientists are some of the best people in the North, studying climate change, helping us understand - this is never highlighted anywhere, which is a pity and a fault of the Indian outlook on these issues.¹¹⁰

Taneja’s observation is two-fold, and indicates an interesting discrepancy that sums up this discussion. While the Indian thrust towards the Arctic region at the moment is mainly through

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Sakhuja 2015

¹⁰⁸ Rapp, Schwägerl &Traufetter. 2010

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Datta-Ray 2015

¹¹⁰ Interview with Taneja 2015

science, Taneja's final remark resembles Wagner's argument on how India projects its soft power internationally. Wagner argues that India is a defensive soft power and therefore its capacities and capabilities to exert influence are limited on the international stage.¹¹¹ This may be the reason why India does not figure in soft power rankings. However, there is an increasing emphasis, especially under Narendra Modi, on utilizing India's soft power capacities and capabilities abroad, and the Arctic is clearly seen from India as a potential stage.

As we have seen in this chapter, an Arctic discourse emerged in India in the years after India's first expedition to the Arctic region in 2007. Within this discourse, some voices frame and view India as a stakeholder in Arctic affairs by pointing to its historical and cultural bond to the region, as well as for the Arctic to be a natural extension of the Indian Antarctic programme. While there are differing views on what the Arctic will mean to India and what interests it should pursue in the region, most voices argue for India to play an active role, through its observer status in the Arctic Council and scientific endeavours. In this discourse, the Arctic is linked with larger Indian foreign policy issues, such as energy security, the relationship with China and possible strategic implications of the melting sea ice for India. However, most seem to agree that India's main thrust towards the region should be through scientific endeavours and that these endeavours can enhance India's influence in the Arctic and in international relations through increasing its soft power capacities and capabilities.

¹¹¹ Wagner 2010: 341

6 Conclusion

In this thesis I have analysed contemporary Indian foreign policy by using India's recent Arctic engagement as a vantage point. I have argued that an Indian discourse on Arctic issues emerged following the establishment of India's research base *Himadri* at Svalbard in 2008. Due to the international interest caused by India's and other Asian countries' accession to observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013, I wanted to investigate and explore how the Arctic was viewed and discussed in India, and how the Arctic was framed within a broader Indian foreign policy perspective. I have argued that this Indian Arctic discourse, primarily confined to special forums, academic publications and newspaper articles, sees India as a natural stakeholder in the Arctic and that India therefore should play an active role in Arctic affairs.

I have argued that this Indian Arctic discourse is constituted by a set of different voices that focus on different aspects of Arctic issues, such as energy and resources, strategic concerns and Arctic governance. An important element in this discourse is the view that India has soft power capacities and capabilities in international affairs and that the soft power displayed by India's scientific research activities in the Arctic may increase India's leverage in international affairs. I have also argued that a wide range of contemporary foreign policy issues surface within this discourse, establishing it as a valuable site for understanding how Indian foreign policy is discussed and perceived by Indian academics and commentators.

The four categories of material used in this thesis have contributed to shed new light on India's Arctic engagement. By combining interviews and interactions with scholars and experts on the field with written sources, I have attempted to map how the Arctic and Indian foreign policy in general is perceived from an Indian perspective.

India's foreign policy has undergone significant changes since India gained independence from the British in 1947. In what Malone terms "preacher to pragmatist",¹ Indian foreign policy has evolved from being steeped in idealism and ideology under Jawaharlal Nehru, to applying a more pragmatic approach to its behaviour in current international affairs. Scholars argue that in contemporary Indian foreign policy, traditional values like non-alignment and third-world solidarity have proved flexible when necessary and that this has made Indian foreign policy difficult to theorise. In this theoretical 'vacuum', I have used soft power theory as a part of my analysis, in order to establish new perspectives on Indian foreign policy. As I have argued, soft power has increasingly become an important

¹ Malone 2011a: 47

component in how India pursues its interests abroad, as well as being a valuable asset to how India itself is perceived by the international community. By emphasizing the uniqueness of Indian civilization and cultural heritage, moral authority through its Nehruvian legacy, along with its science and technology, India's push towards the global stage is mainly through 'soft' means. This has become particularly noticeable over the past few years, most recently under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose emphasis on India's soft power aspects has been characterised by some commentators as a form of "Yoga Diplomacy".² These aspects have then been included in my analysis of the Indian Arctic discourse.

India's Arctic engagement is divided into two domains, which I have described as scientific and geopolitical. The scientific domain is administered by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), whereas the geopolitical is administered by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). These two ministries have different outlooks on the Arctic, and where the MoES is purely concerned with scientific research in the Arctic region, the MEA has incorporated a strategic element in their position. However, both ministries stress the scientific mission as the main rationale of India's Arctic engagement, and no clear Arctic strategic policy is framed at the moment. At the scientific level, the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR) coordinates India's polar research and is every year responsible for dispatching researchers and scientists to the research station Himadri at Svalbard. At the geopolitical level, the MEA provides personnel to the Arctic Council, where India currently has two representatives.

In this thesis I have investigated the the Arctic is viewed from India through four central perspectives, namely how this discourse establishes India's Arctic interests; what the Arctic implies strategically for India in terms of shipping, resources and other geopolitical considerations; India's role in Arctic affairs; and fourthly: science and soft power in the Arctic region. I have then analysed how these points are perceived by Indian academics and commentators.

