

THE MAKING OF A POTENT POWER: INDIA'S STRATEGIC EVOLUTION IN MULTIPOLAR WORLD

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Abstract: The international system today has undergone a significant transformation from a bipolar order to a unipolar order. The contemporary global order is observing an ongoing transformation into a more diffused and complex multipolar world characterized by the presence of multiple centres of power. This evolving global order is marked by shifting alliances, strategic competition as well as cooperation, and the growing importance of emerging states. This paper explores the making of a “potent power” by examining India’s strategic evolution in this contemporary multipolar world. The primary objective is to evaluate the key factors such as policy formulation, strategic autonomy, multi-alignment, and its engagement with global governance institutions that help in raising India’s global influence. The paper also aims to analyse India’s potential to balance its national interests with competing global powers. Though a lot of scholarly research work is being done in this domain but the key research gap lies in the lack of a comprehensive approach that connects India’s economic growth, foreign policy, and strategic choices within a single analytical framework. Most of the existing studies discuss these aspects separately, without clearly explaining how they together contribute to India’s emergence as a potent power in a multipolar order.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach, it is mainly based on secondary sources such as academic literature, policy documents, international reports and official statements. By tracing India’s strategic trajectory in the 21st-century period, the paper analyses that how India’s rise is shaped by a flexible strategy of maintaining strategic autonomy along with multi-alignment. Moreover, India’s influential rise remains gradual and shaped by both opportunities and constraints. These include both domestic challenges and external pressures. This study tries to contribute to the comprehensive discussion about multipolarity by positioning India as an increasingly influential, yet evolving, actor in the global order.

Keywords- Multipolarity, Strategic Autonomy, Power Transition, Multi-Alignment, Global Governance, Potent power

Introduction

The multipolar world we see today, is a result of the gradual historical transformation of the international order over the years. Analysing historically we observe that, the early 20th century had a multipolar global order because of the balance of power among various European great powers. But this system could not sustain long and collapsed resulting in the two World Wars. As a result the global structure witnessed a major shift towards a bipolar setup led by the United States and the Soviet Union through two different poles divided on the basis of ideologies. This period was termed as Cold War by scholars. Later, the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 again transformed the global order into a unipolar system, where the United States emerged as the sole superpower. This period was often referred as the era of US hegemony. But with the beginning of 21st century, transformations such as structural changes in the global economy, the diffusion of technology, and the rise of new centres of powers have led to the gradual rebalancing of power. Additionally, regional organizations such as the European Union and multilateral platforms like BRICS have further reinforced the trend toward multipolarity.

Theoretically analysing, the emergence of multipolarity can be understood through multiple theories of international relations. The most appropriate being the structural realism or neo realism theory by Kenneth

Waltz, which talks about an anarchic system with absence of any higher authority and distribution of power among states and further how states seek self-preservation. He emphasises more on competition and leaves no space for cooperation. According to this view, multipolarity arises naturally as power diffuses and states seek to balance against dominant actors to ensure survival. On the other hand, scholars such as Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye argue that even in a pluralistic system, cooperation can be sustained through institutions that help reduce uncertainty and open the doors for cooperation. The theory of Neo Liberalism or liberal institutionalism highlights that cooperation is possible and sustainable with the increasing role of international institutions and economic interdependence that can reduce conflicts and competition, as a result help in shaping global order. The establishment of institutions like the United Nations, still relevant, supports this argument, suggesting that multipolarity does not necessarily imply instability. Another theory that supports the idea of multipolar world is the, Constructivist theory, associated with thinkers like Alexander Wendt, and highlights the importance of non-material powers such as of ideas, identities, culture, language, knowledge, ideology and norms that along with material power interact to shape global order. In contrast to neo realism and neo liberalism, this theory says that multipolarity is not merely about material power but also about how states identify themselves and their roles and relationships in the international system. Realisation of the importance of strategic autonomy by emerging powers today supports this idea. Analysis of the theoretical approaches in international relations provide complementary explanations, collectively illustrating that the contemporary multipolar order is the product of dynamic interactions between power distribution, institutional frameworks, and evolving global norms.

