

History and National Security[#]

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Abstract

This paper examines the links between the history we choose to tell ourselves and its implications for national security in India. It discusses history in the Indian tradition, the history that is current in India, some common current historical tropes, and why it matters. In the process it seeks to draw some real lessons of India's history for our national security.

Keywords: History, National Security, nationalism, India, victimhood

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There are worrisome national security implications of the present uses of history in India. The fact is that history has important social and political functions in every society. It is inextricably linked to contemporary politics – and therefore to national security. There is no such thing as pure history: objective and divorced from context, an academic discipline maintaining very high professional standards, in isolation in an ivory tower. The issue is the kind of history that we choose to tell ourselves — and teach our children — for it affects what we think and do, now and in the future.

I History in the Indian Tradition

Absolutely central to history in all traditions is the critical distinction between established fact and fiction: between historical statements based on evidence and subject to evidence, and those which are not.

Increasingly often today we see the politico-ideological abuse of history, not just in India but in several major countries. The past, or an *imagined* past, is used to justify religious fundamentalism, polarisation, and chauvinism. We laugh when we hear our neighbour speak of Harappa and Mohenjodaro as “four thousand years of Pakistan.” After all, Pakistan was not even thought of before 1932-3, became a political slogan only in 1940, and came into existence only in 1947. Sadly, some of us in India are falling into the same anachronistic trap.

We have become used to politicians and other public figures speaking of things they are clearly ignorant about, mangling history and logic in statements such as: Einstein discovered gravity, Darwin was wrong because no one witnessed an ape turning into homo sapiens, Chandragupta defeated Alexander, India invented plastic surgery and in-vitro fertilisation procedures, Haldighati was a victory for Maharana Pratap, cow urine cures Covid, India achieved independence in 2014 not 1947, and so on.

One might ignore these statements or laugh at them if they were just reflections of ignorance or jokes. Sadly, they are more. They are part of a larger narrative about our own history, grounded in an attitude of anti-intellectualism, that has the political effect of unsettling society. They also affect India’s credibility as a nation, as a society, and as a power. Worse, they affect India’s ability to function as a state and achieve the transformation of India. The foundation of successful public policy is evidence-based reliable knowledge, and high-frequency information. In its absence, we settle for policy-driven manufacture of evidence and history.

If asked why they do so, the purveyors of false or rhetorical history would probably say that it is necessary for the country, its unity and even for emotional satisfaction. All human beings and institutions need a past. Renan said that nations are historically novel entities pretending to have existed for a very long time (2018). Nationalist versions of history will therefore include omissions, inventions, and even, in extreme cases, lies. The problem is that history as fiction is now becoming widespread in India, encouraged by anti-intellectualism and a mindset that sees ‘good history’ simply as ‘history that is good for our group/country /cause’, and is spreading unchecked on social and mass media.

II The History We Tell Ourselves

History is like a map, an imperfect reflection of a larger objective reality, which, over time and with improvements in the historian's art, becomes clearer and more representative. That map is important to India's security policies because we act, choose and decide on the basis of the map of our own experiences, or history, that we carry in our heads. Perception matters; when perception does not match objective reality, policy errs or fails.

The broader problem is that we in India have been taught a version of our history which ignores how connected to the world India has been, and how our prosperity and security have been directly proportional to that linkage.¹ This may be because the regions which undertook these contacts with the rest of the world, what historians call coherent core areas — i.e., areas characterised by stable, long-term political and cultural institutions, like Bengal, Gujarat, and the Malabar and Coromandel coasts — have been ignored or downplayed in our historical narratives, in favour of the relatively insular Indo-Gangetic plain and the region around Delhi.

This was understandable when our history was being written by the British. They wrote a narrative that legitimised their rule, by making it a continuous sequence of empires, by stressing their alien nature and the role of foreign invaders, and by concentrating on polities near or based on Delhi. This saga of empires was periodised by religion, and caste was emphasised, disregarding the fact that other factors were always more important in practice, and that the ruling elite was always of mixed religious persuasion and origins.

