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The decisive transition India engaged herself in, nearly two decades ago, has developed through an interplay of perceptions which have created the intellectual preconditions needed, both in India and abroad, for the dynamics of change to materialize. By the end of the 1980's India was stuck in a paradox. She was the direct inheritor of a brilliant civilisation anchored in three thousand years of intellectual and material accomplishments. She was also on the verge of becoming, after China, the second country on earth crossing the billion population line—she did it in the year 2000. However, the depth of history and the expanse of demography were not matched by the economic and diplomatic status of the country. Accounting for roughly 15% of the world population, India was contributing for less than one per cent of the global trade and, on the geopolitical map of the world, the glorious days of the non-aligned movement were over. India was not enjoying a seat at the high table of global politics, aside the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Today, India is still outside the UN sanctum sanctorum, and her relative contribution to global trade has only marginally increased. But her perception of herself has changed dramatically. So have the image she has of the world and, as importantly, the new image the world has of India. "India everywhere" was the motto chosen by the large Indian delegation at the Davos summit of 2006. Matters of concern, old and new, remain to be addressed, but India has clearly entered a new historical stage. From 1947 to the Eighties, she has been a post-colonial country, cast in the well thought Nehruvian mould which put her on rails, although on slow motion. Today, India is a post-post colonial country, whose decision makers believe that the Nehruvian paradigm has to be adjusted to new realities. They don't forget the past and its legacy, but they look with a renewed confidence to the future of a "resurgent India". They do believe that globalisation is more an opportunity than a challenge, and they act for enhancing India's status in the world, be they members of the government, or chief executive officers of key Indian industrial or service companies transforming their enterprise by investing abroad, in advanced countries as well as in countries where resources are available — particularly energy.

India's status today is however ambiguous. She is on all accounts the dominant power in South Asia, but she has not been able to implement a fully normalised relationship with her largest neighbours —Pakistan and Bangladesh. Indian medias and noted analysts celebrate "Indian Unbound", and publish volumes entitled "India Empowered" and "India, the Next Global Superpower ?" There is however a clear difference between "global reach" and "global power". Prime Minister Manmohan Singh may sometimes recall that "the emergence of India as a major global power {is} an idea the time {has} come", but usually he prefers to define India as "a self-confident and united nation moving forward to gain its rightful place in the comity of nations" —a somewhat less boosting formulation.

The basis for India's status change lies in the 1990s. In 1991, the Congress Party just returned to power launched a sustained policy of controlled economic reforms, which is still under progress. In 1998, the rival political force from the Hindu Right, the Bharatiya Janata Party, conducted five nuclear tests soon after its arrival to power. These two events, on the economic and on the strategic fronts, testified to a new assertiveness, which has paid : after 2003 the annual rate of growth of the GDP stood to 8 to 9%, and in 2000 the United States started to reconsider their diplomacy regarding South Asia, and engaged a comprehensive rapprochement with New Delhi. The "civil nuclear deal" negotiated by the Bush Administration with India from 2005 to 2008, with the final approval of the 45 countries of the Nuclear Suppliers Group and of the the U.S. Congress is the strongest expression of this new vision.

In its immediate proximity, India tries to improve her difficult relations with her neighbours, particularly Pakistan and China. She follows a double path. On the one hand, she modernises the arsenal of one of the largest military forces in the world. On the other hand, trade, economy and cooperation are now upgraded items in the Indian toolbox of regional diplomacy. In what India called her "extended neighbourhood", New Delhi has developed since 1992 an active "Look East Policy" and tries now to replicate this success in West Asia, while strengthening the Indian Navy in the India

Ocean. On the larger Asian map, the new dynamics of India appears to a number of Asian countries—including Japan—and to Washington as a counterpoint to the rise of China, whatever the disparity between the two countries could be. India is therefore, more and more, an Asian power. But this trend is not simply based upon a rationale of opposition to China. The new "great game" under progress is more elaborated than that, and New Delhi plays all her cards for developing a truly global diplomacy, multiplying "strategic partnerships" with many countries, China included. There is certainly in New Delhi a temptation to join the U.S. bandwagon for approaching the high table. That does not imply that India would join a U.S. sponsored "League of democracies" which would attract her in an orbit where Australia and Japan are already firmly established. In fact, India has also differences with Washington, on issues debated at the World Trade Organisation, or on the need to enlarge the Security Council at the United Nations. Closer to Washington than before, India elaborates nevertheless North South joint actions for the reform of the UN and South South common struggles against huge subsidies provided by the European Union and the United States to their farmers. New Delhi engages herself as well in strengthening cooperation between emerging countries, as testifies the new axis India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA).

By definition, "emerging India" is engaged in a process of unfinished transition. A regional power expanding its first circle of influence beyond the limited confines of South Asia, emerging India is becoming a global player as well, without being yet a full-fledged global power. Her new status is not without drawbacks and challenges to be met. Her low rank on the global Human Development Index illustrates that much remains to be done for implementing the "inclusive growth" expected by the Government. The extent of poverty, the rising inequalities, the crisis in agriculture, the challenges of environment and energy supply limit India's rise.

However, the dynamics of change is such that one should already wonder about the type of global power "resurgent India" will become on due course. New Delhi pleads for a renovated and equitable multilateral system, more open to emerging countries. India will probably become a member of the G-13 — the present G-8 enlarged to India, China, Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico— before the UN Security Council will be reformed. In fact, the real goal of Indian leaders is a mix of multipolarity and multilateralism : multipolarity for entering the circle of States who count, and multilateralism for balancing the relationship between these leading but unequal powers. Is this plain real-politik ? India is inventing her own way to be a democracy adjusting caste to competitive politics. She has her own way to be capitalist and market oriented. She might as well invent her own way to be a rising power and perhaps, to-morrow, a global power—one amongst many. When Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee notes that "Today, there is unprecedented engagement and cooperation among major powers" and suggests that "what the world needs, then, is not old style balance of power but a well-crafted system to promote a "balance of interests" among the major powers"; when he considers that regional security arrangements need to ensure as well "a balance of interest among states", he expresses what are India's expectations in her present phase of emergence as a global player : the search for her interests, but also the search for balance between actors. That does not exclude competition and perhaps even rivalries, but that calls for negotiations. If the Indian dream materializes that way, the legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru would have survived, in a world far different from the one which existed in 1947, when colonised India became a free country.