India 2.0: A strategic transformation from slumber to hyper-nationalism under Modi Regime

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Abstract

This research views growing hyper-nationalism in India from a historical context till its culmination under the Modi regime. For this purpose, the study has been divided into three phases; narrative building, pre-partition, and post-partition. The research argues that hyper-nationalism and chanting of Hindutva under the Modi regime in India is not a new phenomenon, but rather deeply rooted in the Indian strategic culture since Chanakya. Moreover, it contends that India's strategic culture is formative and the study endeavors to develop a contextual analysis of Chanakya's strategic thought and its relevance in India 2.0. Moreover, it has also been argued that how the idea of superiority was constructed through academic discourse, by orthodox Hindus. Furthermore, this research takes a deep insight into India's bandwagoning with major global actors like the U.S. and Russia to counter China and argues that India's philosophy of non-alignment and peace-loving nation is based on contrast in theory and practice. This study is descriptive in nature and critically elaborates on how Hindutva has been used as a means to an end in India 2.0 under the Modi regime and indicates that this hyper-nationalism is driven by history and takes its roots from Chanakya's view on strategic culture.

Key Words: India 2.0, Strategic Culture, Strategic Modernization, Hindutva, Chanakya, Modi Regime, Hyper Nationalism.

Introduction

Security and survival are the two key components that go side by side. In volatile regions such as South Asia, it becomes inevitable that two rival states compete to show prowess through strategic bandwagoning with regional and global players. India and Pakistan are the key players in South Asia with disputed territories in addition to conventional and non-conventional asymmetry, and diplomatic standoff. China is another angle to this equation, but Sino-India relations are unique with an understanding of competition and cooperation. However, India is in a befitting position in the region as all other states in the immediate periphery share borders with India and therefore have strategic dependence. In this context, external and internal factors are key motivators for rapid strategic modernization. The paramount external strand is the China factor. The U.S. National Security in 2022 declared

China a systemic threat and this convergent factor led to the Indo-U.S. alliance. Therefore, the U.S. sides with India to counterweight China in the region while India plays its cards wisely by manipulating the scenario to build its strategic clout by signing multiple agreements with the U.S. such as The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) for geospatial intelligence sharing. Moreover, the U.S. presence in the Indo-Pacific and its position as a prominent arms supplier especially to the neighboring countries of China like India became part of its grand strategy (Barrech & Siddiqa, 2022). Furthermore, the Indo-U.S. partnership gives India strategic leverage to balance against China defensively and assertively vis-à-vis neighboring states. (Mehta, 2022; Malik & Qayyum, 2022) pointed out the involvement of multiple factors in instigating the flames of insecurity in South Asia which includes domestic and international involvement. To avoid strategic imbalance in the region, peace-building measures are inevitable to develop a coherent strategy that ensures regional security. This article has four sections, the first section deals with the narrative phase, the second section lays out the Hindu renaissance, the third section previews the non-alignment phase, and the fourth phase the bandwagoning and hyper-nationalism under Modi in India 2.0.

Apart from external factors, an indigenous factor that prevails in Indian strategic culture, is a superiority complex that compels India to employ strategies to uphold its regional dominance. This superiority complex compels India to utilize modern techniques from hybrid warfare and propaganda techniques to nurturing defense start-ups. However, strategic modernization in India is driven by the quantum of security challenges, the perceptions of the strategic environment, and their alignment to the contemporary threat perceptions kept on evolving. In a wider perception, a strategic culture receives impacts from the indigenous environment, non-traditional threats, thinking, and behaving patterns within society, and civil-state nexus. Therefore, to analyze and describe the transformation of the strategic environment in India this study will interlink all these internal and external factors with analytical and descriptive methods. Chanakya's concept of security will be used in a descriptive method to explore India's personification as a regional hegemon to ultimately serve its purpose as "Akhand Bharat" or greater India.

What is Strategic Culture?

