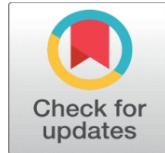
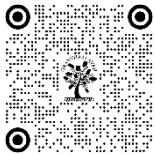


UNDERSTANDING INDIA'S RISE: A STUDY OF DOMINANT STRATEGIC IDEAS

Anwasha Dasgupta ¹✉

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Netaji Satabarshiki Mahavidyalaya, Ashoknagar, West Bengal, India



Corresponding Author

Anwasha Dasgupta,
anweshadasgupta460@gmail.com

DOI
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.3033](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.3033)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2023 The Author(s).
This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

India's enhanced power projection capabilities, expanded economic ties, multifaceted global engagements have ushered it as a rising power with potential for a substantial global status. However, as an emerging power India's ascribed objectives and ideas which it strives to seek in the world order is marred in obscurity. Such ambivalence has led to assumptions and criticisms concerning India's lack of vision or a strategic worldview as a rising power. This article tries to explain India's strategic worldview through five dominant interests which have been constantly reflected in India's association and deliberations with international order. The aim is to provide a simplified, coherent representation of the dominant ideas emergent India endeavours in the present international system.

Keywords: India, Emerging Power, Aspirations, Worldview, Strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century witnessed unprecedented exuberance in portraying India as a rising or emerging power destined for a global stature (Cohen 2001; Ganguly 2003; Kiesow and Noring 2007). The enthusiastic support by the external actors has also been complemented by India's engaging and activist policies in the international system. But there remains an abstruseness regarding the core ideas and interests that India seeks in the current world order to further its global status. As a rising power India has rarely reflected on a coherent vision of a preferred world order and this has often made it difficult to understand and analyze India's strategies and objectives. This article tries to underline certain dominant themes that have been prominent in various discussions, negotiations and deliberations of India with the world order. The attempt is to present the otherwise scattered ideas and interests pursued by India in major international relations and forums to weave a cohesive structure and to give semblance to the idea of a strategic worldview of an emerging India.

Worldview constitutes a broad ideational variable affecting foreign policy decisions of a state. It allows isolation of handful of terms or ideas central to describing and analyzing the interests and the role of a state. Strategies and policies

are thereby shaped and connoted by efforts to harness political, military, diplomatic and economic tools to realize its aspired worldview. It is believed to be the favourable system and conditions under which the state perceives to attain its best form.

Alastair Iain Johnston conceptualized a strategic cultural paradigm and notes two factors (a) the strategic environment constitutes the central paradigm, (b) based on the central paradigm a set of policy preferences are enforced. Strategic choices will be optimizing ones, determined and constrained only, or largely, by variables such as geography, capability, threat, and a tendency of states to refrain from behaviors which clearly threaten their immediate survival (Johnston,1995).

Thus construction of a strategic worldview is dominantly perspective oriented; it highly depends on a state's perception of the international system within which it is operating, the kind of threat it is confronted with, utilization of its capabilities and considering these variables it determines the position it desires and the kind of role it will perform.(Nau and Ollapally 2012:1-5). Perceptions differ from state to state and even within a single state time and situations alter perceptions over values and issues and the means they are willing to employ to protect those; hence strategic worldview is not static or uniform rather its dynamic subjected to timely changes and exhibits national styles of styles of strategy. It is a combination of perception and preference.

The end of cold war altered the nature of international system changing the pattern of distribution of power, security perception and economic and strategic considerations. In Johnstons's term it brought about major changes in the central paradigm and hence states were compelled to change their perceptions and set out new preferences. Thus it was not only necessary to adapt to new changes but also to realize what they would stand for in this altered system. The end of cold war did not do away with India's apprehensions about the international system being a hegemonic one structured by the interests and will of the most powerful but it longer wanted to distance or shield itself from it rather wanted to be an integral part in great power politics. The new system could no longer be identified by a single overarching criterion as the cold war, it is diverse, complex and extremely interwoven and hence engagements and enmeshments are the key to sustain and rise in this system. Since 1990's India has exhibited significant rise in its stature and capabilities and is conscious of the ways it is capable of affecting the great power politics and the degree to which it can be affected by fluctuations of the same (Raja Mohan,2016). There has been a transition from the defensive stance of India to one where it matters, how India deals with this change to attain what strategic goals remains the major question.

