



INTERPRETING INDIA'S RISE AND ITS GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS. INTRODUCTION

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Abstract:

This issue of the UNISCI Journal focuses on key aspects of India's external relations that are becoming increasingly important for its global image in the twenty-first century. Some of these aspects have yet to receive the attention from scholars and policymakers that they deserve. Despite its thematic limitations, this special issue on India sheds light on critical aspects of its foreign and security policies that highlight the country's rise and its global implications.

Keywords: India's rise, India's Foreign Policy, Greater India, Hindu civilization, soft security, diaspora, complex interdependence, Global South, India and the EU, India and the US, India and China, India and Israel, India and West Asia, India and South Asia

Titulo en Español: Interpretando el Auge de la India y sus Implicaciones Globales

Resumen:

Este número de la revista UNISCI se centra en cuestiones fundamentales en las relaciones exteriores de la India, cada vez más relacionadas con su proyección global en el siglo XXI. Algunas de estas cuestiones aún no han recibido la atención que merecen por parte de los académicos y los responsables políticos., Este número especial trata de arrojar luz sobre diversas cuestiones fundamentales que ponen de relieve el auge de la India y sus implicaciones.

Palabras Clave: *El auge de India, la política exterior de India, la Gran India, la civilización hindú, la seguridad blanda, la diáspora, la interdependencia compleja, el Sur Global, la India y la UE, la India y los EE. UU., la India y China, la India e Israel, la India y Asia Occidental, la India y Asia Meridional.*

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1. Introduction

Tracing the rise of a new power in international affairs is relatively easy in comparison to assessing its impact on others. Attempts to assess the impact of India's growing stature as an international actor as a part of the 'rising non-Western world' paradigm on other actors in international system, thus, is a difficult task which need to consider historical trajectories, bilateral and multilateral permutations and combinations and challenges of an increasingly fast evolving and fluid global order. It has been argued, for instance,

A country's stature in global politics is often determined by its popular image and popular perceptions, as reflected in the global media and in the public sphere. Imagery and perceptions regarding a country, of course, never remain static but evolve over time and through different phases of historical transformation...

While India is generally recognised as a 'rising power' broadly conforming to the internationally accepted global norms and an emerging global economic hub, there are prevailing negative perceptions about the country's socio-economic backwardness, gender inequality, ethnic divisions and conflicts along with alleged rise in political authoritarianism which hamper global projection of India's image.²

The global South's growing international prominence has also increased attention to their internal dynamics and operations, as well as their external relationships and behavioural patterns. The question of whether the rising powers' foreign policies have been sufficiently and necessary adjusted to match their newly acquired status, whether they are irredentist, challenging the current global order in various ways, or whether they are more focussed on balancing the impact of their rise by forming alliances and coordinating their policies with existing global powers, is, in short, the focus of much of the world's media (and academia) today. However, there are some inherent risks to such future projections, primarily because these analyses frequently rely on incomplete data and historical patterns and attempt to make future projections based on the reading of the present. These projections are also susceptible to various cognitive biases, which are defined as empirically observed deviations from normative expectations.³

The 'rising India' phenomenon has sought to be addressed from different ends of the spectrum, particularly since the 1990s. In terms of Realist projection, this rise is essentially associated with India's military growth and strategic assertion along with economic growth. India's policymaking, however, tends to confuse analysts which often tend to generate more negativity in the global press or relative absence in India coverage. Analyst Subrata Mitra feels ""(F)oreign observers depending on their own national origin and context, place their bets on predictions of India's next move either as the 'regional bully' or the 'regional push-over'. India, in its contradictory style, often proves both speculations to be right, appearing in the process to be either mystical and moralistic, or utterly devoid of principle or doctrine."⁴ In any case, as M. Torri notes:

If there is one thing that is certain about India – nowadays as it was two hundred or two thousand years ago – it is that Indian reality is extremely complex and highly contradictory. In order to make sense of it, one has to be aware that India cannot be described with simple – and

² Chakrabarti, Shantanu (2024): *Nation branding in Non-Western Societies- Projecting India as a 'Civilisation State'* New Delhi: ICWA & KW Publications, p. vii

