

ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
AND GLOBAL POLITICS

# India in South Asia

Domestic identity politics and foreign policy  
from Nehru to the BJP

Sinderpal Singh



# India in South Asia

Domestic identity politics and  
foreign policy from Nehru to the BJP

Sinderpal Singh



First published 2013  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2013 Sinderpal Singh

The right of Sinderpal Singh to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-0-415-62530-2 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-55222-3 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman  
by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd, Pondicherry, India



Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Printgroup

# India in South Asia

South Asia is one of the most volatile regions of the world, and India's complex democratic political system impinges on its relations with its South Asian neighbours. Focusing on this relationship, this book explores the extent to which domestic politics affect a country's foreign policy.

The book argues that particular continuities and disjunctures in Indian foreign policy are linked to the way in which Indian elites articulated Indian identity in response to the needs of domestic politics. The manner in which these state elites conceive India's region and regional role depends on their need to stay in tune with domestic identity politics. Such exigencies have important implications for Indian foreign policy in South Asia.

Analysing India's foreign policy through the lens of competing domestic visions at three different historical eras in India's independent history, the book provides a framework for studying India's developing nationhood on the basis of these idea(s) of 'India'. This approach allows for a deeper and a more nuanced interpretation of the motives for India's foreign policy choices than the traditional realist or neo-liberal framework, and provides a useful contribution to South Asian Studies, Politics and International Studies.

**Sinderpal Singh** is a Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore.

## Routledge Advances in International Relations and Global Politics

- 1 **Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis**  
France, Britain and Europe  
*Henrik Larsen*
- 2 **Agency, Structure and International Politics**  
From ontology to empirical enquiry  
*Gil Friedman and Harvey Starr*
- 3 **The Political Economy of Regional Co-operation in the Middle East**  
*Ali Carkoglu, Mine Eder, Kemal Kirisci*
- 4 **Peace Maintenance**  
The evolution of international political authority  
*Jarat Chopra*
- 5 **International Relations and Historical Sociology**  
Breaking down boundaries  
*Stephen Hobden*
- 6 **Equivalence in Comparative Politics**  
*Edited by Jan W. van Deth*
- 7 **The Politics of Central Banks**  
*Robert Elgie and Helen Thompson*
- 8 **Politics and Globalisation**  
Knowledge, ethics and agency  
*Martin Shaw*
- 9 **History and International Relations**  
*Thomas W. Smith*
- 10 **Idealism and Realism in International Relations**  
*Robert M. A. Crawford*
- 11 **National and International Conflicts, 1945–1995**  
New empirical and theoretical approaches  
*Frank Pfetsch and Christoph Rohloff*
- 12 **Party Systems and Voter Alignments Revisited**  
*Edited by Lauri Karvonen and Stein Kuhnle*
- 13 **Ethics, Justice and International Relations**  
Constructing an international community  
*Peter Sutch*
- 14 **Capturing Globalization**  
*Edited by James H. Mittelman and Norani Othman*
- 15 **Uncertain Europe**  
Building a new European security order?  
*Edited by Martin A. Smith and Graham Timmins*
- 16 **Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations**  
Reading race, gender and class  
*Edited by Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair*
- 17 **Constituting Human Rights**  
Global civil society and the society of democratic states  
*Mervyn Frost*
- 18 **US Economic Statecraft for Survival 1933–1991**  
Of sanctions, embargoes and economic warfare  
*Alan P. Dobson*
- 19 **The EU and NATO Enlargement**  
*Richard McAllister and Roland Dannreuther*
- 20 **Spatializing International Politics**  
Analysing activism on the internet  
*Jayne Rodgers*
- 21 **Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World**  
Walker Connor and the study of Nationalism  
*Edited by Daniele Conversi*
- 22 **Meaning and International Relations**  
*Edited by Peter Mandaville and Andrew Williams*