2. FIVE DOMINANT COMPONENTS OF INDIA'S STRATEGIC WORLDVIEW

ASPIRATION TO ACHIEVE A MAJOR POWER STATUS:

The core of India's strategic worldview is the enduring and deep rooted aspiration of achieving the status of major power within the international system. India's quest for its great power aspiration can be traced over the periods since independence, conditioned and manifested across different administrations. India's claim to such status has been based on its sense of entitlement based on its civilizational heritage and its distinct success of maintaining internal pluralism and diversity bounded by democratic traditions.

Following India's independence India's leaders saw Great Power status as based upon moral idealism rather than territorial, economic or military indicators. Employment of this language also helped to portray India as a self-assured state (Ogden,2011:5). As Paul and Nayar(2003:128) argues that it was believed India's relatively weak material capabilities as compared to the other great powers can be compensated by non material normative attributes. India sought to claim its desired status with its soft power influences of presenting itself as a nation that denounced power rivalry and conflicts and stood in favour of peaceful co-existence, adherence to norms and order and representing a distinctive voice and approach from newly emergent Asia in the international forums.

Status in the post-cold war system was based on capability measures (specially economic and military), building linkages and integrating on bilateral as well as multilateral levels and interconnectedness of all the factors. Thus, a state's claim to major power status based on a single ideational component was no longer plausible. India needed to adapt to the new system upgrade its capabilities and seek constructive engagements realizing that relations downwards are as important as relations upwards (Cohen,2001:32). India espoused its engagements to build its capabilities, especially to nurture its nuclear option which it believed to be essential to its security concerns and an important step towards realizing its status. The proclamation of its nuclear status was a challenge to the existing international system which had to recognize if not ready to accommodate India as a nuclear power. India by the end of the period had entered into

arrangements for security or strategic dialogue with all major powers, it became a strategic partner of the EU and even received enthusiastic support from Russia and France for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council (Paul and Nayar 2003:233-242). It was hailed as a potential power but its desired status still eluded it.

In the 21st century India's potential to become a major power has been supported by other major power specifically United States proclaimed "to help India become a major world power in 21st century" (U.S State Department,2005) despite these India is still striving for a major power status. One reason holds that India's capabilities remains relatively low in comparison to other major powers and is held back by numerous internal constraints and difficulties, notably its large and poor population, innumerable domestic conflicts, and the many imperfections of its democracy (Basrur 2010; Cohen 2001). A majority opinion sways to the fact of India's inability to substantially contribute or influence the international order or any major global event by itself. Thus aspiring a major power status will continue as India's dominant strategic objective and it will continue seeking a world order where its objective can be fulfilled.

3. MAINTAINING STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Closely following its desire for a major power status is India's stress on maintaining independence in its foreign policy. Its penchant rests on maintaining independent outlook and decision making powers and protect against external influences and constraints with respect to issues defining its core security and strategic interests.

Maintaining autonomy is stressed among all schools of strategic thought though it differs in its manifestation and degree. **Nehruvians** are most stringent on preserving India's strategic autonomy. To them India's great power aspirations must be based on autarky and self reliance.(Hoffmann 2002:229; Bajpai and Sahni 2008). For Neo Liberals or pragmatists, relations with great powers represent opportunities as much as threats. Neo-liberals, argue that in the contemporary world India can only become a great power by raising its economic growth rates, and this is feasible if India works not against, but rather with, the great powers as a way of increasing trade, technology transfers and investment.(Bajpai and Sahni,2008:98). The hyperrealists do not completely reject the Nehruvian principle of resistance neither the neoliberal view of engagement with great powers but they believe that India has all the appurtenances of a great power and can, through an act of will, transform its potential into actuality. Ultimately, India must sit at the high table of international affairs as a complete and assertive equal specially by building its military capabilities. Autonomy should be exercised as long as it helps India to stand firm on vital interests. Pratap Bhanu Mehta insists that India should be an area of great power agreement and see each issue on its merits, to think hard about our interests.(Mehta,2016). Rajagopalan argues that, "The idea that we can make a la carte choices on strategic issues is equally difficult to understand. Issues are linked, even if they are not zero-sum... This is not a recipe for strategic autonomy but for strategic loneliness." He further asserts that the proponents of the strategic autonomy argument often fail to recognise that while partnerships come with some constraints, under many circumstances they are also a deliverance. (Rajagopalan,2016). Autonomy is thought appropriate for weak states trying to protect themselves from great-power competition but not for a rising force such as India.) As India starts to recognize that its political choices have global consequences, it will become less averse to choosing sides on specific issues (Rajamohan,2006:29)