³ Saez, Lawrence: 'The future of South Asia', *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2013, pp.3-5

⁴ Mitra, Subrata K. Mitra (2017): *Politics in India: Structure, Process and Policy*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2nd edn., p. 229



simplistic – formulas. Only a painstaking and careful analysis of the facts can provide a realistic appraisal of its complex and fast changing reality.⁵

Scholars and researchers, however, love to take up difficult and complex issues. The growth in Indian ‘rise’ and foreign policy analyses related literature, particularly tracing India’s growth trajectory in recent decades, has emerged as an important sub-genre within International Studies and Foreign Policy Analyses. Much of this research, is however, concerned with the stories of India’s material growth, economic and in terms of military strength and performance, which have led India to become a prominent global player. Indian foreign policy experts are also engaged with India’s evolving relations with the global order, bilateral and multilateral, with countries, prominent non-state actors and multilateral institutions. This special volume of the UNISCI on India’s growth and its global implications, would of course, focus on many of these things. But it also aims at covering the gaps related to the relative lacuna in focus on the subjective factors behind India’s growth trajectory; the ways and way India’s historical heritage has been subjectively analysed and debated by different regimes and the socio-cultural influences on the foreign policy establishment and state-society interface. It has been argued, for instance, that in “substance, foreign policy, like the state itself, may be perceived as Janus-faced – full of contradictions and multi-layered complexities in its democratic basis and with a steady open space for contestation, and in the end based on a fluid discourse of ‘national interest’ and a pragmatic approach to global affairs. As mentioned before, domestic factors, to a very high degree, shape the modus operandi of external relations among international entities.”⁶

In its attempts to ‘modernise’ the country’s Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India is now opening increasingly to influences from outside its establishment-core, for instance, through collaboration with foreign and privately funded think tanks, business and trade groups and lateral recruitment of external experts whose help is used by the state in organising major events projecting the state including the Raisina Dialogue, India’s prestigious annual conference held annually in New Delhi since 2016. How have these subjective factors helped in moulding opinions and in shaping up of India’s foreign policy discourse, particularly since early twenty first century? Finding answers to some of these key issues; one hopes, would make the volume more comprehensive and holistic and would be interesting to researchers interested in India’s story. Another important visible trend in India’s global policymaking has been attempts to brand India as a ‘civilizational state’. Though, not new, and not entirely state-centric,⁷ such attempts usually are critiqued in the Western academia as challenging the global international order which has largely been sustained since post-1945 period despite challenges. Non-western civilizational states, however, are not of a singular type. India’s growth and self-projection as a civilizational state, therefore, differs from that of Russia and/or China, as such projections are dependent upon unique historical trajectories of nations and their elite perceptions of the evolving global order. More detailed research as to how history and contemporary perceptions coincide and are adapted by the state elite are required for better understanding of this process.

This special issue focusses upon some of these key issues which focus on the dynamics of ‘India’s rise’ and its myriad implications. For the purpose, the special issue is divided into

⁵ Torri, Michelguglielmo: ‘India Rising? The Indian Miracle and its Dark Side’, *The International Spectator*, Vol. 46, n° 2 (2011), pp.38-39

⁶ Schmidt, Johannes Dragsbæk and Chakrabarti, Shantanu: “The interface of domestic and international factors in India’s foreign policy: Introducing the issues”, in Schmidt, Johannes Dragsbæk and Chakrabarti, Shantanu(eds.) (2021): *The Interface of Domestic and International Factors in India’s Foreign Policy*, Abingdon, Routledge, p.4

⁷ For details see Chakrabarti, Shantanu (2024): *Nation branding in nonwestern societies: projecting India as a ‘civilisation state’*, New Delhi, ICWA & KW Pub.