One can understand why the British would prefer such a narrative, serving as it did to justify their own rule. What is one to make, however, of the fact that there are Indians who persist in these characterisations, complete with their narratives about religion and caste, accepting thereby the mythological history foisted on us by the British, despite having been shown by the best historians of the day that they are wrong?

Moving away from a Delhi-centric or Indo-Gangetic valley-centred view of Indian history and including the history of the other regions in our consideration gives us a very different historical legacy; one that should form an increasingly important element of our strategic culture and serve as a driver of our policy choices. If you look at Indian history as Delhi-centred, you will fall into the mistake of believing, as KM Panikkar did, that "India has, throughout history, had trouble arousing much interest in the world beyond its borders", which he contrasted to British attentiveness to developments around the Raj (Pannikar 1961). Instead, it is maritime Asia that has determined our prosperity and security to as great if not a greater extent than any trans-Himalayan expedition (Sivasundaram 2020).

Once one includes the history of southern and western India, as also Bengal and Orissa, in consideration, it becomes clear how strong India's trade, military and cultural links with the rest of the world have been, going back to 2,600 BCE. Ptolemy attests to this in the 2nd century CE; Pliny

¹ See, for instance, Asif, Manan Ahmed. 2020. *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. pp. 1-27.

in the mid-1st century CE grumbles about gold and silver draining away to India from the Roman Empire for luxury goods – a problem that the British also had in the early days of trading with India, until they discovered the commercial uses of opium.

The reach and extent of the soft and hard power of non-Gangetic regions of India in both mainland and archipelagic south-east Asia is visible to this day in the great ruins of Angkor Wat and Borobudur, on the walls of the Vaikuntha Perumal temple in Kanchipuram, and in Hampi, and in the living culture of many countries who formed India's maritime neighbours. Chola activist external policies and willing militarism enabled them to last from the 3rd century BCE to the 13th century CE. Their example was actively followed by the Pandyan (6 century BCE to 12th century CE) and Pallava (3rd to 9th century CE) dynasties. The same is true of the reach and influence of Gangetic or Indus-valley-based political entities like the Mauryas or Kushanas, as the spread of Buddhism overland to the Pacific and the Mediterranean attest. The Mughals, for their part, played an active role in central Asian politics too. This is a strong and abiding legacy that many seem to have chosen to forget.

The history we tell ourselves influences the policies we choose or favour.

For instance, there were several Indian views on India's security and foreign policy just before independence. Within the establishment and the Congress, there were those who believed in a nationalist version of our history, including Nehru, and those who accepted the British version of Indian history as Panikkar did. There was, however, a tolerance for differing views. GS Bajpai's views on alignment were clearly very different from Nehru's, as were KPS Menon's views on China. Yet Nehru made one the first Secretary-General of the MEA and the other the first foreign secretary of India, his top civil servants in foreign affairs.

Panikkar, Bajpai, and Patel prioritised the fight against communism and India's role as a security provider in south-east Asia. To that end, Bajpai, Panikkar, Rajaji, and others were ready for India to work with Britain in Asia in a close defence partnership. Nehru, KPS Menon and others, on the other hand, prioritised decolonisation as a means to enable pan-Asian solidarity, leading to joint actions to preserve peace, in contrast to the traditional power politics of the US and western powers.

There was a "Hindu" alternative to the debate in the Congress and official circles – often called Hindu nationalism, albeit wrongly so, since all sides of the discussion involved Hindus, and all were nationalists. Swami Vivekananda had argued at the end of the nineteenth century that reformed Hinduism based on the early Vedas could liberate India and free the world from "fanaticism and religious wars". This, he believed, would involve karma-yoga, making ourselves physically strong and rebuilding Indian civilisation using modern ideas. Once India mastered science and became "a European society with Indian religion" (Vivekananda 1897), it would conquer its former conquerors, Muslim and Western, by spiritual rather than by military power.

