

India's Ascent to Global Leadership: Opportunities and Obstacles

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Dr. Nittam Chandel

Associate Professor of Public Administration
S.V Govt. College Ghumarwin

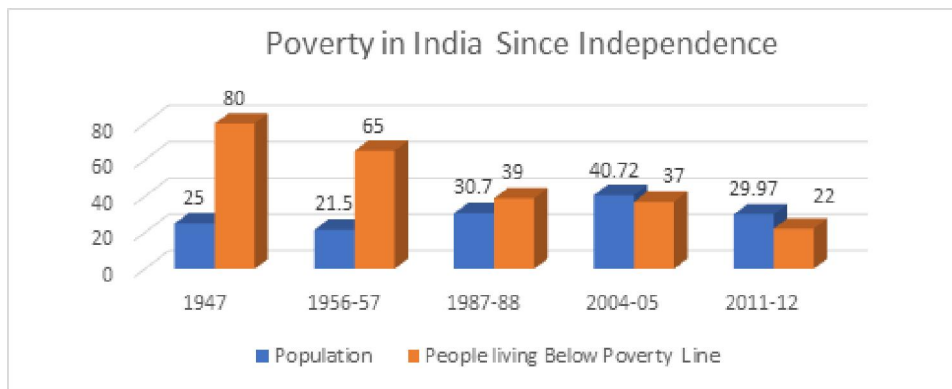
Introduction

In 1947, India attained Independence and became Sovereign Socialist Secular, Democratic Republic. At the time of independence, the country had to deal with several problems, such as illiteracy, corruption, poverty, gender discrimination, untouchability, regionalism, and communalism. According to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), which conducted the first survey on unemployment in 1972-73, the unemployment rate in the country at that time was 8.35%. More than 250 million people were below the poverty line, which was 80% (Figure-1) of the population at that time. The per capita income was very small. During the independence the per capita income of Indian was Rs. 274 only. The health infrastructure was very poor. There were only 30 medical colleges and 2,014 government hospitals across the country. The average age of an Indian was 34 years. These and many other prevailing problems in the country hampered the economic development of the country. In fact, India's GDP at the time of gaining independence in 1947 was only 2.93 lakh crore, or 3% of the global GDP (Figure 3). All these problems faced by the Nehru Administration resorted for a planned economy based on Socialistic pattern of society with an aim of Modernization of economy, using indigenous technology, own resources and building a strong industrial sector in the country. Various structural functional reforms in the form of establishing Planning Commission, formulations of economic, Industrial Policies and administrative reforms were the top priority of the administration.

The decade of 60s was full of turbulence for Independent India. The country faced an acute shortage of food and eatables. This was the decade when the country had to go through the worst drought in history. Due to which the supply of food grains and food grains was

severely disrupted and India's dependence on western countries for help increased. Millions of lives were lost due to this famine. This was the period when the Green Revolution came into existence. The father of the Green Revolution, M. S. Swaminathan, launched the movement in India in 1965. High-yielding wheat and rice varieties were grown on a larger amount of land during the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution produced a record-breaking 131 million tonnes of grain from 1978 to 1979. So, country slowly and steadily adopted various other initiatives like White Revolution, Pink Revolution, and Blue Revolution were all successfully carried out in India, making the country food self-sufficient. Now the country has been acknowledged as one of the world's top agricultural producers in the world.

Figure 1: -Poverty in India Since Independence



Source: NITI Aayog, Planning Commission and RBI

The independent democratic India has faced numerous internal challenges and political turmoil in the form of internal emergency, and also faced outside aggressions in the forms of wars. The conflict of 1948 with Pakistan 1962 with China, 1965 with Pakistan, 1971 with Pakistan has actually waded and shattered the Indian Economy. All these internal, external, and various other challenges led to India's worst-ever economic catastrophe in 1991. On May 30, that year, the nation had to sell 20 tonnes of gold to the investment firm UBS for the first time in order to obtain a \$240 million loan. After that deal, it shipped 46.8 million tonnes of gold three more times as collateral to secure \$400 million in loans from the Bank of England and the Bank of Japan. By December of that year, all of this gold had been replaced. The licensing Raj was abolished by the Narasimha Rao-led administration, which assumed power on June 21, 1991, and had Manmohan Singh as its finance minister. (A short history of Indian economy 1947-2019: Tryst with destiny & other stories 2019)