Therefore, India's growing role in a multipolar global order can be better analysed through these theories with each offering a different perspective on its strategic evolution. Based on realists and neo realists assumptions we observe that India's actions are largely driven by the need to secure its position in an anarchic international system. Strengthening of its military capabilities along with maintaining flexible partnerships rather than fixed alliances helps maintain a balance of power and respond better to evolving regional and global challenges. At the same time, from a liberal institutionalism viewpoint, India's active involvement in global institutions like the United Nations, G20, and BRICS, exhibits its aspirations in promoting cooperation, economic development, and create a rules-based global order. These platforms also allow India to be an active part of global governance and increase its international influence. Similarly viewing from a constructivist perspective, India's foreign policy over the years is shaped by its identity, historical experiences, and normative values. Its major focus remains on maintaining its strategic autonomy, while providing leadership among developing countries. India's aspiration to emerge as a "leading power" also highlights the role of ideas and global perception in shaping global dynamics.

Overall, India's approach is not guided by a single theory but represents a combination of power politics, institutional engagement, and identity-driven policies, enabling it to navigate through the complexities of a multipolar world.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach, it is mainly based on secondary sources such as academic literature, policy documents, international reports and official statements. It is based on secondary sources, including scholarly works by Waltz, Keohane, and Nye, along with journal articles and reports from government agencies such as the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of External Affairs, RBI, and NITI Aayog. A thematic, interpretative approach is used to analyse India's strategic evolution across economic, political, and diplomatic dimensions.

Transforming India

Since its emergence in 1947, India has transitioned from a newly independent nation to a significant global actor. This transformation is the result of continuous foreign policy evolution, balancing non-alignment, strategic autonomy, economic diplomacy, defence modernization, and cultural influence which has been successfully led by successive Prime Ministers Nehru, Indira Gandhi, P.V Rao, Vajpayee, Manmohan Singh, and Modi. India has methodically carved its position as a rising global power. India's road towards achievement of one of the global power status has not been easy. The transition has been gradual and systematic. From being a colony to a state struggling for its independence to emergence of an independent state during the cold war era carrying along the wounds of partition. Through the hard work of decades, India

today stands strong and holds a significant position at the global stage. India of 21st century is new and is transforming at a very fast rate but the historical struggle is also equally important. Being a democratic nation there has been various governments and hence different ideologies backing foreign policies of every decade. Foreign policy formulation and its just execution is of utmost importance in achievement of national interests and greatly determines the status of the state a global level.

Along with efficient formulation and execution of foreign policy, India's emergence as a potent power in the 21st century is driven by a combination of economic growth, strategic military strength, diplomatic influence, and scientific and technological advancements. Economically, India has transformed into one of the fastest-growing major economies, integrating itself into global trade and innovation networks. Strategically, it has modernized its armed forces and developed a credible nuclear deterrent, while expanding defence partnerships to safeguard its interests. Diplomatically, India plays an active role in global governance, multilateral institutions, and building upon regional cooperation frameworks, promoting its vision of a co-operative multipolar world order. Simultaneously, its achievements in space exploration programmes, digital infrastructure, and technological innovation reflect a growing knowledge economy. Clubbing together of these dimensions form the pillars of India's expanding global stature in the contemporary world.