The idea that India's security could be achieved by universal acknowledgement of the truths of Hindu sanatana dharma (roughly, the true, eternal way), later also drove the thinking of Savarkar and Golwalkar, who led the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and is reflected in Narendra Modi's professed goal of India as a vishwaguru ('world teacher'). Savarkar and Golwalkar both argued that Hinduism is destined to bring world peace, but that sanatana dharma would only be taken seriously when India is a "self-confident, resurgent and mighty nation" (Golwalkar 1966). Theirs was, at that time, a small voice without influence or power, and was focused by its leaders on eliminating "internal threats" —

Muslims, Christians, and communists — in pursuit of which they were ready to work with the colonial power, while also admiring European fascists.

Let us consider four of the tropes about Indian history that are current today:

1. A thousand years of slavery

This is an ahistorical or anachronistic construct that may be useful for political mobilisation in post-Partition India but does not fit known and provable facts. Until British rule, the ruling elite in India was not constituted on religious lines, and always included people of different faiths, irrespective of the faith of the ruler. The British were the first elite group to resist assimilation into Indian culture, and to assert a racial basis for their rule and ‘superiority.’ Every other group that came into India became ‘Indian’, whatever that meant at that period and in the region they encountered. Hence the British insistence on hardening and stressing caste and religious divisions in the majority population so as to divide and rule.

Interestingly, it is the British colonial version of our own history that is now being replayed in the refrain of 1,000 years of slavery, of Muslims as foreigners, and in pushing a form of political Hinduism created in the last century. What is being attempted is to remake India and our sense of it into a late-19th century European nationalism, seeking a homogeneity of ethnicity, language, and religion, founded on social Darwinist ideas of race and superiority. It was this form of toxic nationalism that led Europe into four centuries of unremitting warfare, first among themselves and then against the rest of the world, culminating in two world wars that effectively destroyed Europe’s power and role in the world. Is that where we want to take India?

Characterising the last 1,000 years as slavery is not borne out by the historical record. Until almost 1800, there was little to differentiate the development of western Europe from India, eastern Europe, or China (or, to be more precise, of portions of each of these regions) from one another. In these areas in India, living standards were similar to those in advanced parts of China and western Europe. Proto-industrialisation had taken place precisely in those areas of India that were most connected to the world through history— Bengal, Gujarat, the Malabar, and Coromandel coast — i.e., maritime India.

It was only later that the ‘great divergence’ (as it is now known) took place, with western Europe’s economic and technical advancement in the industrial revolution creating a Europe-centred world. As Pomeranz says, “we cannot understand pre-1800 global conjunctures in terms of a Europe-centred world system; we have, instead, a polycentric world with no dominant centre.” (Pomeranz 2000) Angus Maddison’s estimates of GDP bear this out and show how late the great divergence actually took place (Bolt and Zanden 2020).

For our purposes, the figures below are interesting because they show what Empire did to once prosperous and advanced societies in Asia like India. If there is a period of Indian history that was characterised by slavery, it is that of colonialism in India, that is, the British empire. At least until today, we have not used that past to create a narrative of historical humiliation to justify present-day bad behaviour on the global stage, as the Chinese regime does. In India, the narrative of 1000 years of slavery is being used politically to divide and polarise a society already traumatised by Partition.

Distribution of Population & Income in World Economy, 1000-1820

Year	% Of World Population			% Of World GDP		
	1000	1700	1820	1000	1700	1820
Asia, <i>of which</i>	65.5	62.1	65.2	68.2	57.7	56.5
China	22.1	22.9	36.6	22.7	22.3	33.0
India	28.1	27.3	20.1	27.8	24.5	16.1
Western Europe	9.6	13.5	12.8	9.0	21.8	22.9

Source: (Nayyar 2013, 13)

2. India should not have taken Kashmir to the UN in 1948

There has been much second guessing of the decision to take the issue to the UN, and of the conduct of that war, including the decision to accept a UN-sponsored cease-fire in December 1948. Patel, for one, questioned Nehru's promise to the UN of a plebiscite or referendum to determine the future of Kashmir. Keep in mind, though, that Patel was initially ready to hand Kashmir over to Pakistan in return for Hyderabad. It was only after Pakistan sent in tribal raiders followed by the Pakistan Army that he changed his mind (Nandurkar 1976, 62). It was an evolving and very unclear situation, and one that should be evaluated in the context of its time. What is seldom asked is: what were the alternatives available to government at that time?