4. QUEST FOR RECOGNITION AND STRATEGY OF ENGAGEMENTS

India's strategic thought and diplomacy was guided with the ominous quest for recognition and to have its status acknowledged. Thomas Volgy makes a distinction between being major power and being attributed a major power status by other states, whereby the relationship between status attribution and various forms of material capabilities and foreign policy behaviors is not straightforward. Attribution can occur as states in the international system recognize a group of other states as having achieved the status of being a major power, referred as community attribution (Volgy ,2011:6-10). India in the post-cold war period attempted to reinvigorate its relations through an overall strategy of seeking constructive engagement. The important element of this strategy was to build its recognition among the world community by establishing mutually beneficial relationships with major powers and neighbouring countries alike and to extend its economic pursuits. The economic dimension of Indian foreign policy had focused to a larger extent on seeking economic aid shifted its emphasis to trade, investment (Schaffer,2010). Economic partnerships, a slew of free-and preferential-trade agreements with individual countries as well as multilateral bodies including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and the Southern African Development Community became essential aspects. Thus, India's engagements serve two main purposes of gaining recognition and

fulfilling its pursuit capability building. Present Foreign Secretary S. Jaishanker comments, "the quest towards becoming a leading power rests first and foremost on our success of expanding economic pursuit. The role of diplomacy in attracting foreign investment, capital, technology and best practices is significant. This has been central issue in our engagements abroad including high level visits... persuading key partners to understand that it is in their interest that India develops its economy is the core interest of diplomacy"(Jaishankar,2016).

5. ADVOCATES FOR A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

Amidst the various structural conditions India's emergence as a major power also depends on the kind of international system that prevails. The strategic thinking on this includes concepts covering international power structures that India thinks will be preferable to its rise. India prefers a world with diffused centers of power, It sees itself acquiring its desired status and taken more seriously within such a system. A polycentric or multipolar world will not only be more conducive towards absorbing a new power but it will also be conducive towards acknowledging it with more flexible terms of operation. This would provide greater strategic flexibility and the concerned efforts for integration and interconnectedness will be much more indigenous and free from a specific structure forced by a hegemonistic state. Shyam Saran perceives "greater strategic space" for the country in the emerging international order that is "more diffused and diversified." Shyam Saran goes on to add that it "fits well with our own instinctive preference for a multipolar world, which includes a multipolar Asia." He suggests that India should work with other countries that share this objective and "build coalitions on different issues of shared concern" (Saran,2006). The world should be better ruled by more powers, where old and new powers have balanced influence on world leadership affecting its decisions and planning. They can speak for and support other states inside or outside their alliances, previously marginalized or manipulated by single or few unopposed superpowers.

"From Indian perspective, the ideal world will consist of many great powers, each dominant in its own region, and pledged to avoid interference across regions" (Cohen,2001:32).

6. ESPOUSES AN ALTERNATIVE WORLD ORDER

With India's desire to be acknowledged as a major power with definite degree of autonomy, it levels its struggle for an international order that is

(a) a world with multiple centers of power freed from the constraints of working under an overarching structure constructed by one or more superpowers.

(b) India has long leveled its criticism against biases in the international system and strives to promote a more emancipatory and receptive structure that will be conducive to emerging or developing nations.