- 23 **Political Loyalty and the Nation-State**  
*Edited by Michael Waller and Andrew Linklater*
- 24 **Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS**  
Theories, debates and actions  
*Nicole J. Jackson*
- 25 **Asia and Europe**  
Development and different dimensions of ASEM  
*Yeo Lay Hwee*
- 26 **Global Instability and Strategic Crisis**  
*Neville Brown*
- 27 **Africa in International Politics**  
External Involvement on the Continent  
*Edited by Ian Taylor and Paul Williams*
- 28 **Global Governmentality**  
Governing International Spaces  
*Edited by Wendy Larner and William Walters*
- 29 **Political Learning and Citizenship Education Under Conflict**  
The political socialization of Israeli and Palestinian youngsters  
*Orit Ichilov*
- 30 **Gender and Civil Society**  
Transcending boundaries  
*Edited by Jude Howell and Diane Mulligan*
- 31 **State Crises, Globalisation and National Movements in North-East Africa**  
The Horn's dilemma  
*Edited by Asafa Jalata*
- 32 **Diplomacy and Developing Nations**  
Post-Cold War foreign policy-making structures and processes  
*Edited by Justin Robertson and Maurice A. East*
- 33 **Autonomy, Self-governance and Conflict Resolution**  
Innovative approaches to institutional design in divided societies  
*Edited by Marc Weller and Stefan Wolff*
- 34 **Mediating International Crises**  
*Jonathan Wilkenfeld, Kathleen J. Young, David M. Quinn and Victor Asal*
- 35 **Postcolonial Politics, the Internet and Everyday Life**  
Pacific traversals online  
*M. I. Franklin*
- 36 **Reconstituting the Global Liberal Order**  
Legitimacy and regulation  
*Kanishka Jayasuriya*
- 37 **International Relations, Security and Jeremy Bentham**  
*Gunhild Hoogensen*
- 38 **Interregionalism and International Relations**  
*Edited by Heiner Hänggi, Ralf Roloff and Jürgen Rüland*
- 39 **The International Criminal Court**  
A global civil society achievement  
*Marlies Glasius*
- 40 **A Human Security Doctrine for Europe**  
Project, principles, practicalities  
*Edited by Marlies Glasius and Mary Kaldor*
- 41 **The History and Politics of UN Security Council Reform**  
*Dimitris Bourantonis*
- 42 **Russia and NATO Since 1991**  
From cold war through cold peace to partnership?  
*Martin A. Smith*
- 43 **The Politics of Protection**  
Sites of insecurity and political agency  
*Edited by Jef Huysmans, Andrew Dobson and Raia Prokhovnik*
- 44 **International Relations in Europe**  
Traditions, perspectives and destinations  
*Edited by Knud Erik Jørgensen and Tonny Brems Knudsen*

- 45 **The Empire of Security and the Safety of the People**  
*Edited by William Bain*
- 46 **Globalization and Religious Nationalism in India**  
The search for ontological security  
*Catrina Kinnvall*
- 47 **Culture and International Relations**  
Narratives, natives and tourists  
*Julie Reeves*
- 48 **Global Civil Society**  
Contested futures  
*Edited by Gideon Baker and David Chandler*
- 49 **Rethinking Ethical Foreign Policy**  
Pitfalls, possibilities and paradoxes  
*Edited by David Chandler and Volker Heins*
- 50 **International Cooperation and Arctic Governance**  
Regime effectiveness and northern region building  
*Edited by Olav Schram Stokke and Geir Hønneland*
- 51 **Human Security**  
Concepts and implications  
*Shahrbano Tadjbakhsh and Anuradha Chenoy*
- 52 **International Relations and Security in the Digital Age**  
*Edited by Johan Eriksson and Giampiero Giacomello*
- 53 **State-Building**  
Theory and practice  
*Edited by Aidan Hehir and Neil Robinson*
- 54 **Violence and Non-Violence in Africa**  
*Edited by Pal Ahluwalia, Louise Bethlehem and Ruth Ginio*
- 55 **Developing Countries and Global Trade Negotiations**  
*Edited by Larry Crump and S. Javed Maswood*
- 56 **Civil Society, Religion and Global Governance**  
Paradigms of power and persuasion  
*Edited by Helen James*
- 57 **War, Peace and Hegemony in a Globalized World**  
The changing balance of power in the twenty-first century  
*Edited by Chandra Chari*
- 58 **Economic Globalisation as Religious War**  
Tragic convergence  
*Michael McKinley*
- 59 **Globalization, Prostitution and Sex-trafficking**  
Corporeal politics  
*Elina Penttinen*
- 60 **Peacebuilding**  
Women in international perspective  
*Elisabeth Porter*
- 61 **Ethics, Liberalism and Realism in International Relations**  
*Mark D. Gismondi*
- 62 **Law and Legalization in Transnational Relations**  
*Edited by Christian Brüttsch and Dirk Lehmkuhl*
- 63 **Fighting Terrorism and Drugs**  
Europe and international police cooperation  
*Jörg Friedrichs*
- 64 **Identity Politics in the Age of Genocide**  
The Holocaust and historical representation  
*David B. MacDonald*
- 65 **Globalisation, Public Opinion and the State**  
Western Europe and East and Southeast Asia  
*Edited by Takashi Inoguchi and Ian Marsh*
- 66 **Urbicide**  
The politics of urban destruction  
*Martin Coward*