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, clear and certain, and never available to the participants. For the author, this story is proof of how limited the instruments and options available to India were at the time. The first Commanders-in-Chief of both the Indian and Pakistani armies were British. Rob Lockhart and Roy Bucher reported more extensively to their own diplomats and their compatriots in Pakistan than to their nominal masters (Advani 2013). In India, there were even occasions when the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army Gen. Roy Bucher did not carry out direct orders from his Indian political masters (Dixit 2002).

When the moment of decision came, it was the considered advice of the Indian and British military commanders to Nehru that the army could not carry the war to a victorious conclusion, and that India should therefore approach the UN and, later, accept the cease-fire. Lt. Gen. L.P. "Bogey" Sen later titled his account of the Kashmir confrontation 1947-48 'Slender was the Thread,' which gives you an idea of how close India came to losing Kashmir (Sen 1969).

At that time there was no doubt and ample proof of aggression. Nonetheless, at the UN, the UK led the US into treating the matter as a dispute between two states over the status of J&K rather than as a case of aggression that must be vacated. Their aim was both to use Pakistan, and to insert themselves into the issue. The prevarication and diplomacy involved is well described in Chandrashekhar Dasgupta's book, which is an excellent description of the issue itself, as also of how

power politics is played (2002). To assert, with the benefit of hindsight, what ought to have been done then is a leap in judgment.

3. India should have intervened to make Tibet independent in 1950

As India approached independence, it had been clear for some years that China intended to occupy Tibet. Mao had listed Tibet among the lost territories of China in 1936 (when he included Nepal and Bhutan as well). While sitting in the western hills outside Peking in 1949 from April to September, he had listed the “liberation of Taiwan and Tibet” among the first tasks of his new government (Menon 2021, 56). Nehru and his officials were aware that this would be an adverse change in the situation on our borders. They therefore initiated contacts with the Tibetan government of the Dalai Lama to see what might be done and got the military options examined internally from 1948-50. An Indian Army major, Zorawar Chand Bakshi, was sent into Tibet to report to Foreign Secretary KPS Menon about the situation and possibilities. He found that the Dalai Lama was a minor and that the Tibetans themselves were completely divided. Apart from Shakabpa and Tsarong, the rest of the Kashag did not want to provoke the Chinese by a military build-up (ibid).

When the Tibetans did manage to ask for arms from India and sent a delegation to canvas the world, it was a case of ‘too little, too late’. India did supply some weapons in June 1949 and did try some military training. But as India’s Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Cariappa told Nehru in October 1950, the Tibetans had no military capacity to withstand the battle-hardened PLA (who had just driven the Kuomintang (KMT) off the Chinese mainland). The COAS added that the Indian Army itself, engaged in war in Kashmir and in internal security duties, could at best spare one battalion of troops for Tibet, that they would not be acclimatised, and would have to be deployed at Yatung in the Chumbi valley or, at the limit, no further than Gyantse, even that not for long. In effect, India had no real military options to defend Tibet (ibid, 57).

Nehru, therefore, had no choice but military inaction and the use of diplomacy and persuasion. And in that too he was inhibited both by what the British had done to promote and recognise Chinese suzerainty over Tibet (which they presented as a step to keep the Russians out of Tibet), and by the Tibetan desire to negotiate directly with China. There had been a consistent British refusal to arm the Tibetans in the past, and in 1940 a British Foreign Office note said presciently that “China is bound to absorb Tibet after the war if not before and we can do nothing to prevent it” (ibid, 57). The US tried to get the Dalai Lama to leave Tibet in 1951 for exile in Thailand or Sri Lanka but the Dalai Lama chose not to accept the offer. (Mao had offered better terms and the Tibetans were divided.) (Kalha 2014)

Nehru is maligned for ‘losing’ Tibet in 1950. But he had no option to intervene effectively. In fact, he had no military choices and little diplomatic play. The signing of the 17 Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet on 23 May 1951 between the Tibetan authorities and the PRC further limited India’s options. Incidentally, this remains the only such agreement in PRC history, and its signature implicitly recognises de facto Tibetan independence and Tibet’s status as different from the rest of China before 1950. It has been repudiated by the Dalai Lama.