Key Drivers of India's Emergence as a Potent Power

Economic Dimension

In the contemporary international system, it is very evident that economic strength has emerged as one of the most decisive factors of national power. The size of the market it provides, the pace of its growth, and its expanding global economic linkages have created strong prospects for India to emerge as a potent power within the evolving multipolar system. India's economic trajectory today demonstrates major transformation i.e. from a largely agrarian, domestically oriented economy at the time of independence in 1947 to one of the fastest-growing major economies in the contemporary global order. Following the 1991 liberalization reforms, the country transitioned from a state-controlled, slow-growing economy to one that is globally integrated and market-oriented. India's expanding and youthful middle class provides for large domestic market further enrich its economic prospects. India's internal consumption capacity provides a balance in a world marked by uncertainty in global supply chains. , India's nominal GDP has grown substantially, tripling in size from roughly US\$1.2 trillion in FY2015 to an estimated US\$3.8 trillion in FY2025 — positioning India as the fourth-largest global economy and on track to become the third largest by 2030. Initiatives such as Make in India and Digital India have strengthened manufacturing capacity, expanded digital infrastructure, and boosted financial inclusion through platforms like Aadhaar and UPI. Record Foreign Direct Investment inflows (over USD 80 billion in 2020–21) and India's rise as a global pharmaceutical supplier during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight growing international confidence and strategic relevance. India now can strengthen its economic position by investing in green industries, expanding digital trade, and promoting digital economy will make the system more inclusive. Developing resilient supply chains, promoting indigenous technological capabilities, and aligning growth with sustainability goals will enhance India's long-term strategic influence in the multipolar order. Through structural transformation, expansive trade networks, and strategic economic diplomacy, India is actively shaping its role in a multipolar global order.

Military and Strategic Dimension

The military strength and defence preparedness continue to play a decisive role in determining the global rankings of states since ages. For India, a state navigating a complex and evolving global landscape, which aspires to establish itself as a potent power in the 21st century, the military and defence sector forms a critical foundation of its strategic ambitions. This importance becomes even more evident when examined against the backdrop of a multipolar world order and the increasing instability or complexity of the international system. For any state military capability is the one that is directly proportional to territorial security and national sovereignty. India is located in a region marked by unresolved borders, nuclear-armed neighbours, and persistent security challenges. Therefore, economic strength without efficient defence capabilities may result in vulnerability, particularly in a region characterized by territorial disputes and shifting alliances. For India, military modernisation is very crucial. Traditional apparatus such as tanks and fighters continue to be necessary, but contemporary security environment requires for advanced systems including artificial

intelligence, cyber defence, unmanned systems, and space capabilities. Recognising this transformation, India has placed growing emphasis on technological modernisation of its armed forces. One of the most significant policy initiatives in this regard is the push for indigenous defence production. Through programmes such as Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat, the government has sought to reduce dependence on foreign suppliers and strengthen domestic defence manufacturing. Notable developments include the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) program and the development of long-range precision missiles under the Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV) and Agni series. Along with it, India has promoted defence innovation hubs and start-up collaborations to integrate emerging technologies like AI and autonomous systems, cyber security tools, and space-based surveillance into military applications. These developments are essential for maintaining relevance in a rapidly changing security environment.

In a multipolar world, exhibiting military strength alone is quite challenging, here comes the importance of defence diplomacy. Strategic partnerships, joint exercises, and security dialogues allow states to enhance their influence without any direct confrontation. Security partnerships and military cooperation agreements help extend influence and foster strategic trust. For India, this has manifested in a series of bilateral and multilateral engagements. Recently, India has increasingly used defence diplomacy as a tool to expand its strategic space and build trust with like-minded countries. Therefore, the military and defence sector plays a vital role in India's emergence as a potent power in the 21st century. In today's world shaped by multipolar competition and institutional failures, defence capabilities provide security, strategic autonomy, and international influence.

Geographical Dimension

India's geographical location is another factor that adds to its advantage in the contemporary world order. Its geographical position plays a crucial role in strengthening its status as an emerging power in the twenty-first century. As global power relations become more interconnected, India's geography provides it with natural advantages that support its economic development, security interests, and diplomatic influence. Located between East Asia, West Asia, Africa, and Europe, India occupies a central place in the broader Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific regions. Positioned at the heart of the Indian Ocean region, India lies close to some of the most critical trade routes via sea that connect East Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. As in the contemporary world, major powers focus more on maintaining a free, open, and stable trade relations in Indo-Pacific, India's location makes it a natural partner in shaping regional balance and connectivity. Initiatives such as India's engagement in the Quad and various regional maritime organisations and its growing naval cooperation with regional and extra-regional partners demonstrate how geography supports India's strategic outreach and diplomatic influence in the twenty-first century. Apart from the maritime location, India's land with diverse terrain and climatic zones provide for agricultural sustainability, resource availability, and internal connectivity essential to sustain its large population.