In 1991, India not only adopted a new economic policy based on liberalization, privatization and globalization but we also observe a shift and adjustment in India's foreign policy. Much has changed in the world of politics in the thirty years since India made a significant change to its foreign and economic policy. India has undertaken intentional or forced changes to its foreign policy in order to protect its interests in a changing world. However, some of the fundamental principles guiding India's foreign policy continue to be followed, albeit with occasional adjustments made to advance the nation's objectives. The chief Architect of India's Foreign Policy and all successive Prime Ministers including those during coalition govt. shaped the country's policy. In fact, India's greatest diplomatic achievement, which dates back to Nehru's time in office, flourishes. The India that Narendra Modi inherited in 2014 was in the best shape it had ever been in. Modi was successful in continuing the tradition where he developed close relationships with the Heads of state. Up to a point, we were able to successfully balance the western and eastern blocs. The foreign policy becomes more aggressive under Modi Govt. His foreign policy objectives, though, are similar to those pursued by Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Dr. Manmohan Singh but has not 'fundamentally altered the orientation of India's foreign policy'. (Ranjan 2022).

The Modi doctrine has 'reinvigorated' India's foreign policy. Infact, new dynamism and pragmatism in India's foreign policy is easily felt and seen in international affairs now. India's thinking and attitude has been completely changing. Now India's approach is based on the principle of 'friendship with all, alliance with none'. The main focus and efforts of Govt. are to make and establish India a global superpower.

Conclusions: Challenges and Way forward

The country has completed 75 years of independence. A lot has changed in these 75 years. Our population has crossed 100 crores. The GDP of the country has increased from Rs. 3 lakh crore to more than Rs. 147 lakh crore. It has been 75 years since the country got independence. We went from 34 crores to 137 crores. However, the Aadhaar-making body UIDAI has estimated the country's population to be more than 137.29 crore by July 2022. Earlier the citizen of the country had lived an average of 34 years, now he has lived for 69 years. The country's GDP increased from Rs. 2.93 lakh crore to about Rs. 147 lakh crore today. The annual income of the common man increased from Rs. 274 to more than Rs. 1.50 lakh. A lot has changed in the country in these 75 years. The landscape has been changing significantly throughout the years, transitioning from being the world's centre for education in yesteryear to today's IT hub. Using August 15, 1947, as a point of

comparison, we can see that India has made significant advancements in a number of areas, including science and technology, the economy, and human development. Some areas, like health and education, nevertheless, continue to appear to be well-cared for. Let's examine each of these facets of Indian development separately. (75 Years of Independence: The Changing Landscape of India 2022).

The economy of India has grown considerably in the twenty-first century. Several changes have been made during Narendra Modi Govt. such as the repeal of Section 370, the upgrading of the Defense systems, the creation of an atmosphere that is favorable to startups, and many more. The Modi Administration introduced various initiatives, such as "Make in India," "Swachh Bharat, and "Digital India," to boost infrastructure and governance in the country. The vast Digital Public Infrastructure of India (JAM Trinity: Jan Dhan Account, Aadhaar and Mobile) was created under the government's "No one is left behind welfare policy" in fact, Digital technology has successfully distributed food to 800 million Indians, distributing more than \$300 billion in benefits digitally, ensuring that 400 million people have access to regular meals, During Covid-19 country actively developed two indigenously vaccines and provided 2 billion dosages to the people of the country through our technological Cowin portal.

At foreign policy level India started the 21st century as a major player in the Global South i.e., developing countries. As an economic superpower, slowly but steadily, India is touching new heights with full vigor. One of the reasons for India's growing role in contemporary global politics is its success in the economic sector. India's was able to sustain and accelerate growth as compared to large economies such as Japan, Germany, and Russia since 1990, maintaining a remarkable average growth rate of 6.5 percent and progressing even further. With a GDP (PPP) of \$10.5 billion in 2018, India's economy has now become the world's largest economy after China and the US. After implementing several long-term projects, India's economy will become the second largest economy in the world in the next twenty years. India has a vast and ever-increasing military-power in line with the other superpower's resources, which cost \$66.5 billion in 2018. Thus, after America, China, Saudi Arabia and Russia, India has now become the fifth highest spending military power globally. In the last three decades, India has become the largest importer of arms and in the next ten years, it has signed agreements to buy arms in large quantities. Analysts believe that India will become the world's third largest military power by 2030. With the development of such capabilities, India's strategic reach will grow progressively in view of India's energy security and trade related security needs. Further, India is a much younger nation than the US

and China (and of course the European Union) in particular as far as demographics are concerned. This makes it clear that it has such a large workforce that it can retain its economic and military prowess for many decades.