Culture refers to the shared beliefs, values, and norms that define a society (Cowen, 2002). Each political system has a unique culture shaped by history, experiences, rivalries, and ideologies. These internal factors significantly influence culture's growth and endurance. Ideally, culture is indigenous, developed from within the society, rather than adopted from outside influences. However, in an era of globalization, complete isolation is impossible, as continuous external interactions inevitably affect the original characteristics of a culture. As cultures interact, they merge and influence one another, leading to cultural and strategic shifts. Similarly, each state possesses a unique strategic culture that originates from its historical roots and undergoes evolution and adaptation in response to geopolitical changes. However, intermingling with other cultures can also be destructive for indigenous culture and it is imperative to ventilate the unnecessary traits (Marbaniang, 2015).
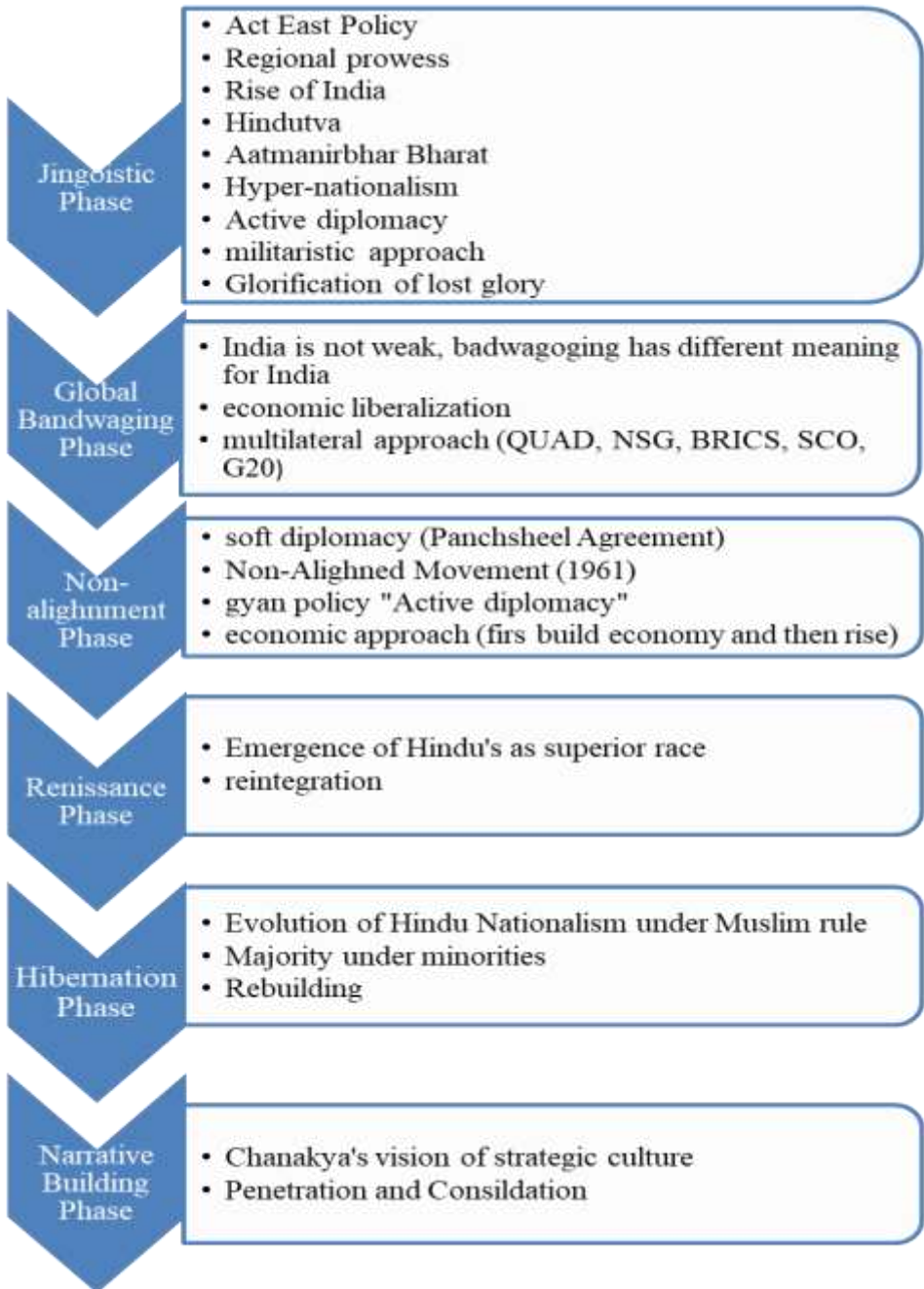
Lantis (2009) explained in detail the nature of culture and strategic culture through his work and elaborated that culture encompasses historical, cultural, and

geographical factors that determine a state's approach whereas, strategic culture refers to the set of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors driven by socialization process and elites of the society and in turn influence to shape a nation's approach to security and military strategy. Moreover, according to Tanham (1992) the geopolitical setting, geographical location, belief system, values, leadership behavior, role of elites, and historical experiences are certain variables that are involved in shaping a strategic culture. Bhaskaran (2020) defines strategic culture as shared beliefs, values, and symbols shaping a nation's view on security and its preferred strategies for achieving security goals. Khan & Mehmood (2020) explained the variation in the meaning of strategic culture and its adaptability in different scenarios and identified the Cold War politics and rivalry between the two blocks gave impetus to the states in the global South to follow the same patterns.

India has cultural unity apart from subcultures and this unity is reflected in Indian strategic thinking (Tanham, 1992). In addition, Indian strategic culture is not a byproduct of deliberate planning but rather evolved over successive regimes with distinctive historical roots (Bajpai, 2002). According to Malik & Qayyum (2022) India's strategic culture, shaped by nationalist policies and Kautilyan ideas, emphasizes regional dominance, especially about Pakistan. Moreover, the rise of Hindutva under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has strengthened an offensive stance and is driven by internal factors like economic challenges, media influence, and the Congress Party's decline, along with support from non-resident Indians (Wulff, 1997; Schaffer & Schaffer, 1998). British Raj played a significant role in arousing Indian nationalism (Tanham, 1992). Similarly, Jindal (2019) opines that the strategic culture proposed by Kautilya is still in practice in India and the concept of force is used to preserve territorial integrity and not vice versa. Crucially, the transformation in Hindu self-identity played a pivotal role in fueling the growth of Hindu nationalism.

