Eötvös Loránd University
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THESIS SUMMARY

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doctoral dissertation, titled

The Road of India from the Independence to the Great Power Status – The Shaping of the Indian Power Role in Reflection of the Conflicts and Security Policy Goals 1947-2004

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Importance of the Research

Since the decolonization of South Asia, India is one of the most remarkable actors in the international relations. During the Cold War, it was considered to be the leading power of the region, and its defeat by the armed forces of China in the 1962 border conflict urged it to improve its defence capabilities for which it sought a superpower alliance (the Soviet Union), and developed the basis of its own nuclear capabilities. Nevertheless, India maintained its strategic autonomy as well. During the eighties, the potential steps of India have already appeared in the Asia-related strategic calculations of the superpowers.

In the end of the Cold War, the baselines of the country’s foreign and security policy were queried. India’s international position was temporarily downgraded, and its economy needed reforms. During the nineties, the country successfully intensified its economic growth. After the change of the Indian National Congress government in 1998, India openly declared its ambition to assume a global great power role. In parallel with the soviet-afghan war in the eighties, India remilitarized its nuclear program, and in 1998, everything was ready for a successful nuclear experiment. The new nuclear capabilities became the most important arguments for acknowledging the Indian great power ambitions.

The interest in historical background of the Indian foreign, security and power policy was rapidly increased since the nuclear power demonstrations. Despite this, there are just a few researchers of this topic in Hungary, and it is marginalized in the academic discourse, too. Currently there is a major transformation in the international system, and India’s global power capacities will most probably show considerable developments in the forthcoming decades. Therefore, it is justified to pay more attention to it in Hungary too.

This dissertation, based on the archive documents and the selected South Asian and Western literature, aimed to be specified and analyzed the most important historical caesuras of the evolution of Indian power policy. From this viewpoint, it is unique in the Hungarian historical literature on India.
Hypotheses

The main questions of my research were the following:

In the first period of the independent statehood, what was the nature of India’s relationship with the great power politics, and could we identify a strategic program, that led to similar ambitions like the later periods?

If the answer is no, than when can we track the changes of the Indian strategy from, and where were the roots of the limited global power ambitions, which New Delhi declared in the end of the nineties?

How was the roles of the leading powers in relation to these changes? (primarily the United States of America, the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China)

And finally, did its procession have contacts with the great military and political conflicts of the independent India?

My hypotheses were the following:

1. In the beginnigs of its souvereign history, India isn’t going to become a military power. The first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru declared the doctrine of positive neutrality and non-violent security policy. In his point of view, the nuclear arms race was one of the most dangerous processes of the world and undesirable phenomenon in the wider region.

Nonetheless, India formulated a limited global power ambition in the second part of the nineties, and the most important supports of this was the country’s military potencial and the nuclear capabilities.

2. Despite this, from historical perspective, the Indian power ambitions were not revolutionary phenomenons without precedent of the last decades. Under the second part of the short twentieth century, India’s power capacities increasingly strengthened. In this reason, its emergigng power status was discernible in the decades of the Cold War too.

3. There were a lot of compelling circumstances, which affected its role as a regional power. We can find in their line the South Asian strategic aspirations of the super- and great powers, and the military conflicts as well. However, the basic elements of the Indian
security and defense policy was invariable since the independence. They were stable elements of the procession of the South Asian country’s power policy.

**Structure**

The structure of my doctoral dissertation is the following:

After the introduction, in the second and third chapters, I present the challenges of the first Indian government from the Kashmir Dispute, the effects of the superpower rivalry in South Asia and the Indian-Chinese relationship to the 1962 border conflict with The People’s Republic of China.

In the fourth chapter I presented the occurrences of the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war, primarily the consolidation of the Indian regional position and the consequences of the second military defeat of Pakistan.

The fifth and sixth chapters undertake to analyze the context, international, regional and political background of the regional power status of India. As a part of this, I pay attention to the 1974 ’peaceful’ nuclear experiment and its significance for the Indian strategic position against the People’s Republic of China and Pakistan. The regional power ambitions of India has been clearly demonstrated during the 1971 Bangladesh war. The ’realist’ turn of the country’s foreign and security policy is obviously an important part of this thread.

In the seventh chapter, I presented the impact of the terrorism and separatism on the Indian internal security and regional positions. Currently, the most interesting is the problem of the Islam militantism. It is well-founded position from the point-of-view of the Kashmiri Situation, but there were a lot of other separatist movements in Indian society, which weakened its stability.

The eights and nineth chapters’ aims to summarize the consequences of the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union from the perspective of Indian foreign- and security policy. Post-bipolar era’s new international order forced India to reevaluate its strategic position and possibilities. In 1998 the new Hindu nationalist government decided to declare the country’s limited global ambitions and demonstrated its nuclear capabilities.
They strove to present India on the international stage as a strong but responsible power by taking part in international missions, by developing the conventional military capabilities, as well as the great power relations of the country.

The 1999 Kargil War was one of the most determinative caesuras of South Asian security processes in the Post-Cold War era. This, and the subsequent military standoff in 2001-2002 determined the Indian military doctrines and practices. The strategic documents of these years designated the main directions of Indian military modernisation, in the spirit of great power aspirations. The tenth to twelfth chapters analyze these issues.

The growing importance of the sea lines of communication in the Northern Indian Ocean between Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Asia is one of the most remarkable phenomenons of the transformation of Asian strategic environment. In the thirteenth chapter, I explain the Indian naval ambitions in this oceanic region. In this context, I introduce the background and motivations of the current Indian-American alliance, and the Western recognition of New Delhi’s great power status.

And finally, in the fourteenth chapter I summarize the conclusions of my dissertation.

**Results of the Research**

As a result of my work, I reconstructed the main stages, dynamism and milestones of the evolution of Indian power policy. During this, I analyzed the regional and wider international connections and the changings of internal conditions in the background of this procession. The interpretation of the challenges and results of Indian security and defense policy was the most important element of my approach. My sources confirmed most of my preconceptions on the evolution of New Delhi’s power policy. A lot of sources were used, which has not been known in the Hungarian literature up to now. I managed to clarify, for example, the role of the military conflicts and the major powers’ South Asian aspirations for the evolution of Indian strategy. Parallel with this, there were a lot of constant elements of the Indian strategic thinking, and this also helps to understand the country’s specific behavior towards the superpowers and also the smaller regional partners. In the second decade of the 21st century, the experts have great hopes for the future of Indian great power policy. It seems to be one of the leading powers of the international system, and this
result forgets its past mistakes. I hope, my dissertation effectively illuminates the main stages and contexts of the evolution of India’s power policy.

**Important Publications on the Topic**