On November 18, 1950, Nehru wrote in an internal MEA note: “It must be remembered that neither the UK nor the USA, nor indeed any other power, is particularly interested in Tibet or the future of that country. What they are interested in is embarrassing China” (Krishna 2007, 230-237).

Sadly, this is as true today as when Nehru wrote it. When the Tibetans appealed to the UN on November 7, 1950, they got no support worth the name.

4. India won the war but lost the peace in 1971

Did India really lose at the peace table what it won in the war of 1971? In July 1972, Mrs. Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (who had become Prime Minister of Pakistan) met to discuss the peace. The Simla Agreement of July 2, 1972 provided for India to vacate all west Pakistani territories occupied during the war, and to release all Pakistani prisoners of war. It was agreed to redraw and adjust the CFL of 1948 and call the new line the “line of control” (LoC) and to settle India-Pakistan issues bilaterally.

The conventional wisdom, supported by an account that PN Dhar wrote thirty years later, is that Mrs. Gandhi was keen to settle the Kashmir issue but was fooled by Bhutto (Dhar 2001). Bhutto agreed that the problem be resolved by Pakistan keeping what was west of the LoC and India east, but didn't want this in the formal agreement, fearing the reaction of the Pakistan Army at home to what they would call an abject surrender. This private understanding on a future settlement of J&K was therefore left to be formalised publicly later. Bhutto is said to have fooled Mrs Gandhi since he never had any intention of keeping his word and got an Indian promise to return all territory in the West and the prisoners of war.

It is true that India proceeded from the sense that an imposed peace – something in the nature of the Versailles accord that ended World War I – would only create resentment, unite Pakistan, and sow the seeds of another war soon. PN Haksar, Mrs. Gandhi's influential principal secretary, argued this forcefully in his notes to her. But what she received and commonly believed version ignores is the absence of any contemporary proof of a desire on Mrs. Gandhi's part to settle Kashmir on these lines, apart from PN Dhar's subsequent memory.

Indeed, not a single Indian draft before or during the Simla meeting included any such indication. Instead, India concentrated on insisting that the Kashmir and other issues be settled bilaterally by India and Pakistan, which Bhutto did commit to, thus taking Kashmir away from the UN for almost fifty years, until Article 370 was read down in August 2019. What is available on the internal record is Mrs. Gandhi saying that the country would not understand or forgive her if, after the victory on the battlefield, she gave away Pakistan Occupied Kashmir to Pakistan. One can understand Bhutto wanting to be seen as a hero at home and spreading the myth that he had fooled Mrs. Gandhi. It is hard to see why an Indian audience should believe it (Chandrashekhar Dasgupta 2021, 227-240).

Even if there had been some understanding at Simla on a Kashmir settlement, what realism would lead one to expect came to pass soon. Bhutto ramped up the rhetoric on Kashmir soon after returning to Pakistan. In any case, by 1975 neither Mrs. Gandhi nor Bhutto had the political capital at home to make the LoC the permanent international boundary between India and Pakistan. It seems doubtful that Mrs. Gandhi, the supreme realist, would expect any informal agreement with a Bhutto she did not trust to work.

Rather, and again realistically, she took what was available at Simla, which was a great deal better than what had gone before in India-Pakistan relations. Pakistan was broken, the subcontinent's political geography improved from an Indian point of view, and the Kashmir issue was bilateralised (Bhasin 2018, 231-251). In hindsight, the Simla agreement brought stability to the subcontinent for

several decades. Even her fiercest critics at the time, Jayaprakash Narayan and Rajaji, praised her for the achievement of the Simla Agreement (Ankit 2022; Gandhi 2010).