In sum, India's geographical advantage plays a foundational role in its rise as a potent power in the twenty-first century. By combining strategic location, maritime access, and regional connectivity, India is well positioned to influence economic, security, and political developments in the emerging multipolar world order.

Demographic Dimension

One of the most significant factor for India's future global role lies in its demographic profile. India's demographic profile is one of its most important long-term strengths in the twenty-first century. India is one of the world's largest populous countries offering both consumption potential and productive capacity. A younger population means that India will continue to have a growing workforce for several decades, as a result a continuous growing economy. Not only population size, it is the youthful and dynamic nature of India's population that provides a strong foundation for its rise as a potent power in the contemporary world order. With a large and youthful population, India possesses a potential labour force that provides for a long-term economic growth at times when many developed economies face demographic stagnation and aging populations. But converting this demographic weightage into advantageous thing depends on investments in education, health, and skill development. Today the emerging new India has increasing focus on human capital development, promoting digital literacy, and through vocational training programmes it aims to convert its youthful population into a skilled workforce capable of competing globally. In this sense, India's

demographic strength functions not only as a quantitative asset but also as a qualitative driver of national transformation. As a result, demographic strength remains a crucial pillar supporting India's emergence as a significant power in the twenty-first century global order.

Technological advancements and Progressive Space Programmes

India's rise as a potent power in the 21st century is closely linked to its rapid technological advancement and notable achievements in the space sector. The expansion of digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence, and indigenous innovation ecosystems has strengthened India's capacity to compete in high-technology domains. Institutions such as Defence Research and Development Organisation and Indian Space Research Organisation have played a central role in advancing strategic technologies, ranging from missile systems to satellite capabilities. India's space programme, in particular, has emerged as a symbol of both technological self-reliance and global prestige. Landmark missions like Chandrayaan-3 and Mars Orbiter Mission demonstrate cost-effective innovation and scientific capability. These achievements enhance India's position in areas such as satellite navigation, space-based surveillance, and disaster management, all of which have both civilian and military applications.

One of the most significant developments has been in the field of digital infrastructure. Platforms such as Aadhaar and Unified Payments Interface have revolutionised governance and financial inclusion by enabling secure, large-scale digital transactions. This digital backbone enhances state capacity and economic efficiency, both of which are essential for sustaining long-term power. Additionally, India is making progress in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and semiconductor manufacturing through government-backed innovation initiatives and start-up ecosystems. Thus, technological progress and space achievements are not merely developmental milestones but critical instruments in consolidating India's status as an emerging global power.

Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy

In the evolving dynamics of a multipolar world, soft power and cultural diplomacy have emerged as significant instruments in enhancing India's global standing. Unlike traditional measures of power rooted in military or economic strength, soft power operates through attraction, legitimacy, and the ability to shape preferences. India's civilizational depth, pluralistic traditions, and democratic ethos provide a strong foundation for such influence. Concepts like yoga, Ayurveda, and Indian spirituality have gained global recognition, exemplified by the international observance of International Day of Yoga, which reflects India's success in projecting its cultural heritage onto the global stage. Cultural diplomacy has also been institutionalised through organizations such as Indian Council for Cultural Relations, which promotes cultural exchanges, academic partnerships, and artistic collaborations. Additionally, the global popularity of Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, and the widespread presence of the Indian diaspora have contributed to shaping favourable perceptions of India abroad. These channels serve as informal yet powerful mediums for transmitting India's values and narratives.

In a multipolar system marked by competing powers and shifting alliances, the ability to influence without coercion becomes crucial. India's effective use of soft power not only amplifies its international image but also supports its broader strategic ambitions. Thus, cultural diplomacy acts as a force multiplier, enabling India to consolidate its position as an emerging potent power in the 21st century.