Challenges

Since independence India became part of all important international organizations and plays a significant role in creation of non-aligned movement during the Russian USA cold war period. Now India is member of major international organisation such as UNO, WORLD BANK, IMF, UNESCO, UNICEF, ILO, WTO, FATF, G20, BIMSTEC, SAARC, SCO, BRICS, RIC, QUAD, I2U2, ASEAN, an invitee in G7 and India-CARICOM etc. In these multilateral forums India sets the narrative of the global north on climate change, carbon pricing, pandemic prevention, issues related to Intellectual Property, global food security and public stock holdings. International Solar Alliance with France in 2015 it has over 100 members and added, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. In 2021 at the COP26 India launched further initiatives under these two platforms like the “**One sun, One world, One grid**”—Green Grids Initiative and the “Infrastructure for Resilient Island States” initiative,” for fighting the problems of Climate Change globally.

India’s Popularity at international level can be seen when India was elected as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for two years by securing a record 189 votes, only four countries voted against its membership. This shows her popularity throughout the world. It is also true that Indian Economy is growing very fast and is now 5th largest in terms of GDP and 3rd largest in term of PPP. However, there are many areas and issues that could pose bigger impediments to the country’s long-term goals, the Indian democracy and economic prosperity. Long-term goals of India may be hampered by the persistent cross-border terrorism threat that has been originating from Pakistani soil since 1948 and the “expansionist threat” posed by China in the LAC and Indo-Pacific. India faces opposition from China, Pakistan, and Turkey in its quest to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a member of the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG). During Covid-19, India’s economy, pummeled by the pandemic and contracted by 7.3% in the 2020-21 financial year. It was the time period when every nation was struggling for medicines and vaccines; India has sent vaccines and medications to other nations. The vaccine diplomacy efforts of India have had a significant global impact. Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Central Asia, and Africa have all received assistance from India.

The major challenge now before the country is how to make India a self-reliant Country. The Russia – Ukraine war supply-chain has been disturbed and crude prices went up which have a negative impact on the Indian economy as the prices soar up and foreign reserves which were all time high has been squeezed due to this. India's foreign exchange reserves have grown substantially since 2000 and stood at US\$ 334 billion as of end-August 2015, as compared to US\$ 107.4 billion at end-March, 2004. In fact, the reserves reached US\$ 300 billion by the end of 2007-08, and have fluctuated around this level since then. (Nath n.d.). Similarly, China- Taiwan conflict due to Post Collins visit has impacted the supply chain of Semiconductors globally. This is appropriate time when India should intensify its Aatmanirbhar Bharat Campaign.

Way Forwards

The road that will lead India to assume a leadership role in the world in the 21st century is a winding one that will be distinguished by a tangled web of opportunities and challenges. The demographic dividend it offers in the form of a sizable population of young people who are also highly educated is one of its most valuable advantages. To make this potential a reality, however, calls for a determined effort to be made in the areas of education, skill development, and job creation. This will ensure that India's young people are able to effectively contribute to the global workforce.

India is on the upswing economically, with a powerful and diverse economy that gives a great deal of room for expansion and development opportunities. India has become a global center to produce software and the provision of information technology services as a direct result of the country's growing technological sector, which is frequently referred to as the "Silicon Valley of the East." In addition, the nation is making headway in the field of renewable energy and is working toward the goal of being a global leader in the production of clean power. The positive economic outlook places India in an advantageous position on the international scene. Because of its strategically important location, India plays an important part in the maintenance of peace and commerce in the region. India, which has the largest economy in South Asia, can exert influence and serve as a stabilizing force in the region. It may also encourage collaboration and connectivity with the countries that are in its immediate vicinity.

Despite these prospects, India is confronted with some daunting obstacles. There is still a large socioeconomic disparity, with a significant difference in income between the rich and the poor. The lack of proper infrastructure, particularly insufficient healthcare, transportation, and

educational institutions, continues to be a primary source of worry. These discrepancies can make it more difficult for the country to make progress and restrict its capacity to fully capitalize on its demographic dividend. Concerns about the environment present still another obstacle. Pollution, deforestation, and a lack of available water sources are all side effects of rapid urbanization and industry. It is a difficult balancing act to find solutions to these problems while still preserving economic expansion. In addition, India's intricate geopolitical linkages have a role in shaping its aspirations to assume a leadership role on the international stage. Careful diplomacy is required in order to successfully navigate its partnerships with key international powers, manage its relationships with countries that are geographically adjacent to it, and resolve disputes along its borders.

In conclusion, India's ascent to the top of the global leadership heap is a process that is both dynamic and complex. Realizing its potential as a worldwide leader in the 21st century will need it to make the most of its chances while simultaneously conquering the obstacles standing in its way. To achieve this goal, India will need to make significant efforts in areas such as education, infrastructure development, environmental sustainability, and diplomatic dexterity. The end goal is to establish India as a powerful force on the international stage.

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