Historical Evolution of Strategic Culture in India:

The transformation of strategic culture in India can be divided into six phases, illustrated as follows:

Jingoistic Phase
- Act East Policy
- Regional prowess
- Rise of India
- Hindutva
- Aatmanirbhar Bharat
- Hyper-nationalism
- Active diplomacy
- militaristic approach
- Glorification of lost glory

Global Bandwaging Phase
- India is not weak, badwagoging has different meaning for India
- economic liberalization
- multilateral approach (QUAD, NSG, BRICS, SCO, G20)

Non-alighnment Phase
- soft diplomacy (Panchsheel Agreement)
- Non-Alighned Movement (1961)
- gyan policy "Active diplomacy"
- economic approach (firs build economy and then rise)

Renissance Phase
- Emergence of Hindu's as superior race
- reintegration

Hibernation Phase
- Evolution of Hindu Nationalism under Muslim rule
- Majority under minorities
- Rebuilding

Narrative Building Phase
- Chanakya's vision of strategic culture
- Penetration and Consildation

Source: Author's illustration based on Indian strategic culture

1. Narrative Building Phase: Chanakya's Concept of Security:

Strategic modernization and developing strategic partnerships are not a new phenomenon in Indian security goals, it can be traced back to the old dynasties and a true glimpse of it can be seen in the Chandragupta dynasty. Chanakya also known as Kautilya was a minister under the Chandragupta dynasty, and his famous book "Artashastra" entails a profound study of rules and principles relating to security and foreign policy. His ideas related to the state are very much identical to Machiavelli's. He is known as Machiavelli of India, who had a pragmatic approach, which can be seen in his theory "Rajamandala" which means "Circle of states. The Rajmandala theory, developed by Kautilya, outlines a dynamic framework for a state's relations with its neighbors, centered around the concept that "the enemy of my enemy is my natural ally." It divides neighboring states into categories: the *vijigishu* (conqueror) at the center, surrounded by alliances and enmities. States are classified as *ari* (enemy), *mitra* (ally), *madhyama* (middle state with influence), and *udasina* (neutral), with each state's relationships shifting based on strategic interests and changing circumstances. The theory emphasizes fluid and situational alliances, rather than rigid or fixed alignments. It can be summarized as follows (Sethi, 2021):

- the state's self-interest and security should be the primary objective while maintaining relationships among states, which means realpolitik.
- every ruler in a circle of states desires to maintain his supremacy, for this, he used to conquer distant lands, the main aim to expand his territory by maintaining his dominance
- second circle of states can be considered a natural ally because according to this theory, contingent states would always be in a constrained relationship.

While explaining his thoughts on foreign relations and security, Chanakya explained the following principles;

- Making peace (samdhi): Agreements and coalitions must be encouraged when states are relatively in a weaker position to defend their territory, and war should be fought only when states possess robust militaries.
- Doing Nothing (Asara) opting for the wait-and-see policy in obscure situations, waiting for the right time.
- Preparation for war(yana) mobilization of forces with preparation for war
- Seeking Protection (Samsrya) alliance formation, treaties, and agreements with stronger states. And it can be with multiple states.

Apart from the external strategies, the internal environment was also taken into account in Kautilya's explanation and he proposed the idea of a powerful and hegemon ruler like vijigishu. According to him, only a despotic ruler can integrate a divided community through good governance, protection, and welfare of the inhabitants of its land (Jindal, 2019). However, history is evident that internal division prevailed as a fault line in undivided and post-partitioned India in terms of Hindu- Muslim conflict and ethnic conflicts with small communities subsequently. Therefore, key texts like Kautilya's *Arthashastra* have historically shaped Indian strategic thinking, alongside other influential works, and even in subsequent

centuries, its reflection can be seen through its influence in guiding national security policy and thought (Lantis, 2009). And the strategic culture of India has historical roots and has developed over successive regimes, rather than being the result of deliberate planning (Bajpai, 2002). This study also takes into account its relevance in contemporary India.

2. Hibernation Phase: Muslim Rule (712-1800)

For Hindu nationalism, the deep and lasting sense of colonial grievance arises not from British rule, but from the Muslim invasions that began with Muhammad Bin Qasim, spanning the eight centuries before British control was established in India (Mehta, 2022). In pre-colonial India, none of the Muslim empires attempted to transform the country into an Islamic state governed by Sharia law. Instead, most Muslim rulers followed a principle of concord, leading to the development of a complex and diverse social structure in the subcontinent. In late medieval India, a shared perspective between the two communities was often reflected in literature, poetry, and craftwork, highlighting common cultural and social values. This mutual influence in artistic expression worked as a bridge, fostering understanding and collaboration between diverse groups and promoting harmony in complex social dynamics. Furthermore, the efforts of later Mughal rulers such as Akbar and Aurangzeb, who promoted peaceful coexistence and adopted policies of concessions, played a crucial role in bridging the divide between the two communities (Tanham, 1992). However, during the colonial period, the British widened this gap by strategically employing a "divide and rule" approach (Wulff, 1997). In subsequent years, a smooth awakening of Hindu nationalism from slumber to renaissance can be seen.

3. Renaissance Phase: (1801-1947)

Hindu nationalism took birth even before the emergence of Muslim nationalism and in undivided India, it started quite early with Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Hindu ideologues, Parthana Samaj, Dev Samaj, Congress Party (1885), Cow Protection Society, and the linguistic differences like Hindi-Urdu controversy. The socio-political and religious disintegration between Hindus and Muslims helped the British Raj to consolidate their rule in the subcontinent by cleaving two divergent hostile communities (Ayoob, 2020). In this timeframe, both communities were measured in a majority-minority framework sponsored by the British Raj, and the major bone of contention in this context remained the issue of representation hence in the future both communities interfaced with divergent outlooks in a competitive term (Mehta, 2022).

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who developed the ideology of Hindutva drew inspiration from contemporary revolutions like Giuseppe Mazzini, the Italian revolutionary who embraced the idea of conflation of national identity with religious unification for achieving political objectives. (Wahab, 2021). Moreover, the Brahmin community was particularly victimized, as they felt a loss of power under Muslim rule. This was one of the reasons why many pro-Hindu movements in 18th-19th century like Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Hindu Mahasabha, and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS); Brahmins led the parent organization of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were led by Brahmins and later protection of Hindu identity and culture became the RSS's primary focus in undivided India. The organization made

significant efforts to distance itself from the freedom movement to avoid antagonizing the British authorities (Jaffrelot, 1999). Therefore, in undivided India, religion was strategically used by Hindus as a subtle tool to enhance their image as defenders of their faith (Wulff, 1997).

With the advent of Muslim rule in the Indian subcontinent, the Hindu's social structure began to deteriorate significantly (Wulff, 1997). Initially, a subtle or hidden approach was taken in response, but by the middle of the Muslim rule, a more proactive strategy was adopted and maintained until its end in the 19th century. Historical evidence shows that the destruction of Hindu temples during this period motivated Brahmins to protect their unique social structure, prompting them to develop a more assertive and militant approach. Hence, the Brahmins, driven by a sense of superiority, began to lead militant Hindu organizations. Swami Vivekananda also propagated the superiority of Brahmins and presented them as both oppressors and holders of high moral values aligned with some ideas of Gandhi (Marbaniang, 2015).

At the dawn of the 20th century, the resurgence of Hindu nationalism gained momentum, and the existence of the British Raj fanned the flames of ethnicity, religious disintegrations, and animosity between Hindu and Muslim communities. Thus, the rise of militant Hindu groups such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) occurred during this period. Additionally, Congress figures played a significant role in the freedom movement by promoting radical communal ideologies through appeals for cultural unity and religious harmony among Hindus. Literary circles also contributed significantly by producing pro-Hindu literature like the publication of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and the establishment of the RSS in 1925 are the glaring epitomes (Ayoob, 2020; Wulff, 1997). Therefore, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar played a key role in shaping the concept of a unified Hindu identity and promoting militant Hindu nationalism. He coined the term "Hindutva" in his 1923 booklet "Essentials of Hindutva," which was later republished as "Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu? (Wahab, 2021).

4. Cold War Dilemma and Non-Alignment Policy

Although India was a byproduct of decolonization and the world became bipolar during the Cold War, India kept a wait-and-see (asara) policy. Accordingly, in state of block politics when the two competing blocks; the capitalist (led by the U.S.) and the communist (led by the Soviet Union) kept engaging newly independent and truncated states in disguise as security providers, India kept its unique position and its strategic calculus was driven by two factors:

1. Non-alignment
2. India as a regional hegemon

Therefore, India successfully avoided becoming entangled in bipolar politics, while still actively engaging with regional blocs and offering a security framework for its neighboring states. In doing so, India emerged as a regional hegemon, pursuing strategic dominance in the region. Unlike Pakistan, which faced challenges with recognition and acceptance on the international stage, India already enjoyed global recognition, with its name firmly established on the world map (Tanham, 1992).

Furthermore, dynamic and responsive leadership also worked wonders for India, while on the contrary, Pakistan had to face a leadership vacuum after political executions and democratic turmoil. Nehru's leadership in India prioritized India's security as a fundamental concern, forging security arrangements aimed at deterring any external threats to both India and the region. This underlying objective drove the signing of agreements and treaties with neighboring countries. Hence, Chanakya's vision can be seen as fully incorporated into Indian strategic culture by making peace in the neighboring states. But in the post-partition milieu maintaining supremacy through conquer and expansion in the circle of states was unlikely. And to ensure regional clout, India adapted its strategic culture by offering security to the neighboring weaker states. Tanham, (1992) applied the Mandala theory in post-partitioned India as follows:

- India as the first circle state
- smaller neighboring states as second circle states
- Pakistan as third circle states
- China as rival
- USSR as a friend
- Indian Ocean as a fourth circle

It is a general phenomenon that emerging states put more emphasis on security than economic goals, however, economic strength is vital for long-term national resilience and according to Kautilya a new state should focus more on its economy than defense capability (Jindal, 2019). And similarly, the early era of independent India is known as the **Nehru Era (1947–1965)** and he prioritized economic development and maintained security by aligning Himalayan neighbors as economic allies rather than through direct control, and sought to avoid entanglements with major powers while countering China's influence. Therefore, Nehru worked to prevent Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim from separating from India and negotiated treaties with each other between 1949 and 1950. These agreements largely mirrored those made during British rule, with Bhutan's 1949 treaty granting India control over its foreign policy and military matters. However, the treaties with Nepal (1950) and Sikkim (1950) were more focused on security concerns following China's occupation of Tibet, including mutual defense clauses and provisions for India's military presence in Sikkim (Mohan, 2013) Chanakya's theory of Rajmandala can be seen when India signed the Tripartite agreement among Nepal, Britain, and India in 1947 in which India got the right to recruit soldiers from Nepal while this right before it was only vested with Britain. This shows India's superior clout in the neighboring states as India viewed its smaller neighboring countries as part of its security sphere and kept outside powers at bay. Hence, during the Cold War, India's foreign policy guided by Nehruvian principles, emphasized the Panchsheel Agreement, strategic autonomy non-alignment, and using the economy as a diplomatic tool.

Nehru's approach also focused on peacebuilding at home, economic policies, and diplomatic strategies to navigate global tensions. However, the key to this approach was initiatives like the Panchsheel principles for peaceful coexistence with neighbors and India's commitment to federalism and autonomy for diverse cultural

and linguistic groups to maintain internal security (Bhaskaran, 2020). India established security treaties with Sikkim and Bengal, later emerging as a protectorate of India, while its relationship with Bhutan focused solely on foreign policy. In contrast, India aimed to position Burma as a strategic partner in addressing Asia's security concerns but faced setbacks following the 1962 war with China.

After partition, the relationship with the Himalayan kingdom was ambiguous so independent India had two options: either to sustain the old security framework of Raj policy or to design the new one with a distinct outlook. In addition, China's independence in 1949 as a communist country and its occupation of Tibet raised serious potential threats to the region in general and India in specific. In this preview, the Chinese factor remained paramount because it stimulated India to entangle weaker states and their security concerns against the authoritarian communist regime in China. Accordingly, India wisely played strategic cards and was able to present its hegemonic position.

In addition to China, regional states like Iran and Pakistan were also on the periphery, but historically, India's security calculus did not significantly factor these two into its strategic equation. The non-alignment policy was only intended to deter external interference in the region and signal that India would not align with any international bloc. Behuria et al, (2012) describe India's neighborhood policy as one focused on fostering close relations with neighboring countries, balancing influence with sensitivity to their concerns. Thus, amidst concerns about the proliferation of communism in South Asia and despite external efforts to contain it, India maintained its commitment to non-alignment as a top priority. Therefore, China, Iran, and the United States influenced India to strengthen its strategic capabilities and assert its regional influence while minimizing external interference.

The later era after Nehru can be known as the **Indira Era (1965–1990)**. During this India adopted a realist approach and strengthened India's security through the Indo-Soviet Union partnership and subsequently the 1971 Simla Agreement between India and Pakistan was the result of Soviet mediation. During this phase, India's economy transformed from a vulnerable one to a mixed economy model and thus was able to pursue a strong economy, defense, and strategic apparatus to reduce external reliance and boost regional dominance. However, Indian discourse observed the least acceptance from neighboring regional countries of this increased Indian clout (Tanham, 1992; Behuria et al., 2012; Schaffer & Schaffer, 1998). The least acceptance from neighboring countries has been mentioned by Muni (2003) and this reluctant behavior was based on multiple factors; firstly, India's bilateral approach in dealing with neighboring countries because India was the embodiment of a non-aligned movement and failed to look at issues at a broader level. Secondly, neighboring states were tilting toward China, and thirdly the contrast in theory and practice as India was chanting the mantra of democracy and secularism but kept an indifferent attitude towards non-democratic regimes in neighboring countries (Hagerty, 1991).

To maintain a greater independent outlook and regional superiority, India also adopted a mixed economy and this became part of the Indian strategic culture that India always sought strategic partnerships, and economic avenues to share despite

having rivalries. This context can be understood by taking China as a key example. Apart from the Sino-India strategic rivalry and evolving security dynamics, India always preferred to seek trade opportunities with China. Although at multiple times they came across territorial disputes and lowest ebbs, this economic interdependence never drove them to full-scale war.

5. Post-Cold War Dilemma

The culmination of the Cold War with the following historic events transformed the security calculus of global and regional powers (Schaffer & Schaffer, 1998).

- disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
- a shift from bipolar to a unipolar world
- non-proliferation of nuclear weapons vs nuclear proliferation in South Asia

By the end of the Cold War, India emerged as a regional hegemon with increased international prestige, driven by economic liberalization and a non-aligned stance in world politics. Alongside economic independence, India pursued comprehensive strategic modernization, focusing on military advancement and socio-political and economic reforms. The overarching goal of these advancements was to establish India as a leader in regional politics, but after the culmination of the Cold War one more aspiration was added to participate in world politics with a unique amalgam of active and passive involvement.

The legacy of separatist movements in the subcontinent continued to stalk India in the post-partition. In this context, there is a widespread consensus in intellectual discourse that India's strategic culture is primarily influenced by internal dynamics more than external factors (Malik & Qayyum, 2022; Hudaya & Putri, 2019; Bajpai, 2002, Tanham, 1992). However, the subsequent shifts in Indian leadership focused on the evolution of the country's foreign policy with the least focus on internal dynamics (Schaffer & Schaffer, 1998). This era can be termed the Gujral Era (1996–2000) and negated the assertive policy enforced by the Indira Era. This era is known for liberalization, cooperative regional relations, a non-reciprocal approach to neighboring countries, and a strategic security shift with "No First Use" nuclear policy (Behuria et al., 2012). The "Gujral era," emphasized non-reciprocal benevolence towards smaller neighbors. Both doctrines reflect India's grand strategy, rooted in its plural, democratic, and secular identity, but differ in their methods of asserting influence in South Asia (Bhaskaran, 2020).

After the nuclearization of the region, a détente could be seen between India and Pakistan in the form of the Lahore Declaration however, the Kargil episode broke this détente and thus both historic rivals once again entered into a phase of mistrust. In subsequent years, India's strategic doctrines adapted India to the regional and global geostrategic environment and made India the net security provider. Therefore, India's passive approach became part of its strategic culture and India kept personifying itself as a peace-loving state that is not aligned but cooperative simultaneously. India's eagerness to maintain its dominant status has not vanished even after being nuclear and it kept flexing strategic muscle by signing defense treaties and nuclear deals with superpowers, in this fact, the Indian policies of "No First Use" and "pre-emptive strike" are inherently contradictory, a disparity that

predates geopolitical shifts and can be traced back to the early days of nuclearization in the region. This contrast is evident in statements made by Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee and is not solely a consequence of evolving geopolitical dynamics (Bukhari & Mirza, 2022).

6. Global Bandwagoning Phase (2001-2024)

With the dawn of the 21st century, a major geostrategic shift influenced Indian strategic culture. The following key factors are paramount in this lieu:

- the war in Afghanistan
- rise of China parallel to India
- rule of BJP

In the post-9/11 scenario, U.S. intervention in Afghanistan exacerbated the regional balance and after 2001, India emerged as a net security provider in and beyond the region. Indian role in Afghanistan can't be overlooked in providing technical assistance and infrastructure development, which triggered a sense of insecurity in Pakistan. However, India had a strong ambition to portray itself as a security provider by bolstering structural reforms in Afghanistan, and hence India projected its soft image.

Another factor in post-9/11 scenario is the rise of China which shifted the regional and global balance of power, it challenged the India's regional clout and also shifted the nature of world politics from a bipolar world to a multipolar world respectively. This polarization became more tangled with the dawn of the Modi regime in India from 2014 onwards and military reforms in India (Barrech and Siddiqa, 2022). China factor emerged as a growing threat to India, because of the economic and strategic weakness of the neighboring states, the immediate periphery of India either had to be dependent on India or other global or regional powers. In this context, the rise of China in the extra periphery challenged India's dominant status in the region (SIPRI, 2024). There is a consensus that India's steps towards strategic modernization and doctrines are directed towards Pakistan and China (Babar & Mirza, 2020). But another narrative can be built up that its sole threat is coming from China and not Pakistan because Pakistan's security policy revolves around the policy of survival and equal deterrence capability. The main objective of India remained to develop equal capability to counter China and not Pakistan but vice versa any strategic development in India posed serious security concerns in Pakistan. Though the nuclearization of both countries has minimized the possibility of full-scale war, the trust deficit remained paramount due to a lack of confidence-building measures (CBMs).

Therefore, the rise of China stimulated India to adopt a strategic policy for providing a role as a net security provider and bandwagoning with major powers is the episode of the same strategic policy. After India's 1998 nuclear tests, India-China relations improved through pragmatic diplomacy, leading to a Security Dialogue in 1999 and the 2003 "Declaration on Principles," which promoted cooperation on modernization and development. India followed a trajectory of a double-edged

sword strategy with a unique outlook of strategic divergence and convergence with both China and the U.S. (Ogden, 2022):

- Balancing strategy with China
- Bandwagoning strategy with America

The balancing strategy with China is driven by confrontation and cooperation and India bandwagoning with America is to counter China.

The utility of Chanakya's philosophy can be observed in India's strategy of seeking protection (samsrya) against China through alliance formation, treaties, and agreements with stronger states. This bandwagoning can be seen through multiple alliances, like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA), Indo-US Nuclear Deal, Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), and Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) (Barrech and Siddiqa, 2022). In addition, balancing with China can be seen through various Indian cooperation such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS and both countries aspire to their mutual rise as a chance to drive the "Asian Century" (Ogden, 2022). Although economic ties have been a key pillar in the China-India rapprochement since the 1990s, remaining strong even amid ongoing tensions. Despite the military standoff in eastern Ladakh, which peaked in the 2020 Galwan skirmish, trade between the two countries surged to a record $125 billion in 2021 a 43.3% increase from 2020 (Robertson, 2022). However, under the Modi regime, India's growing ties with the U.S. and its allies are sowing seeds of mistrust between China and India (Ogden, 2022).

Jingoistic Phase- Modi Regime: Strategic Modernization in India in the 21st Century

In the contemporary era, India's quest for recognition as a key regional and global player revolves around the Hindutva ideology (Hilali, 2001). To expand India's regional clout India revived the lost glory and ambitiously pursued to personify its vision of Akhand Bharat (Mehta, 2022). To achieve this objective, religious and social cohesion was a prerequisite that was unlikely to prevail because colonization left deep imprints on Indian culture due to religious, cultural, and ethnic amalgamations (Tanham, 1992). Moreover, BJP rule sharpened the ethnic divisions, and communal riots became the norm of the day (Schaffer & Schaffer, 1998). In subsequent years, under the Modi regime since 2014 Hindutva has been incorporated as a tool to meet the desired ends. In this context, the reunification of the nation under the ambit of one religion became a top priority of the incumbent government. This era can be known as the **Modi-Doval Era (2014–present)** in which defense startups, chanting of Hindutva ideology, projection of India as a liberal democracy, and India's role as a net security provider became key areas and Hindutva was used as a tool. Modi's vision for Hindu nationalism is beyond rhetoric and hence this chanting of Hindutva is used as a strategic tool in foreign policy. Yet, to maintain a softer image, India portrays itself as a supporter of liberal democracy, distinguishing itself from Western democracies that often use military power to promote democracy beyond their borders. (Jouhki, 2020). Moreover, India is constructing a narrative that Hinduism is not a religion but is a code of life (Tanham,

1992) and projecting a softer image through culture, art, and academic discourse (Khurshid & Khawaja, 2021).

Historically, India's strategic culture is shaped by two main streams: the plural & secular democratic approach, rooted in Nehruvian and Gandhian ideals, which prioritizes defensive security, strategic independence, and trust in democratic and international institutions (Tanham, 1992). India's rhetorics of a secular and multicultural society with democratic norms have often been narrated as India's projection of soft power (Khurshid & Khawaja, 2021). Under Modi, Hindu nationalism is marked by the elevation of rigid and uncritical beliefs as a moral high ground. It's unusual in recent times to witness political leaders so openly condone violence without any sense of restraint or remorse. These contrasting but complementary perspectives personify the diversity of India's strategic vision (Bhaskaran, 2020). Aatmanirbhar Bharat' was launched by Modi in May 2020 (Barrech and Siddiqa, 2022) with an integrative outlook to escalate India's self-reliance in all realms including boosting domestic defense production (Pandey, 2023). So, the strategic environment was already brewing up, and with Narendra Modi, it became intense, and resultantly since 2014, rapid strategic modernization in India in terms of the development of weapons, forces, and projection capabilities has been seen. Under the Modi regime, India not only raises its prestige at the regional level but also at the global level. India's defense budget, when adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP), rises to $281 billion about 37% of the U.S. defense budget—making India the third-largest military globally, surpassing Russia (Robertson, 2022). Defense spending was also taken upward by 44%. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) India emerged as 4th largest military spender in the year 2023 with a spending of $83.6 billion, and Pakistan on 30th with $8.5 billion in defense spending (SIPRI, 2024). Furthermore, China factor is also impeding to growing Indo-US ties as China's actual defense expenditure is about $471 billion-36% of the U.S.'s defense budget, estimated at $1.3 trillion in 2024. This improved understanding can help U.S. policymakers make more balanced and informed defense decisions, reducing the risk of overestimating China's spending. Accurately assessing China's defense spending is crucial for the U.S. to invest effectively in countering threats without overextending resources or intensifying Indo-Pacific tensions (Fravel et al., 2024).

Moreover, to ensure strategic matching with China on border security and naval capability, India is striving to modernize the Indian Navy under the Modi regime. The Indian Naval modernization appears to be the most imperative due to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and String of Pearls strategy. Under the Modi regime, India has rapidly advanced its naval modernization to counter China's influence in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Naval Indigenization Plan (INIP) 2015-2030, which aims to enhance domestic production of advanced naval technologies, aligning with the "Make in India" initiative to reduce reliance on imports and strengthen India's defense capabilities is a glaring development (Barrech, et al, 2024). Moreover, The U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy aligns with India's Act East Policy, which seeks closer ties with East Asia for security and economic growth, shifting from self-reliance to active global engagement (Bhaskaran, 2020).

In addition to naval modernization, India 2.0 under Modi is also ambitious to be in the list of arms exporter states (Yadav, 2024). This can be viewed in the preview of Chanakya's philosophy; preparation for war(yana) mobilization of forces with preparation for war. In addition to maintaining a regional presence and securing access to strategic ports like Indonesia's Sabang and Oman's Duqm, India is getting closer to the U.S. and killing two birds with one stone:

- U.S. Indo Alliance = India's regional supremacy
- Containment of China = India's regional supremacy

In 1975, the Indian government formed a committee with General K. V. Krishna Rao, M. L. Chibber, and K. Sundarji to design a 20-year plan to enhance India's military strength. The goal was establishing India as a prominent global power with minimum reliance on arms imports (Hilali, 2001). And this has been proved in subsequent years as, under Prime Minister Modi, India 2.0 is making significant strides in developing hypersonic missile technology. India's success in hypersonic missile testing is a major milestone in the Bharatiya Janta Party's government's push for self-sufficiency in defense technology (Barrech and Siddiqa, 2022). India has transformed from an arms importer state to an arms-producing under the "Make in India" policy in addition to the pursuit of an arms exporter state. Since 2014, under Prime Minister Modi, India has reformed its defense sector, relaxing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) limits and simplifying licensing. Foreign investment up to 49% is now automatic, while higher investments require review. The government is actively promoting private sector participation and innovation in defense production. (Yadav, 2024). India is also endeavoring to maintain its clout in the global arena by focusing on its internal dynamics and acceptance in the region that India is greater. In this context, the second edition of the Chanakya Defence Dialogue, an important international seminar hosted by the Indian Army, took place on October 24–25, 2024, with the theme; "Drivers in Nation Building: Fuelling Growth Through Comprehensive Security." The dialogue aimed to incorporate security perspectives into national and international policymaking to promote sustainable growth and development (Web Desk, 2024). This manifests the recognition level among policy circles that India's image as a net security provider should be accepted from the outside and not from within. Moreover, due to the current geopolitical dynamics in the immediate and extended periphery such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Israel-Palestine war, it is imperative in India's greater interests to minimize external dependence (Yadav, 2024). This is also in India's favor to keep an independent foreign policy because since independence India has been a strong embodiment of a non-aligned movement and carried this policy as a legacy in the 21st century. By and large Indian security calculus revolves around China and cross-border terrorism (Bhaskaran, 2020).

Challenges in Strategic Modernization in India 2.0

Indian thrust for strategic modernization is giving impetus to strengthen its self-reliance on equipment. However, the development of defense technologies needs time investment and usually takes years to flourish. The defense start-up in India has to take into account pernicious challenges linked with bureaucratic obstacles, alignment issues with government policies and militaristic requirements, and financial and procurement constraints. Therefore, effective governmental policy is

needed to streamline the channels along with a surge in budget allocation for the defense industry. But a litmus test is needed to cross-check the precision of this indigenous-based defense equipment (Bhatia, 2023).

The heavy import of raw materials and technology are also obstacles in the indigenization process, and despite being the 4th largest defense spender, India is still a net arms importer. Although the Indian shipyards have made better progress reaching 80%, Defense Public Sector Units (DPSUs) like Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) and Bharat Electronics Ltd. (BEL) rank low globally and rely on imports for 62% of parts and materials (Yadav, 2024)

Another major challenge is the absence of an acceptance level in Indian strategic culture. It traces its roots back to Chanakya, who advocated for a ruler's absolute power, both physical and psychological. Post-independence, India attempted to follow this philosophy by projecting India as a peace-loving country in a hostile bipolar world; however, it was a marginal success in incorporating Chanakya's ideas at its fullest, particularly in addressing internal conflicts and fostering peace within its borders (Jindal, 2019). The recent "Chanakya's Dialogue 2024" exemplifies this approach, with policy recommendations emphasizing that India's greatness should be acknowledged by its neighbors rather than by India itself (Web Desk, 2024) This has been repeatedly endorsed through previous academic discourse as well (Behuria, and et al 2012).

Conclusion

A set of similarities and relevance can be drawn between the Modi regime and Chanakya's philosophy such as strategic vision, national unity, and regional influence. Just as Chanakya advocated for strengthening India's position through cohesive governance, economic power, and military prowess, Modi's leadership has focused on unifying the nation under Hindutva, promoting religious and social cohesion, and expanding India's regional and global influence. The shift from a defensive posture to India positioning itself as a "Net Security Provider" mirrors Chanakya's principles of strategic expansion and power consolidation.

In conclusion, this research delves into the rise and development of hyper-nationalism and Hindutva rhetoric in India, tracing their roots back to ancient times, particularly during the era of Chanakya, a renowned strategist. These ideologies have been consistently woven into India's strategic culture, shaping the nation's approach to power and identity. The research explores how India's sense of superiority has been built over time, particularly through academic narratives and the influence of traditional Hindu philosophies, which have shaped national thinking. Moreover, it examines how India's strategic alignments took place with the geostrategic environment during Cold War and post-Cold War and how India positioned itself as a key player. Ultimately, the study reflects on how these elements have come together to form the "India 2.0" under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, where hyper-nationalism and Hindutva rhetoric play a key role in defining the nation's future direction on the world stage.

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