Philip Nel suggests that this struggle of redistribution and recognition is an intersubjective process which strives not only for the acknowledgement of equal status but also as agents with distinct needs and interests that may or may not coincide with the presumed universal interests of established states" (Nel,2010:954). India in its strive to bring about alteration in the established order acts through two distinct ways, (a) It tries inducing changes in norms and rules by working within the established institutions through negotiations or by building sub-forums with others, (b) To construct and participate in indigenous regional attempts to form new organizations or institutions that can provide alternative approaches to address the concerns.

It utilizes its predominant regional and emerging global stature to try and shape the international economic environment to bring it closer to what it perceives to be optimal conditions for the domestic and global advancement of the developing world. Within WTO India vociferously advocates for a fairer distribution of the benefits of trade and the removal of non-tariff obstacles, increased development-focused capital flows and others. India has been promoting its distributive approach to international negotiations through its active participation within the New QUAD to alter the decision making processes in WTO, with other developing countries through G20 and G77, Heiligendamm Process along with emerging economies of Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa.

India is an enthusiastic participant in various indigenous regional organizations and identifies with the self reliant efforts of the regional actors to address questions of economy, trade, security etc. in contrast to the established norms. India has established links with diverse organizations ranging from ASEAN, BRICS, IBSA to organizations with extended

neighbourhood including BIMSTEC, Mekong-Ganga Initiative. Such regional endeavours works toward institutionalizing policy co-ordination on a range of fronts between regional powers across regions, encouraging bilateral and multilateral trade, reciprocal investment by developing infrastructural links between member countries, negotiating strategies in areas as diverse as multilateral trade talks, climate and environmental issues, financial and technology regulation and management.

However, the degree with which India voices its concerns against the established norms it has been quite lukewarm in its efforts to contribute new ideas or processes to these regional initiatives and rather remains satisfied by just being a participant. As the present Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar (2016) points out, "India should drive rather than be driven by regional co-operation. Infact, we should be pursuing our goals purposefully without letting be overtly influenced by the limitations of our partners or diverted by difficulties of the day."

7. CONCLUSION: STILL A MAJOR POWER IN MAKING?

India's actions and aspirations on the global stage has changed dramatically towards greater activism and leveraging of its economic strength. Yet such activism and engagements have not resulted in its emergence as a system determining power.

A majority opinion sways to the fact of India's inability to substantially contribute or influence the international order or any major global event by individual effort. Power among interdependent entities has two facets. Negative power involves the ability to resist a particular set of rules and processes sought to be established; positive power involves the ability to actively shape regimes through processes of generating ideas, persuasion, and bargaining. In regime building, India exhibits greater readiness to use its capability than it does in traditional strategic relationships, but thus far it has exercised only negative power in resisting the construction of regimes it sees as inimical to its interests. Until it shows the capacity to wield positive power in the politics of regimes, it will remain, at best, a state aspiring to become a major power (Basrur, 2011:184). Some have argued that it has potential, but has a considerable way to go; it can resist strong pressures to alter its strategic behavior, but it is not yet able to exercise significant influence on others (Mistry 2004; Nayar and Paul 2003; Perkovich 2003/2004).

Its aspirations hasn't been accompanied by an emphatic thrust for its achievement. Building capabilities have been gradual and incremental and thus lags behind in comparison with other major powers. The vigor with which the international actors propelled India to a global power status seldom matches with the incoherent strategic vision India still has about the role and purpose it would serve as an emergent power.

At the global level, India is a state with currently limited capacities and limited status attribution, but considerable potential in the long term to lay claim to the status of a major power. Aspiring a major power status will continue as India's dominant strategic objective and it will continue seeking a world order where its objective can be fulfilled. As an aspiring power India's interest should lie in leveraging the dominant, collaborating with the convergent and managing the competition. India needs to resist the established order by acting on two simultaneous roles by complying and supporting the existing structure to gain legitimization to its rise while resisting the aspects it sees as biased and contributing to form alternative emancipatory strategies.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Bajpai Kanti and Varun Sahni (2008). *Hegemony and Strategic Choice*, In: Chandra Chari ed., *War, Peace and Hegemony in a Globalized World: The Changing Balance Of Power in 21st Century*, 1st ed. Routledge: Oxon, pp. 97-102.
- Basrur Rajesh (2011), *India: A Major power in Making*. In: Thomas Volgy et. Al ed., *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politics*, 1st ed. Palgrave Macmillan: New York, p.184