- 67 **Transnational Activism in the UN and the EU**  
A comparative study  
*Jutta Joachim and Birgit Locher*
- 68 **Gender Inclusive**  
Essays on violence, men and feminist international relations  
*Adam Jones*
- 69 **Capitalism, Democracy and the Prevention of War and Poverty**  
*Edited by Peter Graeff and Guido Mehlkop*
- 70 **Environmental Change and Foreign Policy**  
Theory and practice  
*Edited by Paul G. Harris*
- 71 **Climate Change and Foreign Policy**  
Case studies from East to West  
*Edited by Paul G. Harris*
- 72 **Securitizations of Citizenship**  
*Edited by Peter Nyers*
- 73 **The Power of Ideology**  
From the Roman Empire to Al-Qaeda  
*Alex Roberto Hybel*
- 74 **The Securitization of Humanitarian Migration**  
Digging moats and sinking boats  
*Scott D. Watson*
- 75 **Mediation in the Asia-Pacific Region**  
Transforming conflicts and building peace  
*Edited by Dale Bagshaw and Elisabeth Porter*
- 76 **United Nations Reform**  
Heading north or south?  
*Spencer Zifcak*
- 77 **New Norms and Knowledge in World Politics**  
Protecting people, intellectual property and the environment  
*Preslava Stoeva*
- 78 **Power, Resistance and Conflict in the Contemporary World**  
Social movements, networks and hierarchies  
*Athina Karatzogianni and Andrew Robinson*
- 79 **World-Regional Social Policy and Global Governance**  
New research and policy agendas in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America  
*Edited by Bob Deacon, Maria Cristina Macovei, Luk Van Langenhove and Nicola Yeates*
- 80 **International Relations Theory and Philosophy**  
Interpretive dialogues  
*Edited by Cerwyn Moore and Chris Farrands*
- 81 **Superpower Rivalry and Conflict**  
The long shadow of the Cold War on the twenty-first century  
*Edited by Chandra Chari*
- 82 **Coping and Conformity in World Politics**  
*Hugh C. Dyer*
- 83 **Defining and Defying Organized Crime**  
Discourse, perception and reality  
*Edited by Felia Allum, Francesca Longo, Daniela Irrera and Panos A. Kostakos*
- 84 **Federalism in Asia**  
India, Pakistan and Malaysia  
*Harihar Bhattacharyya*
- 85 **The World Bank and HIV/AIDS**  
Setting a global agenda  
*Sophie Harman*
- 86 **The "War on Terror" and the Growth of Executive Power?**  
A comparative analysis  
*Edited by John E. Owens and Riccardo Pelizzo*
- 87 **The Contested Politics of Mobility**  
Borderzones and irregularity  
*Edited by Vicki Squires*