India's Strategic Evolution

India's rise as a potent power in the twenty-first century is best understood as a long-term and carefully shaped process rather than a sudden or disruptive shift in global status. The trajectory of India's emergence as a potent power in the twenty-first century reflects neither a sudden transformation nor a linear rise driven by a single determinant of power. This evolution reflects both continuity with India's historical diplomatic traditions and significant adaptation to the changing structure of the global order. India's growing international influence has gradually emerged with the substantial changes brought in foreign policy vision, economic capacity, strategic autonomy, and multilateral engagement. Today, rather than abandoning strategic autonomy, India redefined it in more flexible terms allowing cooperation with multiple power centres while avoiding rigid alliance commitments. Such a change in Indian foreign policy outlook enabled India to respond

effectively to a world characterized by economic interdependence, technological competition, and shifting power balances. In a multipolar world marked by uncertainty and fragmentation, India's role increasingly extends beyond participation to agenda-setting. Rather than treating multilateralism as a constraint, India has consistently viewed global institutions as platforms to articulate interests and build coalitions. At the same time, India has been a vocal advocate of institutional reform, particularly in decision-making structures that no longer reflect contemporary distributions of power. This dual approach participation combined with reform advocacy enhances India's legitimacy and diplomatic relevance. Therefore, here we analyse certain crucial policy shifts that help India portray itself as an emerging power.

From Non-Alignment to Multi-Alignment

India's shift from non-alignment to multi-alignment shows how its foreign policy has evolved to adapt to changing global realities. After independence, under leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, India followed the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement, staying away from power blocs during the Cold War to protect its strategic autonomy and sovereignty. However, in the 21st century, the global system has become more complex with the rise of new powers and the decline of a single dominant power. In this context, India has adopted a policy of multi-alignment, where it builds relationships with multiple countries at the same time. For example, India has strong strategic ties with the United States, continues defence cooperation with Russia, and actively participates in groups like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and BRICS. This approach helps India increase its global influence. This policy shift enhances India's position as a "potent power" by maximizing strategic autonomy while expanding its global influence. Multi-alignment allows India to diversify partnerships in defence, technology, and energy, thereby reducing dependence on any single power bloc. It also allows India to play a balancing role between major powers and act as a voice for developing countries. Additionally, India's involvement in issue-based partnerships, such as climate action, trade, and regional security helps it shape global rules and decisions. A new idea emerging from this shift is that India is positioning itself as a "connector power," linking different regions and groups in the global system. This strengthens its diplomatic influence and builds trust among diverse partners.

Overall, the move from non-alignment to multi-alignment has made India more flexible and strategically stronger. It has helped India expand its global role and move closer to becoming a significant power in the evolving multipolar world.

Promotion of Strategic Autonomy in Foreign Policy

India's sincere efforts to focus on its strategic autonomy in foreign policy shows how its approach has changed in the 21st century. Earlier, India followed the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement, trying to stay away from major power blocs. Today, adoption of the idea of strategic autonomy helps it remain flexible in making decisions based on national interest rather than following strict neutrality. India now cooperates with different countries on different issues at the same time. For example, it cooperates closely with the United States in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, while still maintaining strong defence and energy relations with Russia, even during the Russia-Ukraine War. This non-aligned posture allowed India to secure critical energy supplies and military hardware while projecting itself as a responsible global power able to navigate complex geopolitical tensions

This balanced approach helps India avoid depending too much on any one country. It also increases India's importance in global politics, as it can engage with multiple groups like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. During its G20 Presidency 2023, India also highlighted the concerns of developing countries, strengthening its global image. Overall, strategic autonomy gives India the freedom to act independently and respond to changing global situations. This flexibility is helping India build influence, take on leadership roles, and move closer to becoming a strong and influential power in the future. In the near future, such strategic flexibility positions India to act as a mediator, norm-shaper, and security provider in the Indo-Pacific, thereby strengthening its trajectory toward becoming a potent power in a fragmented yet interdependent multipolar world.

Increased Engagement in Global Institutions

India's growing involvement in global institutions has become an important part of its foreign policy in the 21st century. Instead of just following existing rules, India is now trying to play a more active role in shaping them. Its participation in organisations like the United Nations, World Trade Organization, BRICS, and the G20 shows that India wants to increase its influence in global decision-making. It has also been strongly demanding reforms in global institutions, especially a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, to reflect current global realities. Major international organizations that regulate international political and economic affairs today were established after the Second World War and largely reflected the geopolitical realities of that era and no longer reflect contemporary power realities or the interests of the Global South. By promoting reforms that give greater voice to developing countries and emerging economies, India positions itself as a spokesperson for the interests of the Global South. This role strengthens India's diplomatic legitimacy and expands its influence in global affairs. India's advocacy for such reforms is also essential for addressing emerging global challenges. Issues such as climate change, energy transition, digital governance, and global public health require collective international responses that go beyond traditional power politics. In recent years, India has taken more responsibility on global issues such as climate change, sustainable development, and economic cooperation. Its role during the G20 Presidency 2023 is a good example, where it focused on the needs of developing countries and worked to bring different nations together. India has also supported new initiatives that promote clean energy and global cooperation.

India under Prime Minister Modi adopted for proactive engagement in global governance institutions, focusing on its ambition to play a leading role in shaping the global order. Hosting the G20 Summit in New Delhi in 2023 marked a significant milestone, where India championed themes such as sustainable development, equitable digital growth, and economic resilience with the theme of the event being "One Earth, One Family, One Future" embracing India's belief in the idea of "Vasudhev Kutumbukam" i.e. the world is one family which stands very relevant in the current multipolar dynamics. This active engagement has improved India's image as a responsible and reliable country. It allows India to connect both developed and developing nations and increases its global importance. Overall, by playing a stronger role in international institutions, India is gradually building its position as an influential power in the emerging multipolar world. In the long run, this institutional activism not only expands India's strategic space but also consolidates its position as a potent power capable of shaping the norms and priorities of a multipolar international order.

Efficient use of Diplomacy, Soft Power for Global Integration

India's rise in the 21st century multipolar world is closely linked to the combined use of diplomacy, soft power, multilateral participation, and global economic integration. Its diplomatic approach has become more flexible and practical, allowing India to build relationships with different countries without being limited to fixed alliances. This has enabled India to operate effectively across diverse global platforms. At the same time, India's soft power plays an important role in strengthening its global presence. Cultural influence, the popularity of yoga, and strong diaspora connections help create a positive image of the country abroad. Initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance show how India combines cultural appeal with practical solutions, especially in domains like climate change and sustainable development. This approach has improved India's credibility, particularly among developing nations. India's growing involvement in global governance also reflects its intention to influence international rules and systems. Its leadership during the G20 Presidency 2023 highlighted its ability to bring countries together and address shared challenges. In addition, stronger integration with the global economy through trade, technology, and supply chains has increased India's importance in the international system.

In the future, India's continued progress will depend on how well it balances these elements. By combining diplomatic flexibility, cultural influence, and active global engagement, India is well placed to emerge as a key power that not only participates in but also helps shape the direction of the multipolar world.

Balancing between Multilateralism and Global Governance

Multilateralism represents a mode of international engagement where three or more countries coordinate their actions through shared rules, common procedures, and cooperative decision-making. It differs from bilateral dealings by prioritising collective norms and structured dialogue over one-to-one negotiations. The idea

gained prominence after the Second World War with the establishment of global institutions like the United Nations, IMF, and World Bank, which aimed to bring some stability through collaboration rather than rivalry among major powers. Global governance is also a related concept that includes the diverse systems like formal organisations, informal networks, regulatory frameworks, cooperation and partnerships and international laws through which global challenges are addressed collectively. It involves not only states but also regional organisations, civil society groups, and private actors. In the 21st century, global governance has become multi-layered and decentralised due to shifting power dynamics, rapid technological advancement, and cross-border issues such as climate change, pandemics, and digital regulation.