It remains hard to see how a settlement of J&K that legalised the status quo would have been politically accepted in either country — in a Pakistan smarting from defeat, when large portions of the populace and army sought revenge from India, or for that matter in a triumphal India. It is also moot whether such a settlement of J&K would have lasted, given that it would have left both sides dissatisfied, and in all likelihood would have fallen victim to the fractious turn that domestic politics took soon thereafter in both countries. But this is speculation. What is certain is that, on balance, the Simla agreement brought stability and helped to avert a conventional war in the subcontinent for many years.

The subcontinent continues to this day to live with some baleful aftereffects of the 1971 war. Pakistan's realisation that J&K could not be taken by conventional war led to the pursuit of nuclear weapons and increasing reliance on terrorism and other asymmetric means. Bhutto and the Pakistan Army decided at Multan in 1972 to build nuclear weapons, "even if we have to eat grass", as Bhutto said. The conflicts over Siachen and Kargil are collateral effects of the Line of Control drawn after the 1971 war. Pakistan's stoking of insurgency in Kashmir and other parts of India, and Bangladesh's deep political divides and fissures are among legacies of the war with which we are still coming to terms.

But taken together India achieved all her war aims on the field and at Simla: the birth of Bangladesh, the bilateralisation of our disputes with Pakistan, the removal of a UN role, the cutting of Pakistan down to size, remaking the geopolitics of the subcontinent, and several years of peace with Pakistan. These are not small matters, and we reap the benefits to this day, the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of Bangladesh, in the relationship we enjoy with Bangladesh and its direct contributions to our security.

III. Why it Matters: The Real Lessons of our History for National Security

Why rake up these controversies about old times? Because they are being used for contemporary political purposes, and to manipulate what the average Indian thinks, by those whose history is neither evidence nor fact based. Ahistorical or fact-free stories like these affect our view of ourselves, and our capability to think rationally, to think big, and to be ambitious for India.

This matters at the level of both principle and practice. The reason leaders seldom lie to their international counterparts but find it easier to lie to their own people is because they are easily found out and because credibility is essential in dealings with those who are not under your control or authority. Pervasive lying creates a poisonous culture of dishonesty within a society (Mearsheimer 2011, 90-101). Internationally, lying by leaders and the backlash it provokes affects their ability to pursue effective external and security policies.

Bad history makes bad policy. Indeed, history shows how bad history was used to justify bad policies. Bad policy leads to bad results. This is all the more tragic for a country where there is much to learn and adapt from history, properly studied. In this final section, let us consider five lessons of

India's unique history, each of which, in the author's view, has implications for our national security calculus.

1. Self-strengthening and strategic autonomy

India has a unique endowment of geography, history, economic resources, demography and other long-term drivers. Therefore, India cannot just imitate anyone else, like China or the US, though it must learn from their experience. No other country shares India's interests to the point of being invested enough in India's security and territorial integrity to defend it. This is even more so now that India is a 'rising power'. Self-strengthening and a grand strategy of autonomy are therefore essential and unavoidable.

In practical policy terms, this results in hedging, balancing, resilience, using India's scale and strength. This also means that internal security is not distinct from external security. A mess up in one affects the other. Historically, in 1965, this dynamic worked for India in Kashmir. Internal cohesion matters.

Civil-military relations also need careful handling: consider the recent news of "Bhagavad-Gita's relevance in today's military leadership" allotted at a military command course (News18.com 2021). The Pandavas were armed with more than the Bhagavad Gita. They learnt martial skills from Drona before going to war and possessed the most advanced weapons of their time. Consider the PLA, a political army since its inception, which asks the question: Can ideological purity and revolutionary spirit defeat a carrier strike group? And their answer is a clear 'NO.'

The Indian Army is not and should not be a political army, though there are disturbing signs of its use in domestic politics and of military leaders making statements that suggest a political orientation. If it were to change its character, the Indian Army would lose the public respect and esteem in which it is held, as has happened to the police in India.