two sections followed by this brief introductory. Section 1 titled **Conceptualising India's rise-external and internal dimensions** includes seven articles. The first article by Shibashis Chatterjee and Sreya Maitra traces the transition from India's idealist foreign policy during Nehruvian Era to its present-day pragmatism. It contends this stems from India's global leadership claim, which is caught between lofty normative goals and material constraints. India's foreign policy, in this connection, exhibits an interplay between global systemic pressures and domestic preferences, influenced by postcolonial anxieties and a distinct civilizational identity. The second article by Jolita Zabarskaitė takes up the historical process of the 'Greater India' movement which flourished in the first half of the twentieth century and died out shortly after India's independence and tries to show how the historical memories related to that movement are being adapted and used as a key component of India's civilizational projection in recent times. Zabarskaitė argues that the concept of 'Greater India', by implying Southeast Asia's subordination to Indian civilization, serves as a historical framework to assert India's cultural and geopolitical influence. As it has reappeared in the last decade, it has taken older forms, but without some of the subtleties of those forms.

In the third article by Vidushi Kaushik and John Doyle focusses on the internal problematics within Indian state-society interface which hampers India's projection and rise. It highlights these internal contradictions through India's approach to addressing armed violence in the case of the Maoist conflict and the racializing logic it applies towards its Adivasi population. The authors link this approach to the homogenizing and Hindu civilisational approach that has gained primacy in India's foreign policy over the past fifteen years, since the BJP came into power.

The following two articles focus on the issue of India's soft power in operation. Professor Ajaya Das traces how India's soft power has been analysed over the years since its conceptualisation in the 1990s. As a critique, Das argues that most of the focus has been on its potential non-military elements of soft power thereby perpetuating illusion about India's soft power rather than its real power or influence. Sohom Bhattacharyya, on the other hand puts his focus on India's soft power projections under Narendra Modi's leadership and how his tenure has reoriented the foreign policy of India by foregrounding cultural diplomacy, civilisational heritage and diaspora outreach as some of the major strategic tools for global influence.

The article by Rajsekhar Basu and Sayantika Biswas analyses India's diasporic links, a key factor in the country's growing global engagement. Among the largest and most heterogeneous global communities, Indians abroad have become central to debates on identity, migration, and transnationalism. The Indian case exemplifies the plurality of society and the heterogeneity of migration phases, causes, and host country contexts, making it difficult to subsume under a single paradigm.

The final article in this section reorients our focus on traditional security. The authors Ratnadeep Maitra and Tapas Das scrutinize the synthesis of geoeconomics and security in the semiconductor industry, drawing on Buzan's theorization of "multi-dimensional security" and Keohane and Nye's conceptualization of "complex interdependence". Finally, it interrogates how India may shape the emergent network of supply chains, harnessing rare earths, and the consequent implications for technological security.

Section II of this special volume titled **India's global engagement- bilateral and multilateral** includes ten articles. The first in this section, written by Swaran Singh analyses India's relations with the so-called superpowers- USA, Russia and China. Drawing on strategic hedging theory and network-security analysis, process-tracing of their recent interactions, the article argues that, as part of rising India's major-power engagements, its interactions with these three superpowers have evolved from conventional compartmentalised bilateralism into an