- Basrur, Rajesh (2010). Global Quest and Regional Reversal: Rising India and South Asia, *International Studies*, 47 (2-4), pp.267-84.
- Cohen Stephen P. (2001). *India: Emerging Power*, 1st ed. Brookings Institution Press: Washington D.C.
- Ganguly, Sumit, ed. (2003). *India as an Emerging Power*, 1st ed. London & Portland, OR: Frank Cass.
- Hoffman Steven (2002), Indo- U.S strategic Worldviews, in Ashok Kapur et al ed., *India and The united states in a Changing world*, 1st ed. Sage Publications: New Delhi. P.229
- Jaishankar S. (2016), "India as a leading Power", Keynote Address delivered on 6th April 2016 at the launch of Carnegie India: New Delhi, URL: <http://carnegieindia.org/2016/04/06/launch-of-carnegie-india-event-5186>
- Johnston, Alastair Iain (1995), Thinking About Strategic Culture, *International Security*, 19(4), pp. 32-64.
- Kiesow, Ingolf and Nicklas Noring (2007), *The Rise of India: Problems and Opportunities*. Washington, DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute; and Uppsala: Silk Road Studies Program
- Mistry, Dinshaw (2004.), A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment of India as an Emerging Power, *India Review*, 3(1), pp. 64-87.
- Nau, Henry.R and Deepa M. Ollapally ed.(2012), *Worldview Of Aspiring Powers: Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China,India,Iran,Japan, Russia*, 1st ed. Oxford University Press: U.S.A, pp. 1-5.
- Nel Philip (2010), Redistribution and Recognition: What emerging regional powers want, *Review of International Studies*, 36(4), pp.951-974.
- Ogden Chris (2011), International Aspirations of a Rising power. In David Scott ed., *Handbook of India's International Relations*, 1st ed. Routledge: London,p.5.
- Paul T.V and Baldev Raj Nayar (2003), *India In The World Order: Searching for Major Power Status*,1st ed. Cambridge University Press: United Kingdom, pp.233-242.
- Perkovich, George (2003-04), Is India a Major Power?, *Washington Quarterly*, 27 (1), pp. 129-44.
- Mehta Pratap Bhanu (2016), The Great Delusion, *Indian Express*, New Delhi, 29th August 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-nsg-nuclear-supply-group-membership-china-the-great-delusion>
- Rajagopalan Rajesh (2016), India, China & NSG: Partnership vs Strategic autonomy, *ORF Raisina Debates*, 2nd July 2016 <http://www.orfonline.org/expert-speaks/india-china-and-nsg-partnership-vs-strategic-autonomy/> [Accessed on 24th September,2017]
- Rajamohan C. (2016), India and The Major Powers, speech delivered on 6th April 2016 at the launch of Carnegie India:New Delhi, URL: <http://carnegieindia.org/2016/04/06/launch-of-carnegie-india-event-5186> [Accessed on 7th August,2017]
- Raja Mohan C. (2006), India and the Balance of Power, *Foreign Affairs*, 85(4), pp. 17-32.
- Saran Shyam (2006), 'Present Dimensions of the Indian Foreign Policy'—address by Foreign Secretary Mr Shyam Saran at Shanghai Institute of International Studies, 11 January 2006, Embassy of India, Washington, DC, <http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail994/—%09—'presentdimensions-of-the-indian-foreign-policy'—address-by-foreign-secretary-mr.-shyamsaran-at-shanghai-institute-of-international-studies> [accessed on 28 October 2010].
- Schaffer Teresita (2010), *India and the United States in 21st century: Reinventing Partnership*, 1st ed.,New Delhi: India Research Press.
- "Background Briefing by Administration Officials on U.S.- South Asia Relations," United States Department of State, March 25, 2005. Available at <http://www.fas.org/terrorism/at/docs/2005/StatePressConfer25mar05.htm> [Accessed on July 24, 2017].
- Volgy Thomas J. et. al (2011), *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politics*, 1st ed.,Palgrave Macmillan: New York, pp. 6-10.