India's strategic evolution in the 21st century multipolar order is marked by its careful balancing between multilateralism and global governance. Rather than relying solely on traditional alliances or unilateral action, India has increasingly used multilateral platforms to expand its diplomatic reach while simultaneously seeking to influence the rules and norms that govern the international system. Its active participation in institutions such as the United Nations, G20, and World Trade Organization reflects its commitment to multilateralism as a means of addressing shared global challenges like climate change, economic instability, and security threats. At the same time, India is not just following existing rules; it is also trying to reform them to contemporary realities. It has been consistently rooting for reforms in global institutions, especially the UN Security Council, so that they better represent today's world. India also focuses on raising the concerns of developing countries and making global decision-making more fair and inclusive. Its role during the G20 Presidency 2023 shows how it can bring different countries together and find common solutions. This balanced approach helps India in many ways. By working through multilateral platforms, it builds strong international partnerships and increases its global presence. At the same time, by contributing to global governance, it gains respect as a country that can shape international rules. This improves its position as a reliable and responsible power.

In the future, India's ability to combine cooperation with leadership will be very important. By continuing this approach, India is likely to strengthen its role as an influential and capable power in the evolving multipolar world. In the long term, this balance between participation and leadership positions India to play a central role in managing global transitions. As multipolarity deepens, India's ability to align multilateral cooperation with governance reform will be crucial in consolidating its status as a potent and influential global actor.

Challenges in India's Strategic Ascent

India's rise as a strong and influential power in today's multipolar world is not only driven by its ambitions but also shaped by several internal and external challenges. Despite various prospects and opportunities, India's evolution is not without limitations. The evolving multipolar world order presents a complex landscape in which India's aspiration to emerge as a great power is shaped not only by opportunities but also by a range of structural, institutional, domestic, regional and strategic constraints. For example, constant socio-economic inequalities, infrastructural deficits and challenges, and governance shortcomings lower the pace and inclusiveness of growth. At the domestic level, inequality remains a key issue. Even though the economy has grown significantly since the 1990s, gaps in income, regional development, and access to quality education and healthcare still exist. These gaps reduce the full potential of India's large population. Problems such as slow bureaucratic processes and uneven policy implementation also affect the effectiveness of reforms. At the same time, India faces the difficult task of balancing economic growth with environmental protection and energy needs. Additionally, technological dependence, energy security concerns, and evolving cyber warfare and non-traditional risks pose significant hurdles to India's long-term power projection. India needs to strengthen its capabilities in areas like artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and advanced manufacturing to reduce dependence on other countries. Recent global disruptions have also shown the importance of building strong and reliable supply chains. Along with domestic constraints the regional security tensions like particularly unresolved border disputes and neighbourhood tensions and the continuously changing international order continue to divert strategic attention and resources utilisation. On the external front, India operates in a complex global environment. The growing competition between major powers like China and the United States requires India to carefully manage its foreign policy. Moreover, weak global institutions and declining cooperation at the international level make it harder for India to shape global rules.

Overall, India must focus on inclusive growth, better governance, and technological progress while maintaining flexible diplomacy. Addressing these challenges effectively will help India move closer to becoming a potent power in the 21st century. By navigating these constraints effectively, India can strengthen its position as a credible and influential actor in the evolving multipolar order.

Vision for India in the upcoming decades

As the twenty-first century advances, the global order continues to undergo a structural transformation marked by the diffusion of power across multiple centres. With this evolving international dynamics, India's rise as a potent power is not an accidental development but the result of long-term civilizational continuity, democratic resilience, economic expansion, and strategic adaptability. The coming decades provide India with opportunities to consolidate its position not merely as a regional leader but as a responsible and influential global actor. India's future vision as a potent power can be defined as multidimensional because unlike traditional great powers whose influence was often derived from military conquest or imperialism, India's ascent is shaped by a unique combination of demographic advantage, technological capability, normative credibility, and strategic autonomy. This distinctive pathway positions India to play a constructive role in a multipolar world that increasingly values cooperation, inclusivity, and sustainable development. India's advocacy for a reformed multilateral system underscores this vision. In the decades ahead, India's global vision is likely to be guided by a balance between national interest and global responsibility. India does not seek dominance but rather an equitable position with an ability to influence outcomes while preserving decision-making autonomy. . In the coming decades, India's role as a bridge between developed and developing worlds may become increasingly significant, especially as the Global South seeks greater voice in decision-making processes.