increasingly interconnected strategic ecosystem shaped by defence-industrial linkages, geo-economic networks, and the diplomatic logic of rivalrous multipolarity. In the next article in this section, author Agnieszka Kuszewska-Bohnert focusses on India's evolving relations with the European Union (EU) and argues that India's role in the European Union's foreign and security policy was for decades overshadowed by the focus on economic issues, trade talks, and development cooperation with New Delhi being only recently regarded as a potential strategic partner in Indo-Pacific and maritime security, a role reflected in several substantive initiatives. This article investigates the challenges of EU-India security interactions by referring to three inter-related dimensions that together explain their drivers and limitations: strategic opportunities, structural constraints and political ambiguities. The next article by Urbi Das traces evolving nature of India-US relations with special reference to the Indo-Pacific region. The article seeks to investigate the significance of the Indo-Pacific to India and US's security calculations and the implications in light of the rise of China and its assertiveness in the region. Article by Subhadeep Bhattacharya continues the focus on Indo-Pacific region. The author argues that the Indo-Pacific strategic notion revolves mostly round the perception of China's assertive rise and the probable decline of US-led liberal international order which triggers strategic competition and rivalry between the rising and dominant powers. He concludes that given the challenges within its neighbourhood, India has little scope of really emerging as a significant player in the immediate future. Article by Priya Singh focusses on evolving bilateralism of India and Israel. Tracing how ideas, infrastructures and economic strategies intersect within this bilateral relationship, she argues that there has been a paradigmatic shift in the relationship from its earlier security oriented one to a more multi-level engagement in recent times. In the article number thirteen, Kingshuk Chatterjee traces India's engagement with West Asia/Middle East. In the three decades since liberalization of Indian economy in the 1990s, the author argues, India's policy towards the Middle East has continued to develop along a uniform trajectory regardless of the party in power. In recent years India has made some attempts de-hyphenate its West Asia connectivity from the Pakistan focus and has continued to focus major attention on the Arab shores of the Persian Gulf as a region, without compromising its old ties to the north of the Gulf. At the same time, India has developed new ties with new allies like Israel, in ways that were beyond imagination before the 1990s.

The last three articles in this section analyse India's projections and relations within its immediate neighbourhood of South Asia and extended areas. Tanwir Arshed looks at India's failures to infuse cooperative mentality within South Asia and suggests adopting new initiatives beyond the lens of traditional acquaintance of security and securitisation, using three main constructive exploration; firstly through mapping India's lost civilization and cultural heritage, secondly, tracing the postcolonial patters of sub-regional engagements and connectivity initiatives, and, finally its portraying a unique version of non-western humanitarian and value based assistive diplomacy. Anwesh Gosh's article analyses India's soft power strategy in Afghanistan across three phases: its consolidation (2001–2021), abrupt disruption following the Taliban's return, and cautious recalibration thereafter. The analysis illuminates the tension between values and realpolitik in India's evolving Afghanistan policy and evaluates the opportunities and constraints of its current "humanitarian-plus" approach within a broader quest for regional stability and strategic autonomy. The final article written by Tapas Das and Tanwir Arshed focusses on factors behind recent turbulence in India-Bangladesh relations. This essay examines the nature of the ensuing changes, marked by deepening relational fault lines and a heightened security dilemma in the following year, driven by the rise of Islamist factions and Dhaka's growing defense cooperation with Beijing.

As the editor and coordinator of this special issue, I would like to thank all the contributors for submitting their though provoking essays. India's foreign policymaking and.



projections may include and cover numerous areas and can be studied through multiple angles using various theoretical analyses. I had the pleasure of coordinating and editing another special issue of the UNISCI Journal on India in 2019 which had focussed on the theme of *Indian Strategic and Foreign Policy Making*,⁸ which had focussed more on realpolitik and India's bilateral and multilateral interactions and engagements with little focus on subjective factors (though not altogether absent as one of the essays by Pradeep Gautam in that volume was on Dharma and the moral aspects of statecraft in Indian policymaking).⁹ It is not possible, and perhaps, not desirable to cover all issues at one time. As an editor, I am aware of the existing gaps and critical shortcomings in this special issue. Our aim, however, is to focus on some of the issues which have become important and are increasingly associated with India's global projections in recent period, some of which are yet to receive the scholarly and policymakers' attention which, we feel, these issues deserve. If the articles included in this special issue could help in sparking more scholarly interest in these directions, one would feel reasonably satisfied that the task initiated has not been in vain.

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⁸ For details see Special Issue on Indian Strategic and Foreign Policy Making, Journal UNISCI/Revista UNISCI n°49 (Enero/January 2019), Journal UNISCI/Revista UNISCI n°49 (Enero/January 2019) Special Issue on Indian Strategic and Foreign Policy Making, Shantanu Chakrabarti (coordinator) | UNISCI

⁹ See, Gautam, Pradeep: 'Dharma: the moral aspects of statecraft', *UNISCI Special Issue on Indian Strategic and Foreign Policy Making*, Journal UNISCI/Revista UNISCI n°49 (Enero/January 2019, pp. 29-42