

Associate Paper

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Narendra Modi, *Akhand Bharat* and “Greater India”

Dr Qaisar Rashid

FDI Associate

Key Points

- The Indian Prime Minister’s overall focus is on his country’s economy.
- *Akhand Bharat* is an internal policy of the Modi Government to motivate Indians into realising their nationalistic responsibilities for progressing India’s economy.
- “Greater India” is an external policy of the Modi Government to re-develop the influence of Hindu culture, also with the aim of enhancing economic benefits for India.
- Together, both policies are bound to benefit India in the long run.

Summary

In Pakistan, many observers believe that with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the helm, India harbours physical expansionist designs to absorb Pakistan. To substantiate that belief, the bogey of certain terms, such as [Akhand Bharat](#) and “[Greater India](#)”, is raised. This paper argues against that belief.

Analysis

A brief overview of history is required to establish the context of those claims. The [partition of Bengal in 1905](#) prompted a Bengali conservative activist, Chandranath Basu, to coin the term [Hindutva](#). In 1923, [Vinayak Damodar Savarkar](#) used the same term to construct a collective Hindu identity as an essence of [Akhand Bharat](#), an irredentist concept in Sanskrit that means an undivided India. The idea was to interpret the division of Bengal as running counter to the interests of Bharat (India). In other words, Akhand Bharat was a conservative concept to introduce a collective Hindu identity – in the context of Hindu nationalism (or

Hindu-ness). In Bengal, Hindu-Muslim animosity emerged in 1905, which left a lasting impact on the politics in colonial India. In 1919, the First World War brought both communities together to forge a united front against the ruling British. One such opportunity was the [Khilafat Movement](#) (1919-22), which was launched for the preservation of the Caliphate in Turkey, an adversary of the British in the First World War.

Events consequent to the movement saw the concept of Akhand Bharat evolve further. For instance, after the failure of the Khilafat Movement and the collapse of the concomitant Hindu-Muslim unity, many Hindu and Muslim leaders sought to frame the future of India from their own perspectives. The Muslims demanded the division of the Indian subcontinent along communal lines. In 1925, the President of the [Hindu Mahasabha](#), which had been founded in 1915, [Lala Lajpat Rai](#) abdicated the joint membership of the Indian National Congress, a secular organisation, and not only demanded the partition of the Punjab along religious lines but also demanded that Muslim India be carved out of non-Muslim Hindu India. By doing so, he decried the presence of Muslims on Indian soil and thought it appropriate to isolate them to their areas of high concentration – to purify Hindu soil. In this way, the concept of Akhand Bharat embraced introversion, espoused conservatism and sought internal cohesion. Today, whereas the concept of Hindutva as collective Hindu identity or Hindu-ness can be seen in post-partition (or post-colonial) India, Akhand Bharat related more to [the internal policy](#) of India.

Against this background, the rise of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seen as being emblematic of the rise of the [Sangh Parivar](#), the family of Hindu nationalist organisations that includes the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), a right-wing Hindu nationalist volunteer cultural organisation that champions the cause of Hindutva. The RSS is, according to some observers, the parent organisation of the ruling [Bharatiya Janata Party](#) (BJP), despite the latter's protestations that it governs independently of the RSS. It is interesting to note that this is the same party that performed dismally in the 1935-36 and 1945-46 elections in pre-partition India, which indicates that Hindus at that time generally dismissed the Hindutva concept as a factor in Indian politics. The Indian subcontinent was divided in 1947 and with that, the proponents of the BJP such as [Lala Har Dayal](#), who was also a known anti-British revolutionary, failed to prevent the division of India.

In 2016, a prominent Indian economist, Rajiv Kumar, wrote a book, [Modi and his Challenges](#), in which he outlined some of the challenges that Prime Minister Modi faced. Those challenges ranged from the application of his belief in Hinduism to figuring out an India-specific economic growth model. Kumar thinks that when Modi was Gujarat's Chief Minister (2001-14), he followed the Bengali monk [Swami Vivekananda](#)'s vision of Hinduism: motivate Hindu society to be competitive globally. Modi developed his Gujarat model of development based on three components: an export-oriented labour-intensive manufacturing sector, a pro-public service bureaucracy, and management through e-governance. Kumar believes that Modi has tried to replicate the same model at the national level. This point signifies that Akhand Bharat is related more to the internal policy of India, and that it has been transformed into India's progress and development.

On the other hand, [Greater India](#) is a cultural concept to ensure the influence of Hindu culture on the suburban region to create a [Bharat Mahasangh](#). Afghanistan, Burma and other South Asian countries are considered relevant in this context. Central Asian States and the Arab countries are also [related](#). In other words, Greater India means rejuvenating the archaic influence of Hindu culture on various adjacent and distant lands to forge association. The liaison is cultural but it is meant to serve an economic purpose. Greater India is related more to [the external policy](#) of India. The essence of economic relationships is trade. India intends to identify and exploit all areas that were influenced by its culture to seek economic benefits. For instance, the lands where Indian cuisine, Indian costumes and Indian movies are popular fall under the [traditional sphere of Indian influence](#). To elaborate this point, according to the Modi Administration's [neighbourhood-first policy](#), South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East are such lands which are considered [ripe for trade](#) with India. A reflection of this approach is India's effort to build a sphere of influence [in the Indian Ocean region](#). Similarly, India has also focussed on its shared spheres of influence. For instance, India sees South-East Asia as a [sphere of confluence](#) that has been enriched by Hindu culture. Presently, transcending physical boundaries, India has tried to use the Greater India concept to forge an economic federation in its sphere of cultural influence on the lines of the European Union. Added impetus to that effort is provided by the Indian [expatriate communities](#) in Europe, Australia and the United States.

In 2016, a noted Indian scholar who specialises in India's international security and international political economy, Sreeram Sundar Chaulia, wrote a book, [Modi Doctrine: The Foreign Policy of India's Prime Minister](#), in which he described the contours of the Modi doctrine which was embedded in contact and commercial diplomacy. Contact diplomacy means establishing personal rapport with different heads of states, and commercial diplomacy means embracing any country propitious for financial recovery of India, while shying away from the either-or dilemma, for instance, having to choose between Israel and the Arab countries. In other words, India has abandoned the policy that the enemy of my friend is my enemy. Under Modi, New Delhi has tried to avoid the either-or conundrum. Instead of letting India enter into alliances, Modi [prefers personal ties](#) with heads of states to use the economic objectives favouring India.

Chaulia says that whereas the US sought to contain China through the so-called "pivot to Asia" and other means, India preferred not to jump on the bandwagon to balance China. Interestingly, in Pakistan, many believe that the [US is pitting India against China](#) to contain the latter's economic and military ascent. That belief is driven by the assumption that Indians are unaware of that stratagem. The attendant assumptions are that India has made sufficient economic progress to consider a potential conflict with China and that China is also ready to risk its economic advances in a conflict with India. Chaulia says that Modi adroitly kept China interested in India's growth through commercial diplomacy. For instance, in September 2014 Chinese President Xi Jinping [visited India](#) and pledged to invest US\$20 billion (\$28.2 billion) in India. That pledge was made at a time when [trade between the two countries](#) exceeded US\$70 billion (\$98.8 billion) a year. Chaulia claims that Modi's foreign policy doctrine is to present a perception of balanced diplomacy in reaching out to any country that could be commercially beneficial to India and to balk at making enemies and fighting wars. To the utter surprise of many Pakistani diplomats and strategists, Modi has

tried to strike a [balance in India's relationship](#) with both the US and China. Even at the height of the current standoff in the Himalayas, India is exercising restraint. India seems still to be seeking a mutually-beneficial relationship with China.

Whereas Akhand Bharat is an internal policy of the Modi Government to motivate Indians, with its main focus on the Hindu community, into appreciating their national responsibilities for making India progress, Greater India is an external policy of Modi's government to reconstitute and re-develop Hinduism's cultural influence on the region and beyond in an effort to cultivate economic benefits for India. Taken together, both policies are bound to benefit India economically in the long run.

The tyranny that hits Pakistan hard is that, thriving on India's fear, Pakistan's policymakers keep on raising various monsters to camouflage their own failures and the consequent fiascos that have deprived Pakistan of its rightful chances to progress. Lately, Akhand Bharat and Greater India are two such fears that appear to have taken over the minds of Pakistan's policymakers, thereby depriving them of the initiatives to formulate pro-development economic policies for the benefit of the country.

In short, instead of promulgating physical expansionist designs, India is working towards enhancing its commercial (or financial) strategies. Pakistan's policymakers and people alike need to perceive the terms Akhand Bharat and Greater India in a more objective way. Such an understanding would not only help them to shed their fear of those terms and mitigate their apprehensions regarding India's apparent expansionist designs, but it would also help them to rethink their approaches towards a better understanding of India.

About the Author: Dr Qaisar Rashid is a Lahore-based freelance writer, who has contributed a weekly column for 15 years to various English-language dailies in Pakistan.

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Suite 5, 202 Hampden Road, Nedlands WA 6009, Australia.
Tel: +61 8 6389 0211
Web: www.futuredirections.org.au