- 88 **Human Security, Law and the Prevention of Terrorism**  
*Andrej Zwitter*
- 89 **Multilayered Migration Governance**  
The promise of partnership  
*Edited by Rahel Kunz, Sandra Lavenex and Marion Panizzon*
- 90 **Role Theory in International Relations**  
Approaches and analyses  
*Edited by Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank and Hanns W. Maull*
- 91 **Issue Salience in International Relations**  
*Edited by Kai Oppermann and Henrike Viehrig*
- 92 **Corporate Risk and National Security Redefined**  
*Karen Lund Petersen*
- 93 **Interrogating Democracy in World Politics**  
*Edited by Joe Hoover, Meera Sabaratnam and Laust Schouenborg*
- 94 **Globalizing Resistance against War**  
Theories of resistance and the new anti-war movement  
*Tiina Seppälä*
- 95 **The Politics of Self-Determination**  
Beyond the decolonisation process  
*Kristina Roepstorff*
- 96 **Sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect**  
The power of norms and the norms of the powerful  
*Theresa Reinold*
- 97 **Anglo-American Relations**  
Contemporary perspectives  
*Edited by Alan P. Dobson and Steve Marsh*
- 98 **The Emerging Politics of Antarctica**  
*Edited by Anne-Marie Brady*
- 99 **Genocide, Ethnonationalism, and the United Nations**  
Exploring the causes of mass killing since 1945  
*Hannibal Travis*
- 100 **Caribbean Sovereignty, Development and Democracy in an Age of Globalization**  
*Edited by Linden Lewis*
- 101 **Rethinking Foreign Policy**  
*Edited by Fredrik Bynander and Stefano Guzzini*
- 102 **The Promise and Perils of Transnationalization**  
NGO activism and the socialization of women's human rights in Egypt and Iran  
*Benjamin Stachursky*
- 103 **Peacebuilding and International Administration**  
The cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo  
*Niels van Willigen*
- 104 **The Politics of the Globalization of Law**  
Getting from rights to justice  
*Edited by Alison Brysk*
- 105 **The Arctic in International Politics**  
Coming in from the cold  
*Peter Hough*
- 106 **The Scourge of Genocide**  
Essays on reflection  
*Adam Jones*
- 107 **Understanding Transatlantic Relations**  
Whither the West?  
*Serena Simoni*
- 108 **India in South Asia**  
Domestic identity politics and foreign policy from Nehru to the BJP  
*Sinderpal Singh*

# Acknowledgements

This book project began life in a much earlier form as a doctoral dissertation. Therefore, it would not have come to very much without the guidance and support of my two doctoral thesis supervisors, Michael William and Jeroen Gunning. At the most critical periods, Robin Jeffrey's interventions helped to push this project forward. This book owes Robin a huge debt of gratitude. I would like to thank my colleagues at ISAS and NUS for their support and assistance throughout this project. I would especially like to thank Tan Tai Yong, Rajesh Rai, Natasha Hamilton-Hart, Rahul Mukerji, Amitendu Palit and C. Raja Mohan for their inputs and suggestions at various stages of this book project. I would also like to thank my brother Rajpal Singh, whose musings on 'real life' diplomacy serve to constantly question many of my prior assumptions about contemporary global politics. From its very beginning, Kate's contributions to this project are far too many to list here. I thank her for helping to ensure this project reached its final destination. This book is dedicated to Santokh Singh, who first introduced me to the gratifications of reading a book.

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
Introduction	1
1 Nehru and the invention of India	12
2 Nehru and the birth of India's regional policy: the case of Pakistan and Nepal	28
3 'The Empress of India': Indira Gandhi and the idea of India	48
4 A 'new' phase in Indian foreign policy: the case of Pakistan and Sri Lanka	65
5 The BJP era and the construction of Indian identity	85
6 A 'Hindu' foreign policy: dealing with Pakistan and Bangladesh	99
Conclusion	114
<i>Notes</i>	120
<i>Bibliography</i>	147
<i>Index</i>	161

# Introduction

## Foreign policy and domestic identity: India in South Asia

This book explores a key problem in international relations: the extent and manner in which domestic politics affect a country's foreign policy. It focuses specifically on one of the most politically volatile regions of the world, South Asia and the way in which India's complex political system impinges upon its relations with other South Asian states. The book argues that particular continuities and disjunctures in Indian foreign policy are linked to the way in which Indian political elites, within the context of domestic politics, articulate Indian identity. The manner in which these political elites conceive India's region and regional role depends upon their engagement with domestic identity politics, and such exigencies have important implications for Indian foreign policy in South Asia.