The discourse establishes the Arctic as a natural sphere for Indian interest for several reasons: Some voices argue that India has a historical and cultural relationship with the Arctic, by virtue of being a signatory to the Svalbard Treaty of 1920, were the British signed on behalf of India. Some also argue that India's Arctic roots can be traced back to its ancient Vedic history, through Tilak's theory of Aryan migration from the Arctic region to the Indian subcontinent. However, most argue that India's natural place in the Arctic is due to its long

² Martin 2015

history of polar science, where the experience from the Indian Antarctic expeditions are seen as fundamental. This view emphasises that India has been present in the Antarctic since the 1980s and was one of the first Asian nations to establish research facilities in the region, and also one of the first Asian countries to accede to the Antarctic Treaty.

Opinions differ on the strategic implications for India due to melting Arctic sea ice. Some voices argue that new shipping lanes may pave the way for potential conflicts and changes in the power balance that may spill into the Indian Ocean. Other voices disagree with this scenario and place India at the outside of any strategic implications. Many view the Arctic as a potential source of energy in the future, due to India's increasing energy demand and the need for diversifying its already manifold energy supply chains. In this regard, most of my informants and the written material analysed view the Arctic as a place for potential conflicts over resources. However, most seem to stress that these issues are or should be dealt with through multilateral Arctic governance and diplomatic means.

There are also differing views on what role India should play in the Arctic. Before India gained observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013, some voices argued against India's participation, whereas others saw the Arctic Council as a ready opportunity for India to influence Arctic affairs. Some of those who opposed India joining the Arctic Council seemed to argue that India should propound the idea of the Arctic to be treated as a 'global common'. These arguments closely resembled the 'Question of Antarctica' issue, where India wanted to bring the Antarctic continent under the banner of the UN in the 1950s. However, after India joined the Arctic Council, most now seem to agree that India should make its contributions within the configurations of the Arctic Council.

Finally, most commentators and academics stress the scientific aspects of India's Arctic engagement, and that India should pursue its interests in the region through scientific research on climate change. Here, the voices argue that the melting of the Arctic sea ice and climate change impacts are felt globally, not only in the Arctic region. Moreover, India's soft power capacities, in the form of its scientific and technological prowess, are seen as constitutive elements in how India can play a role in the Arctic, as well as project its interests globally.

As I have shown, the environment in which Arctic affairs are discussed is a small, yet vibrant, arena where the only participants are a handful of scholars, journalists and commentators. These are often from the strategic community or specialists on foreign policy issues. Within this discourse, we can clearly see how central principles and themes in the history of Indian foreign policy is projected on to Arctic affairs and how India has presented

itself globally in previous decades, through advocating values like non-alignment and idealism in foreign affairs. One might argue that these principles have supplied India with a “moral capital” in international affairs, and it is evident from analysing the different voices in the Indian Arctic discourse that India is seen as having the potential of playing a leading and normative role in Arctic affairs.

The Arctic forms a small and limited field within a broader Indian foreign policy discourse, and is yet to find its way out to the broad public. As Kabir Taneja observes, India’s Arctic engagement does not really exist in the minds of most Indians.³ It is perhaps because of this that only limited research has been done on analysing India’s Arctic engagements as viewed from India. Hopefully, this thesis has contributed in this regard. Although I may have barely scratched the tip of the proverbial iceberg, more research on the topic is necessary to bring in other perspectives and conclusions. Of particular interest would be to analyse how the Indian discourse relates to other Asian discourses on the Arctic, for example those of China or Japan, and whether these have influenced India’s views on Arctic affairs. Moreover, another interesting subject would be to explore how India’s bilateral ties with the Nordic countries play out in the Arctic and how India’s interest in the Arctic is perceived from a Nordic perspective. These and other issues fall beyond the scope of this study, but should inspire to future attention.

³ Interview with Taneja 2015

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Appendix 1: List of informants

Deep K. Datta-Ray, interview 02.10.15

Lecturer at Jindal School of International Affairs.

Dr. K.P. Krishnan, interview 05.10.15

Scientist and head of the Arctic department, Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR).

Shastri Ramachandaran, interview 07.10.15

Journalist, author and independent political and foreign affairs commentator.

Uttam Kumar Sinha, interview 12.10.15

Research Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies and Strategic Analyses (IDSA); Adjunct at the Malaviya Centre for Peace Research, Benares Hindu University (BHU); Managing Editor of *Strategic Analysis* (Routledge).

Vijay Sakhuja, interview 15.10.15

Director, National Maritime Foundation (NMF)

Kabir Taneja, interview 15.10.15

Journalist and researcher specializing in foreign affairs and energy security.

Interview 16.10.15

Representative, Royal Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi.

Air Chief Marshall Norman Anil Kumar Browne, Interview 07.11.15

Ambassador of India to Norway

Appendix 2: Abbreviations

AC: Arctic Council

ATCM: Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party

BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

IDSA: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

IGY: International Geophysical Year

IR: International Relations

IOR: Indian Ocean Region

LEP: Look East Policy

MEA: Ministry of External Affairs

MoES: Ministry of Earth Sciences

NAM: Non-Aligned Movement

NCAOR: National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research

NMF: National Maritime Foundation

NSR: Northern Sea Route

NWP: North West Passage

OVL: Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Videsh Limited

PMO: Prime Minister's Office

SaGAA III: The third Science and Geopolitics of Arctic-Antarctic-Himalaya Conference

UN: United Nations

UNCLOS: The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea