

THE ELEPHANT RISES

INDIA'S STRATEGIC RENAISSANCE
IN GLOBAL POLITICS



DR. SHAILEN VERMA

The Elephant Rises:

India's Strategic Renaissance in Global Politics



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India's Strategic Renaissance in Global Politics

Authored by:

Dr. Shailen Verma

Assistant Professor

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Avadh University, Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh

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Foreword

In the ancient game of chess, born in the fertile valleys of the Indus, the elephant piece moved with deliberate wisdom—neither as swift as the horse nor as direct as the chariot, but with a patience that outlasted empires. Today, as I pen these words from a world transformed by pandemic and war, by digital revolution and climate crisis, that same elephant has awakened to find itself at the centre of humanity's most consequential game.

When I first conceptualized this book, I sought to understand a paradox: How could a nation that gained independence amid partition's trauma and emerged from centuries of colonial subjugation transform itself into a pivotal global power within a single human lifetime? The answer, I discovered, lay not in mimicking the paths of others but in rediscovering an ancient playbook written in the very DNA of Indian civilization.

This is not merely another analysis of India's rise. It is a meditation on how patience can triumph over haste, how wisdom can outmanoeuvre force, and how a nation can maintain its soul while adapting to a rapidly changing world. Through these pages, you will journey from Kautilya's ancient strategies to Modi's digital diplomacy, from the Non-Aligned Movement's idealistic vision to today's multi-aligned realism.

The elephant's gambit is unfolding before our eyes. Unlike the aggressive moves of knights or the sweeping dominance of queens, India's strategy resembles the elephant's patient accumulation of position—building technological capabilities while preserving cultural authenticity, fostering economic growth while maintaining strategic autonomy, projecting soft power while developing hard capabilities. As you embark on this intellectual journey, remember that you are not merely reading about diplomatic manoeuvres or economic statistics. You are witnessing the reawakening of a civilization that once contributed nearly a quarter of global GDP, the stirring of a society that gave the world the concept of zero and the game of chess itself.

The chessboard of the 21st century awaits moves that only the elephant can make. In understanding India's grand strategy, we glimpse not just the future of one nation, but the emerging architecture of a truly multipolar world where ancient wisdom meets modern innovation, where democracy and development dance together, and where the patient ultimately inherits the earth.

Acknowledgment

Writing this book has been a six years journey of discovery, growth, and profound learning that would not have been possible without the unwavering support, guidance, and encouragement of numerous remarkable individuals who have shaped both my academic pursuits and personal development.

I extend my deepest gratitude to my esteemed mentor, Prof. Priyankar Upadhyaya Sir, UNESCO Chair, and Prof. Anju Sharan Upadhyaya whose visionary leadership and scholarly wisdom have been instrumental in shaping my understanding of the academic world and social research. His profound insights and continuous encouragement have not only guided this work but have also inspired me to think beyond conventional boundaries. Equally important has been the invaluable guidance of Prof. Manoj Kumar Mishra, whose expertise and mentorship have enriched my academic journey immeasurably.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to all the distinguished faculty members and mentors at the Malaviya Centre for Peace Research, Faculty of Social Sciences, Banaras Hindu University. I am grateful to the all teachers of Faculty of Social Sciences, BHU, to fostering critical thinking and commitment to academic excellence have provided the intellectual foundation upon which this work rests. The Centre's nurturing environment has been pivotal in transforming ideas into meaningful scholarly discourse. At my current academic home, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia Avadh University, Ayodhya, I extend my sincere gratitude to supportive guidance and scholarly insights have been invaluable in bringing this project. The institution's Sardar Patel Centre, well known for encouraging atmosphere and academic resource persons, provided the perfect environment to complete this work.

This research would not have been possible without the treasure troves of knowledge housed in several distinguished libraries that became my second homes during this academic odyssey. The Central Library of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and departmental library of MCPR-BHU opened its doors to an extraordinary collection of contemporary research and theoretical frameworks. The Central Library of Banaras Hindu University and the Library of Dr. Rammanohar Lohia Avadh University, Ayodhya provided access to centuries of accumulated wisdom and scholarly traditions. The specialized collection at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi offered crucial insights into strategic studies and policy

research. The Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and many e-resources platforms enriched my understanding with its invaluable archival materials and historical documents.

I am deeply thankful to my fellow mates, seniors, and juniors at BHU, whose stimulating discussions, shared experiences, and collaborative spirit have enriched my academic journey. The vibrant intellectual atmosphere we created together has been a constant source of motivation and learning. My gratitude extends to the numerous teachers and professors from different institutes who have contributed to my knowledge and understanding through their lectures, seminars, and informal conversations.

This journey has been blessed by friendships that span across cities and memories. To my dear friends from Delhi, Lucknow, Banaras; thank you for your constant support and for making this academic pursuit a memorable adventure. Special appreciation goes to my friends back home in Lakhimpur Kheri, whose roots and connection to our homeland have kept me grounded throughout this endeavour. Each conversation with scholars, each book borrowed, each manuscript consulted has contributed to the mosaic of understanding that this work represents.

Above all, I owe my deepest gratitude to my parents, whose unconditional love, sacrifices, and unwavering belief in my abilities have been the bedrock of all my achievements. Their constant encouragement and understanding have made this journey possible. To my beloved sister, Nayani, whose support and cheerful presence have been a source of strength throughout this endeavour, I extend my heartfelt thanks.

This book stands as a testament to the collective wisdom, support, and love of all these wonderful people who have touched my life.

Dr. Shailen

Timeline in the Book

Ancient Period (Pre-1947 CE): Foundations of Strategic Thought

- **4th Century BCE:** Kautilya authors the *Arthashastra*, introducing concepts like "mandala" (circle of states), "sama, dana, bheda, danda" (persuasion, inducement, division, force), "matsya nyaya" (law of the fish), and the importance of economic strength and intelligence in statecraft. These principles lay the philosophical groundwork for future Indian strategic autonomy and multi-alignment.
- **Ancient Times:** India develops sophisticated early infrastructure (Lothal ports, urban planning) and becomes a global trading network hub.
- **Throughout Millennia:** Indian spiritual and cultural traditions (yoga, Buddhism, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*) spread across Asia without military force, demonstrating early forms of "soft power."
- **Colonial Era (1700-1947 CE): Humiliation and Awakening 19th-20th Century:** India experiences colonial subjugation, losing sovereignty and strategic agency. This period instills a deep understanding of the importance of strategic autonomy and the memory of humiliation, influencing future foreign policy.
- **1893:** Swami Vivekananda introduces yoga philosophy to Western audiences at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, laying the foundation for its global expansion.

The Sleeping Giant Stirs (1947-1971): Building Foundations and Learning Hard Lessons

- **August 15, 1947:** India gains independence, marking the birth of a nation struggling with partition trauma, economic devastation, and political fragmentation. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru articulates the vision of "Tryst with Destiny."
- **1950s:** Prime Minister Nehru articulates the philosophy of non-alignment, drawing on ancient Indian wisdom of "Nishkama Karma" to avoid Cold War binary choices.
- **1954:** The U.S. formalizes an alliance with Pakistan (Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement), profoundly altering South Asian strategic dynamics and poisoning early US-India relations.

- **April 1955:** The Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, marks a watershed moment for non-alignment, where Nehru helps articulate the Ten Principles of Bandung, challenging superpower dominance.
- **1960:** The Indus Waters Treaty is signed with Pakistan, providing a framework for managing shared water resources.
- **1961:** INS Vikrant, India's first aircraft carrier, is commissioned, laying the foundation for naval power projection.
- **October 1962:** The Sino-Indian War: China attacks across the Himalayan frontier. India suffers a devastating military defeat, shattering Nehru's assumptions about peaceful coexistence and highlighting the inadequacy of non-alignment without military preparedness. This becomes a "strategic awakening" moment, leading to increased defense spending.
- **1963:** The first MiG-21 fighters are acquired from the Soviet Union, marking the beginning of a strategic defense partnership.
- **Mid-1960s:** Defense spending dramatically increases from 2.1% of GDP (1962) to over 4%, catalyzing military modernization.
- **1970:** India implements a controversial policy allowing process patents but not product patents for pharmaceuticals, laying the groundwork for its future as the "pharmacy of the world."
- **August 1971:** India signs the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, a tactical adjustment to secure support during the escalating Bangladesh Crisis.
- **December 1971:** The Bangladesh Liberation War: India decisively intervenes in East Pakistan, leading to Bangladesh's independence. This demonstrates India's evolution into a proactive regional power capable of using military force for strategic objectives, showcasing emerging military capabilities and surprising allies and adversaries.

The Regional Elephant Awakens (1971-1998): Nuclear Ambitions and Regional Interventions

- **May 1974:** "Smiling Buddha" nuclear test: India conducts its first nuclear explosion in the Rajasthan desert, entering the exclusive club of nuclear powers, albeit with ambiguity about weaponization. Dr. Homi Bhabha's vision is realized.
- **1980s:** Tejas Light Combat Aircraft project begins.

- **1987-1990:** Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) intervention in Sri Lanka: An ambitious experiment in using military force to shape outcomes in a neighboring ethnic conflict. It provides valuable lessons about intervention complexities.
- **1988:** "Operation Cactus" in Maldives: India deploys paratroopers to prevent a mercenary coup, demonstrating rapid deployment capabilities.
- **1988:** INS Chakra, a nuclear-powered submarine, is leased from the Soviet Union, providing crucial experience for India's indigenous nuclear submarine program.
- **1991:** The collapse of the Soviet Union: India loses its primary strategic partner and arms supplier, and its socialist economic model loses its ideological framework.
- **July 1991:** India faces a severe balance of payments crisis (foreign exchange reserves for only two weeks of imports). Finance Minister Manmohan Singh announces comprehensive economic liberalization reforms, signaling a shift from state-led industrialization to market-oriented policies. This marks a "strategic inflection point."
- **1990s-2000s:** India's information technology services industry emerges as a global leader, with companies like Infosys, TCS, and Wipro becoming major players and instruments of soft power.
- **1996:** The Ganges Water Sharing Treaty is signed with Bangladesh.
- **May 1998:** Pokhran-II nuclear tests: India conducts a series of nuclear tests (fission and fusion devices) under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, declaring itself a nuclear weapons state. This fundamentally alters the global balance of power and triggers immediate American sanctions.

The Global Elephant Takes the Stage (1998-Present): Multi-Alignment and Comprehensive Power

- **1998-2000:** Strobe Talbott-Jaswant Singh talks: Fourteen rounds of sustained diplomatic dialogue between the US and India, attempting to find common ground after the nuclear tests.
- **1999:** Kargil Conflict: France provides GPS guidance systems to India despite an embargo by other suppliers, establishing a template for reliable partnership.

- **March 2000:** President Bill Clinton visits India, marking a symbolic and substantive turning point in US-India relations. He refers to them as "natural allies."
- **2001:** September 11 attacks: Create an opportunity for US-India strategic convergence, aligning American global priorities with Indian concerns about terrorism.
- **2001:** India establishes the Strategic Forces Command and the Andaman and Nicobar Command, reflecting new thinking about integrated military operations.
- **2003:** India officially articulates its nuclear doctrine: "No First Use," "Credible Minimum Deterrence," "Massive Retaliation," and "Civilian Control."
- **2004:** Agni-I missile (700 km range) is operationalized for regional deterrence.
- **2005-2008:** The Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement is negotiated, creating an exception to American non-proliferation policy and symbolically recognizing India as a "responsible nuclear power."
- **2006:** India conducts the Lebanon Evacuation, demonstrating global reach for crisis response.
- **2008:** Agni-V missile (5,000+ km range, ICBM capability) is operationalized.
- **2008:** BrahMos supersonic cruise missile is successfully test-fired (joint development with Russia).
- **2010s:** India's renewable energy revolution begins, with solar power capacity growing significantly.
- **2012:** Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) is launched between US and India for collaborative defense technology development.
- **2012:** INS Chakra II, a nuclear-powered submarine, is leased from Russia.
- **2013:** India establishes the Mountain Strike Corps, its first offensive formation designed for high-altitude warfare against China.
- **2014:** Mars Orbiter Mission (Mangalyaan) reaches Mars at a cost of \$74 million, showcasing frugal innovation and technological prowess.
- **2014:** "Make in India" initiative is launched to boost manufacturing.

- **2015:** "Digital India" initiative is launched, aiming to leverage digital infrastructure for geopolitical influence (India Stack, UPI, Aadhaar).
- **2015:** Prime Minister Modi announces the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine in Mauritius, articulating a holistic maritime strategy for the Indian Ocean.
- **2015:** International Solar Alliance (ISA) is launched by Prime Minister Modi with French partnership, positioning India as a climate leader.
- **2015:** India conducts the Yemen Evacuation, showcasing regional leadership by evacuating citizens from 39 nations.
- **2016:** Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) is signed between US and India for mutual logistical support.
- **2017:** Rosneft acquires a 49.13% stake in Essar Oil, deepening Russia-India energy ties.
- **2017 (revived):** The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with the United States, Japan, and Australia is revived, becoming a significant Indo-Pacific security development.
- **2017:** The Doklam standoff with China.
- **February 2017:** ISRO successfully deploys 104 satellites in a single launch, emerging as a major space services provider.
- **2018:** Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) is signed between US and India, enabling secure communications.
- **2018:** India's NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation) system provides indigenous GPS capability for the Indian Ocean region.
- **2018:** Prime Minister Modi articulates India's vision for a "free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific" at the Shangri-La Dialogue.
- **2019:** Mission Shakti: India conducts an Anti-Satellite (ASAT) weapon test, entering an exclusive club of nations with space warfare capabilities.
- **2019:** India's National Cyber Coordination Centre is established, and the Defence Cyber Agency is formed, reflecting recognition of cyber threats.
- **2019:** India withdraws from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) due to concerns about Chinese manufacturing dominance.

- **2019:** National Infrastructure Pipeline is announced, envisioning \$1.4 trillion in infrastructure investment.
- **2019:** Chief of Defence Staff position is created, with General Bipin Rawat as the first CDS.
- **2020:** Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA) is signed between US and India, completing the foundational trilogy of defense agreements.
- **June 2020:** Galwan Valley clash: Results in the first combat deaths along the India-China border in 45 years, fundamentally altering Indian perceptions of Chinese intentions. India bans 267 Chinese mobile applications.
- **2020:** CoWIN platform manages over 2.2 billion vaccine doses during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **2020-21:** "Vaccine Maitri" initiative: India supplies vaccines to over 100 countries, showcasing its pharmaceutical capabilities as soft power.
- **2021:** Afghanistan Evacuation is conducted, showcasing India's crisis response capability.
- **February 24, 2022:** Russia invades Ukraine. India adopts a "middle path" of strategic ambiguity, abstaining from UN resolutions condemning Russia while providing humanitarian aid to Ukraine. India significantly increases oil imports from Russia.
- **2022:** INS Vikrant, India's first indigenously built aircraft carrier, is commissioned.
- **2023:** Chandrayaan-3 lunar landing: India becomes the fourth nation to achieve a soft lunar landing and the first to land on the lunar south pole.
- **2023:** India hosts the G20 presidency under the theme "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family), demonstrating leadership and brokering the African Union's inclusion.
- **2023:** The India-US Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) partnership is launched, covering AI, quantum computing, biotechnology, and space.
- **2023:** The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) is announced at the G20 Summit, linking Indian ports to European markets through the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel.

- **2023:** Russia becomes India's largest oil supplier, accounting for nearly 40% of total imports.
- **2024:** Over 100 unicorn companies produced by India's startup ecosystem.
- **2024:** India achieves 70% indigenous defense production, up from 85% import dependence in the 1990s.
- **2024:** UPI processes over 10 billion transactions monthly, becoming the world's largest digital payment system by volume.
- **2024:** India aims for \$5 billion in defense exports.
- **2024:** Solar power capacity reaches over 70 GW, and combined renewable capacity exceeds 175 GW.
- **2024:** Domestic mobile phone production meets over 95% of local demand, with exports exceeding \$11 billion annually.
- **2024:** India's economy expands to over \$3.7 trillion, making it the world's fifth-largest economy.
- **2024:** US-India bilateral trade grows to over \$190 billion, making the United States India's largest trading partner.
- **2024:** Russia accounts for 45% of India's arms imports.

Future Pathways (Towards 2047): Challenges and Aspirations

- **2030:** India aims to produce 5 million tons of green hydrogen annually.
- **2030:** India targets 500 GW of renewable energy capacity.
- **2035:** India aims for an Indian Space Station.
- **2047:** India aims to achieve developed nation status by the centenary of its independence.
- **2070:** India commits to achieving net-zero emissions.

Table of Contents

Title of Chapters	Page No.
Chapter 1	1 – 37
<i>The Elephant Rises: India's Strategic Renaissance</i>	
Chapter 2	38 – 57
<i>Historical Underpinnings: From Kautilya To Nehruvian Non-Alignment</i>	
Chapter 3	58 – 93
<i>Economic Statecraft – Trade, Technology, And Sanctions</i>	
Chapter 4	94 – 151
<i>India's Military Metamorphosis: From the Garrison State to the Global Guardian</i>	
Chapter 5	152 – 185
<i>Soft Power and Diplomatic Leverage</i>	
Chapter 6	186 – 213
<i>The Dragon and The Elephant: Navigating Asia's Great Power Dance</i>	
Chapter 7	214 – 252
<i>The USA-India Partnership – From Estrangement to Entente</i>	
Chapter 8	253 – 270
<i>India & Russia – A Fading but Resilient Partnership</i>	

Chapter 9	271 – 311
<i>The Neighbourhood – Dominance or Diplomacy?</i>	
Chapter 10	312 – 339
<i>Domestic Constraints – Can India Deliver?</i>	
Chapter 11	340 – 378
<i>Scenarios For 2047 –India's Journey in Multipolar World Order</i>	
<i>References</i>	379 – 385
<i>Notes</i>	386 – 410

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Shailen Verma is an academician specializing in International Relations, currently serving as an Assistant Professor at Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Avadh University, Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. His scholarly pursuits focus on border studies, human security, colonial legacies, and South Asian geopolitics, with a keen emphasis on interdisciplinary research and policy-relevant scholarship.

Dr. Verma earned his Ph.D. in Political Science from Malaviya Centre for Peace Research-Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in 2020, where his doctoral thesis explored *"Colonial borders and aspects of open border in South Asia: A case study of India-Nepal border."* His research underscores the socio-cultural and security dynamics of borderlands, contributing significantly to academic discourse.

A highlight of his academic journey is the prestigious Linnaeus-Palme Fellowship (2019), awarded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). As a scholar at Karlstad University, Sweden, he engaged in cross-cultural academic exchange, further enriching his expertise in global governance and peace studies. Dr. Verma's prolific contributions include UGC-CARE and SCOPUS-indexed publications, book chapters, and presentations at international conferences.



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