

**PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY INDIA:  
AN OVERVIEW OF THE COMPILATION**

*Ambassador Arif Kamal*

**Prelude**

Five India-specific studies in the compilation aim at offering perspectives on contemporary India and bring to the readership a better appreciation of thematic issues that are relevant to Pakistan's interface with India. The ensemble makes a broad-brush picture of the transformations, whether accumulated or in the making, in our neighborhood, thus relate to assessing the scenario and policy options. This carries a focus on India's aspirations for a global role, dynamics of minorities situation in the secular setting, interstate water management issues, militancy as a case study and recent electoral process that unfolds the new elite's twin track approach on 'Hindutva' and 'economic revival'. The themes when seen as part of an organic whole, offer a reference point for more specialized studies in the days ahead.

**Significance**

The scholastic undertaking presupposes significance of Pakistan's interface with India and vice versa as next door neighbors and therefore, of the profound impact which the dynamics of either scenario might carry on the other. The relationship in spite of tests and trials of our times, is critically important for peace and progress in South Asia and a subject of constant review.

Understandably, the fallout from India's domestic scene as well as its external posture evokes a legitimate interest in Pakistan. For example, India's power politics and who is on

the steering: hardline or softline; issues such as minorities and militancy have had their own momentum. Similarly, India's alignments within the global and regional frame, have been a determinant factor in Pakistani threat perception and in its response. Concurrently, Indian defence doctrine in spite of its China-specific pretensions remains very much cognizant of Pakistani reality in its neighborhood. The composite picture offered in the two-way exchanges remains critically important for issues of peace and progress in the region.

Today, India's profile is taking a significant turn in terms of aspirations and a reality-check of her capacity to perform and deliver. The contemporary scene, therefore, evokes considerable interest for those engaged in strategic studies. The study is well-timed as Indian scene has attained a dynamic shift in the follow up of 2014 general elections, from moderate though inertia-ridden approach to a hardline and proactive treatment of issues in the policy-relevant domains. The discussions are now focused on the quality and pace of 'India's Rise' and on whether the mix of proactive and hardline approaches promise any significant gain or otherwise for peace and progress in the region. This presents a dilemma viz-a-viz hopes that in the post 2014 Afghanistan scenario, Pakistan instead of facing a two-front situation finds an environment conducive for settling hotbeds of conflict and to build horizontal economic connectivity.

## **Methodology**

The researchers while engaged in the study, employed qualitative methods of research and applied analytical and explanatory approaches in support of hypothetical statements. Instead of questionnaires and surveys, leading academic and policy relevant experts from Islamabad were gathered on our campus to deliberate on each issue separately. The papers are indeed case studies of five issues in the Indian scenario, presented from Pakistani perspective.

A good number of academicians and policy relevant experts from different institutes and think tanks in Islamabad had joined the ISSRA faculty in a series of thematic discussions relevant to this study. In this context, we note with appreciation invaluable feedback and contributions made by Dr. Muhammad Mujeeb Afzal (Quaid-e-Azam University), Mr. Ejaz Haider (Political Analyst, Capital Television), Mr. Salman Zaidi (Jinnah Institute), Dr. P.I. Cheema, (Dean, Faculty of Contemporary Studies), Dr. Muhammad Khan and Dr. Shaheen Akhtar (International Relations Department-FCS). The exercise enabled the writers to test their hypothesis and fine tune their products.

## **Scope**

Amongst the studies, a revisitation of India's 'major power syndrome' figures in prominently as the first chapter. The study argues that pronounced as the largest democracy and rapidly developing country, India has a 'pressing urge to act powerful' and therefore, a mindset that is illustrative of its ambitions. Concurrently, the country is likely to benefit from the 'proxy role' on behalf of the US, as the later shifts its priorities and redraws rules of engagement. This aspect relates to how much it can cash on the so called US policy of China's containment.

If the capacity to influence the others is a key gauge, its reflection in acquiescence if not allegiance, will be very much relevant. It remains uncertain if India was any near to attaining the status. An answer to the preposition would, in major parts, rest upon an appreciation if there is any narrowing gap between the country's ambitions and military muscle on one hand and the quality of its socio-political development, economic progression on the other.

The discussion of minorities in India in relation to the country's secularism, is revealing in terms of newer approaches towards understanding the democratic order: democracy as synonymous with 'majoritarian' political culture, inability of secularism to deliver on equal opportunities for the religion-based minorities, and in the wake of Hindutva's rise, growing apprehensions of a faster loss of cultural identity in an otherwise pluralistic society. The study appreciates that an Indian minority, for example Muslims, show awareness of multiple identities carried by them at present. However, the minority representation in all sectors of Indian life and development remains abysmally low. In a nutshell, 'the secularism was seen as a vanguard to celebrate India's cultural diversity'. However, in reality, 'India has not celebrated the diversity but only accommodated it'.

The inadequacy of the Indian political system to unfold fair and equitable representation of minorities in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections is already manifested. Muslims constitute fourteen percent of the country's population while Muslim's returned to the legislature are only four percent of the total seats. In demographic terms, India is the third largest Muslim populated country and therefore, it remains critical for the country's image abroad, whether it conveys positive or negative connotations. The play of soft Hindutva as against the fundamentalist posture, can possibly slow down if not outweigh, negativities this may carry.

A segment of the study relates to discussion of the dispute settlement process over shared rivers between Indian states. It argues that although the process established for settling water dispute between the Indian states is unique and of significance importance, a number of problems have emerged in the course of implementing this process and those problems need to be addressed to strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of the process.

The work on ‘insurgencies’ or ‘sustained armed resistance’ phenomenon offers a comparative study in ‘anti-systemic ideological conflicts’ with reference to India’s Maoists and Pakistani Taliban. It recaps the ideological motivation to bring about a change in the status quo, whether conceived by human mind or ordained by the Creator. Beyond the ideological realm, it extends diagnostic survey to the notions of greed and grievances and to fears of ‘alien inroads’ into their settings. Concurrently, the work unfolds prescriptive approaches to address the negative fallout of the phenomenon. Accent of the study is on addressing the existentialist threats in the arena and on best ways to facilitate the actors’ reentry into the mainstream.

Last but not the least, elections in 2014 are seen as watershed in the BJP’s rise under Modi and a significant loss to Congress while reinforcing India’s institutional strength and democratic advance. However, it raises a three-fold question that does not necessarily conform with the stereotype projections: the BJP holds twelve percent edge over the Congress in the popular vote while its relative gains in terms of seats is six hundred percent. Second, the party’s spectacular rise is directly related to the Congress’s losses while regional parties remain prominent in the arena. This also signals a north-south divide. The election outcome carries an imprint of incumbency factor faced by Congress and *Charisma* associated with Modi. Lastly, the new elite in its run upto government, presided over a mix bag of Hindutva and quest for economic change. The future direction of the Indian politics is likely to rest upon an interplay of these factors.

The researchers stay short of finding Modi’s similarities with Vajpayee and his era in view of contextual changes in the arena and limited experience of the party’s earlier tenure. For this reason, the new elite is seen as an ‘unknown commodity’. However, the study pins hopes on the leadership’s economic drive as against Hindutva posture as any failure on the first

count can lead upto distractions that may be unhelpful for the region.

To sum up, the compilation unfolds a composite picture of the contemporary Indian scene in a thematic order. It therefore, presents a useful package for any policy-relevant analysis that may be necessitated from time to time. However, it may be important to expand the area of study and research beyond the five segments of this compilation and to carry forward the process in the days ahead.