Since independence in 1947, Indian elites have argued vigorously about what 'India' means and how the Indian state should articulate such self-representations. This contest over the idea of 'India' had important implications for Indian foreign policy, specifically in relation to other states in South Asia. The idea that India's own struggle against colonialism and its eventual independence bestowed 'special responsibilities' upon the country beyond its own borders is evident early in India's independent history. In 1948, in the midst of debates over the framing of the constitution, India's first prime minister and external affairs minister, Jawaharlal Nehru

saw the star of India rising far above the horizon and casting its soothing light [ ... ] over many countries in the world, who looked to it with hope, who considered that out of this new Free India would come various forces which would help Asia.<sup>1</sup>

From the early days of independent statehood, 'Indian-ness' contained within it a conception of India's 'natural' regional space and role. The notion that India had a role beyond her domestic boundaries lay in the fact that

India, not because of any ambition of her own, but because of the forces of circumstances, because of geography, because of history and because

## 2 *Introduction*

of so many other things, inevitably has to play a very important part in Asia.<sup>2</sup>

Nehru's framing vision of India's larger role beyond its shores would come to structure the approach and perceptions of future Indian political elites.

### **The argument**

This book intends to make one principal argument. It asserts that rival views of what it means to be 'India' and the contests between the proponents of these rival views affect the ways in which the Indian state interacts with other states in South Asia. In effect, it designates the politics of identity-making at the site of the Indian state as a starting point in understanding Indian foreign policy in South Asia. Moreover, it analyses how domestic identity politics plays a key role in India's foreign policy towards South Asia.

Domestic identity-politics refers to contests among political elites over the way in which the Indian state represents its identity to its own people and its neighbours. It denotes the competitive process by which political elites attempt to represent state identity in specific ways. By advocating the explanatory value of domestic identity-politics, the premise is not that domestic identity-politics explains everything concerning the complexities of India's foreign policy. Rather, the premise is that the framework of domestic identity politics helps to explain important links between the domestic realm and foreign policy, links which have been overlooked in the existing literature on India's foreign policy.

The domestic identity-politics framework does not preclude strategically motivated action in a bounded rational sense; rather, domestic identity politics frames how foreign policy is conceived by rival political elites in their domestic contests about 'Indian-ness'. In short, domestic identity politics is the domestic component of India's foreign policy formulation. By itself, it does not explain the full range of motivations and preferences that go into the making of Indian foreign policy, yet it is argued here that no comprehensive attempt to understand Indian foreign policy in South Asia can be complete without consideration of these rivalries and contests.

Indian political elites articulate and represent their understanding of the Indian state via three discourses – secularism, democracy and anti-imperialism. Each is articulated – used and justified – in the cut-and-thrust of domestic politics, particularly the politics of identity.

The relationship between the discourse of secularism and representations of Indian state identity is fundamental due to the purported ideational basis upon which Pakistan was created. The legitimating basis for the state of Pakistan – that the formation of a separate state was necessary to safeguard the interests of Muslims in British India after independence in order to avoid the tyranny of the 'Hindu' majority – has continually confronted Indian political elites with the fundamental issue of defining the role of religion in

the Indian state. In such a context, 'secularism' has been a response to multiple religious identities and is itself a proposed form of meta-identity, transcending these seemingly contending religious affiliations. This has been a dominant theme in the process of defining Indian state identity, especially associated with the legacy of Nehru but it has, nevertheless, been persistently contested. The very content and meaning of 'secularism' as it relates to Indian state identity has been contested since 1947. The manner in which the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rose to political power exhibits even more starkly the highly disputed nature of the relationship between 'secularism', or at least an Indian variant of it, and Indian state identity. The BJP era in Indian politics, when the party led a coalition Indian government, witnessed a radical attempt at re-negotiating the discourse on secularism as it relates to the identity of the Indian state vis-à-vis different religious groups.

The discourse on democracy and its relationship to the representation of state identity is hardly unique to India, or to politics in the modern era, especially given the centrality of democracy discourses to the nature of the postcolonial state in a general sense. Similarly, as in other postcolonial states, there was deep contestation about the meaning, both in theory and practice, of 'democracy' in the Indian context at the advent of independence at 1947. There were Gandhian inspired ideas of democracy for the reduction of the centralized state's political role and the strengthening of village representative bodies, the Nehruvian inspired ideas of robust parliamentary democracy and secular, constitutional government and, lastly, the religiously informed ideas of Hindu nationalist groups about democracy as a means of safeguarding certain inherent rights of the majority Hindu community within independent India.<sup>3</sup> These three conceptions of democracy and their related discourse of 'Indian democracy' reflected differing understandings of the aims and potential benefits of democracy for independent India. More specifically, these different conceptions and their associated discourses of 'Indian democracy' reflected a deeper contestation over how to order certain critical relationships among competing groups within independent India.

In independent India, the discourse on democracy is crucial to representations of Indian state identity in terms of framing a specific relationship between the state's imperative to carry out the role of economic redistribution versus the role of the state to defend the rights and autonomy of individuals and various groups, defined in religious, ethnic, economic and provincial terms. As the world's largest democracy and given that it has had a popularly elected central government since independence (except for a brief aberration between 1975 and 1977), the discourse of democracy becomes central to any exercise in defining Indian state identity. Furthermore, the discourse of democracy subsumes other discourses and ideas related to Indian state identity, such as the type of socialism and federalism that India should imbibe. Therefore, it is via contesting discourses on democracy that Indian political elites have framed questions concerning the role of the Indian state as an agent of socio-economic change, versus the imperative of protecting

individual and group rights within Indian society and allowing for genuine regional autonomy within the Indian Union.

The genesis of India's independent statehood via a long and bitter struggle for political independence from British imperial control has consequently led to discourses on anti-imperialism to be related crucially to representations of Indian state identity. Thus Indian political elites relate ideas of national autonomy, national honour and freedom to conceptions of Indian-ness via the discourse of anti-imperialism. In fact, Indian political elites saw India's external role to be an expression of this element of its identity, giving credence to its demonstrated freedom and autonomy. This was especially true in framing India's role within South Asia, which they saw as a stage for India to demonstrate its anti-imperialist credentials. Similarly, although references to the defence of India's territorial integrity have been an important part of political elite discourse, such notions are related habitually to the identity of the Indian state via the broader discourse of anti-imperialism.

Taken together, these three discourses – secularism, democracy and anti-imperialism – are crucial to an understanding of the ways in which different sets of Indian political elites across time have sought to represent Indian state identity. By identifying how different sets of Indian political elites participate in the three discourses within the context of domestic identity politics, it becomes possible to understand how these elites represent the identity of the Indian state in certain specific and definite ways. However, in analysing these three discourses within the context of domestic identity-politics, it is necessary to be clear at the outset how discourse is analysed and employed in this study.

The term 'discourse analysis' has been employed with a variety of meanings across a broad range of academic disciplines to denote various actions.<sup>4</sup> Broadly, one prominent strand of discourse analysis is related to how discourse relates to 'regimes of knowledge' within societies. This work is largely influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, with its more recent incarnation, termed 'critical discourse analysis' (usually abbreviated to CDA), drawing upon the central tenets of the critical theory approach of the Frankfurt School.<sup>5</sup> However, this is not how 'discourse' is employed in this study. Instead, 'discourse analysis' is performed in this study by moving away from the above focus on the power dynamics of discourse and towards discourse analysis as 'the processes of social construction that constitute social reality'.<sup>6</sup> As such, its starting point is the examination of how Indian political elites participate, within the context of domestic identity-politics, in shaping a specific state identity as the dominant social 'reality' via the discourses of secularism, democracy and anti-imperialism. The manner in which such discourses reproduce particular relations of power/domination between certain Indian political elites and other groups of people within/outside the Indian state/society is thus beyond the purview of this study. Instead, it concentrates on how, very specifically, Indian political elites compete among themselves in constructing Indian state identity via these three discourses. The



manner in which such constructions of 'India' impinge on India's foreign policy in South Asia can then be traced.

## Theoretical contentions

This study begins from the theoretical contention that traditional IR theories – variants of realist and neo-liberal approaches – are inadequate in addressing the impact of state identity on India's foreign policy. These approaches contend that state actors formulate foreign policy on the basis of factors existing predominantly in the external milieu and not in the domestic sphere. Similarly, in instances when the existence of 'identity' factors is acknowledged, these factors are either subsumed within the larger explanatory category of 'national interests', or they are assumed to be variables endogenous to explanations of foreign policy. As Wendt puts it, these theories 'bracket' identity in their explanations of state behaviour.<sup>7</sup> In accordance with such theories of IR, an attempt to look at the domestic realm in explaining state behaviour in making foreign policy is thus rendered 'reductionist'.

These shortcomings therefore challenge any serious observer of Indian foreign policy to explore the ways in which 'identity' is employed elsewhere within IR literature and its applicability in the framing of more comprehensive understandings of Indian foreign policy. Moving the analysis from a predominantly materialist conception of how states conduct their foreign policy, the identity approach emphasizes how ideational conceptions of the material world are crucial in comprehending how states approach their foreign policy. The assertion that states conceive of their actions, and those of others, within a larger framework of 'meaning-making' acknowledges the identity approach as a more sensitive analytical tool for understanding why and how states reflect their domestic socio-political differences within their respective foreign policies.

The use of 'identity' to explain how states approach their foreign policy has been a relatively recent trend within IR, with a growing number of works engaging the debate.<sup>8</sup> A key element in these works is discerning the relationship between identity, political elites and foreign policy. Political elites are vital to a study of identity and foreign policy because of their institutional location within institutions of the state, 'where the allocation of authority and responsibility for the national interest to the state' rests.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, other sets of domestic actors are relatively less important when it comes to propagating state identities in foreign policy. From within this institutional position, these elites assign identities to the state in relation to foreign policy formulation. However, such assignment of identities to the state takes place within certain 'reality' constraints, both internal and external. Internally, these constraints embody themselves in what one writer terms the 'security imaginary', defined as the 'linguistic, cultural and institutional resources' located at the site of the state that contain a 'repertoire of meanings' within which political elites propagate state identities in foreign policy making.<sup>10</sup> Externally, certain events



that occur outside the state can impinge critically upon the autonomy of such elites in making foreign policy. Such reality constraints, however, are ‘quite loose and [allow] a wide range of sometimes quite dramatically different representations’. This is because

the meanings produced out of a state’s security imaginary are [ ... ] not ‘dictated’ by real factors since it is instead this meaning which attributes to these ‘real’ factors a particular importance and a particular place in the universe constituted by a given society.<sup>11</sup>

Such externally generated ‘real’ factors thus assume significance and meaning largely through the kinds of identities that the state, via political elites, has represented for itself and other entities with which it interacts in its foreign policy.

### **Book structure and methodology**

This book analyses three periods since India’s independence – the Nehru (1947–62), Indira Gandhi (1966–77, 1980–4) and BJP (1998–2004) eras. The three periods have been selected on the basis of two main factors. First, an examination of these three periods reveals important differences in how Indian political elites attempted to represent Indian state identity. These three periods, with their contrasting experiences of how Indian political elites sought to represent Indian state identity, afford the opportunity to discern the link between varying representations of Indian state identity and Indian foreign policy across time. A second and related factor is the issue of political elites and the duration of their tenure at the apex of the Indian state. Nehru’s tenure as both prime minister and external affairs minister (17 years), Mrs Gandhi’s term as prime minister (15 years) and the BJP’s duration at the head of a coalition government (six years) mark out these three periods as the longest periods that any one set of political elites have exercised political power as head of the government of India from 1947 to 2004. The significance of political elites’ duration as heads of the Indian government in this context is relatively clear-cut. There is a discernible link between duration at the head of government and the ability to negotiate (and re-negotiate) Indian state identity, and for its effects to be discerned in foreign policy. Thus, an analysis of these three periods allows for an application of the domestic identity politics framework in linking these political elites who lead governments, their participation in the negotiation of state identity domestically and tangible Indian foreign policy outcomes.

Besides the length of the tenure, the Nehru era is also crucial in one other respect – its role in defining ‘Indian-ness’ at the point of India’s inception as an independent state. This period witnessed the birth of the Indian state and the beginnings of the process of framing Indian state identity. Second only to M.K. Gandhi as the most influential personality in the Indian nationalist