In terms of demographic growth, If India succeeds in nurturing a globally competitive workforce, it could emerge as the world's largest reservoir of skilled professionals, influencing global labour markets, innovation ecosystems, and knowledge production. The coming decades will therefore test India's capacity to convert population size into productive human capital. India's vision as a potent power also depends on its investment in regional and global security. In the coming decades, India's security approach is likely to focus on deterrence, maritime security, cyber resilience, and indigenisation of defence capabilities. Along with it India's expanding role in humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and peacekeeping reflects an alternative form of security leadership advocating for protection and partnership rather than dominance. Next to discuss is the economic aspect as we all know India's future as a potent power will depend on its ability to sustain high growth while ensuring social inclusion. Over the next few decades, with one of the largest domestic markets India is likely to emerge as a central link in global supply chains. The future trajectory points toward becoming a knowledge-driven economy anchored in innovation, digital infrastructure, and advanced manufacturing. Sectors such as artificial intelligence, renewable energy technologies, biotechnology, and space-based applications offer India great opportunity. Beyond material capabilities, India's future influence will increasingly depend on its historical richness rooted in India's civilizational heritage, democratic values, provide a foundation for ethical leadership in global affairs. Cultural diplomacy, diaspora networks, and educational exchanges are likely to play a growing role in India's international presence. If India succeeds in aligning its domestic priorities with its global aspirations, it is likely to emerge not just as a powerful state, but as a shaping force in the evolving world order.

Conclusion

This research paper tries to analyse India's strategic evolution within the context of an increasingly complex and fluid multipolar world, arguing that its emergence as a potent power is a gradual, dynamic and multi-dimensional process rather than a fixed or linear pathway. The findings suggest that India's rise is being shaped by the interaction of multiple factors like economic expansion, flexible foreign policy rooted in strategic autonomy, growing technological capabilities, and a more assertive role in global governance and global institutions. At the same time, the findings suggest that this trajectory is constrained by persistent domestic challenges such as socio-economic inequality, uneven development, and institutional inefficiencies, along with some external pressures arising from intensifying great power competition and shifting regional dynamics. These dual forces of opportunity and constraint define the contemporary reality of India's ascent.

Thus, India's future lies not merely in rising within the system, but in actively shaping a more balanced, inclusive, and cooperative global order, marking its transition from a participant to a key architect of the emerging multipolar world. The observations suggest that the multipolar world offers India a unique opportunity to redefine its global role. Its rise will be shaped not only by material capabilities but also by its ability to project ideas, build partnerships, and maintain internal cohesion. If these elements are effectively managed, India is likely to emerge as a key pillar of the evolving global order and play a constructive role in making it more inclusive and balanced. India's position in the 21st century can be best understood as that of a rising but still consolidating power, i.e. a potent power; one that holds the potential to shape global outcomes, provided it sustains long-term strategic vision, balances domestic and international priorities, and adapts effectively to the complexities of a multipolar order.

A major contribution of this research lies in addressing the existing gap in academic literature by offering a more integrated analytical framework. Unlike earlier studies that treat economic growth, foreign policy, and strategic behaviour as separate domains, this paper demonstrates how these elements are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing. By doing so, it provides a more comprehensive explanation of India's evolving global role. The study further in terms of contemporary realities of international system, presents India as a "connector power" or "bridge state" a state that not only balances between major powers but also bridges divides between the Global North and South, traditional and emerging institutions, and competing geopolitical interests.

In academic terms, the paper contributes by combining theoretical perspectives with empirical developments, thereby offering a more grounded and multidimensional understanding of power transition in the 21st century. It also opens up new directions for future research, particularly in areas such as digital governance, supply chain resilience, climate leadership, and India's role in shaping alternative development narratives.

In conclusion, India's future as a potent power will depend on how effectively it manages internal transformation while sustaining external engagement. Its ability to align domestic priorities with global responsibilities will ultimately determine how it evolves from a rising actor into a key architect of the contemporary multipolar order.

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