2. India is most prosperous and secure when most engaged and connected to the outside world

The historical record is clear. In today's situation, India's needs can only be met by engaging abroad. Almost half of India's GDP is the external sector. Imports are critical to our growth and transformation. 80% of India's imports today are maintenance imports, hard to do without—oil, coal, fertiliser, moong dal, non-ferrous metals, technology, and capital goods. And to pay for those imports, exports are a necessity.

Besides, one cannot walk on one leg; seeking active political and security involvement with the outside world while turning one's back on them, as it were, in economic terms. Walking out of RCEP, raising tariffs for four years, and if *atmanirbhartha* means a return to the import substitution days of the sixties and seventies – none of these help India's case for closer external engagement. If we need balancing coalitions with Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Australia, Singapore, and others to counter China's rise, we cannot have a one-sided or uni-dimensional relationship.

3. We are a maritime subcontinent with a continental problem:

India is a classic land-sea power – historically, it has been a maritime subcontinent with a continental problem. Today, the balance of forces in the seas around India creates an opportunity that

does not exist on land. In this situation, the sea is the axis for India to project power, and essential for India's prosperity.

India's major security challenges are on the Asian continent—especially after Partition and the rise of China have physically cut off the traditional arenas of inner, central and west Asia. The world's largest boundary dispute with China, and Pakistan's inveterate hostility, mean that India cannot act like the other members of the Quad, who are islands in geopolitical terms.

India's tactical and operational problems on land cannot be solved at sea. The answer to Chinese salami-slicing on the LAC cannot be blockading the Malacca strait, or, for that matter, nuclear weapons. Each of these domains and portions of the spectrum of conflict needs to be dealt with on its own terms. In a larger strategic sense, of course, Indian strategic autonomy on the continent is instrumental for the success of a "free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)." Thus, India needs to have stronger partnerships with Russia and Iran for the continent; at the same time, a Quad and FOIP strategy for the maritime arena.

4. Not all problems are historical; look forward not back:

Economic and military strength and internal cohesion are essential for strategic autonomy. Image polishing, or control of the narrative, can take one only so far. As India's former Foreign Secretary Venkateswaran said when Rajiv Gandhi wanted MEA to improve India's image abroad, 'the image cannot be better than the original.' (Panneerselvan 2021)

The relationship with China is India's greatest challenge; It became a challenge after 1950 when China occupied Tibet. History, therefore, offers little help and limited guidance – certainly little that can be applied directly. The present day challenge is rooted in India's growing power imbalance with China, and can only be solved by looking towards the future, not to history.

5. Successful rising powers have followed similar strategies in the past:

There are two broad strands to the strategies followed by successful rising powers in the past.

One is to initially follow an accommodational strategy, working with the established order, norms, and hegemon(s) for as long as possible, while steadily continuing to accumulate the material basis of national power, namely military and economic power, or hard power.

The other is to develop a narrative to explain and propel one's soft power, both internally and externally. These narratives reconcile their growing power with the existing international order, acknowledge existing norms, and explain the purpose of their rise in terms acceptable to established powers. Ideally, if it is to be credible, this narrative should be the same both within the country and internationally.

It is only after the accumulation of sufficient power that rising powers have turned to shaping the regional or global order to suit their interests, as they see them.

No country has become a great power by wallowing in victimhood, dividing its people, picking fights with its neighbours and other powers on ideological grounds, or by parading an inferiority complex as history.

IV Conclusion

What we need in India is a forward-looking, confident India, not one that manufactures a history of victimhood for itself. Remember that the uprising of 1857 which looked backward failed; the freedom movement looked forward to transforming India and succeeded. 1857 was followed by a generation of great leaders and thinkers, most born between 1850 and 1875, from whom India could learn lessons of complete independence, economic emancipation, and social unity, for the political, economic, and cultural revival of India.

That is what we need to build the strong, prosperous, and modern India of our dreams.

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