

*Event Transcript*

**A Discussion with Professor T.V. Paul: Is India a “Swing Power”?**

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*Featuring:*

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*Event Description*

India has established itself as a rising power with global aspirations. With its deepening rivalry with China, the rise of Hindu nationalism under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the growing strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific, India is at a pivotal juncture. In *The Unfinished Quest: India's Search for Major Power Status from Nehru to Modi* (Oxford University Press 2024), Dr. T.V. Paul, Distinguished James McGill Professor of Political Science at McGill University, highlights a range of factors that have contributed to India's rise and assess its future prospects on the global stage. In setting India's trajectory in historical perspective, Paul assesses whether India can emerge as a “swing power” capable of blunting China's aggressive actions in the Indo-Pacific. He will be joined by Dr. Daniel Markey, Senior Advisor, South Asia Programs, USIP. The discussion will be moderated by Dr. Sahar Khan, Deputy Director and Senior Fellow of the South Asia Program.

More information and event video available at: <https://www.stimson.org/event/a-discussion-with-professor-t-v-paul-is-india-a-swing-power/>

*Event Transcript*

Sahar Khan: I'm Sahar Khan, a senior fellow and the Deputy Director of the South Asia program at the Stimson Center. As many of you know, India is currently the fifth largest economy in the world, it's surpassed the UK, France, and Brazil a few years ago. India's population has also surpassed China, which it did last year. And under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Indian government has launched ambitious and far-reaching proposals for military modernization. In addition to all of that, India has also made great technical strides in the last two decades. As India's economy grows stronger, its population grows and becomes more educated. And as the state builds on its military and technical capabilities, Indian leaders have a strong desire for international status recognition, and great power recognition.

Yet, this recognition isn't coming as fast as India would like or as some would argue, that India wants. And to understand India's aspirations and challenges, it is my great pleasure to welcome Professor T.V. Paul at Stimson today. Professor Paul is the distinguished James McGill professor, in the Department of Political Science at McGill University. He specializes on International Relations and he teaches courses on international security, South Asian politics, and regional

security as well. He is the author and editor of 24 books and nearly 85 journal articles or book chapters. And so today, he will discuss his latest book, which is aptly called, the *Unfinished Quest India's Search for Major Power Status from Nehru to Modi*. And also here with us today is Dr. Daniel Markey. He's a Senior Adviser on South Asia at the U.S. Institute of Peace. And Dr. Markey has two decades of academic think tank and government experience, that is focused on international relations and U.S. policy in Asia, and with a particular focus on South Asia and China's evolving role in the region.

Just as a reminder to our audience, I know that there are already questions rolling in, so thank you so much in advance for that. But please do use the Q&A function that you will find at the bottom of your screen. And those questions as they come up, I will try to ask Professor Paul and Dr. Markey as many questions as I can. But for now, I'm going to turn things over to Professor Paul to get the conversation rolling. And one last thing for the audience as well, you can use the promo code ASFLYQS6 to save 30% on the book. And this information is also available in the description of the event as well.

So, turning over to you, Professor Paul. Your book is rich in analysis and I'm happy to say I actually finished it last night, so that is really great for me. But I really could not put it down for a variety of reasons. And one of the things is that it really discusses the roots of India's desire for great power status, and the challenges the country faces. And it asks the question, that despite high economic growth for nearly three decades, markers of a middle-class, quasi-developed country with clean water, relatively accessible healthcare, infrastructure that is reliable and that is developing, why hasn't India acquired the status that it wants?

T.V. Paul: Okay, thank you both Sahar and Dan, who have been good friends over the years. And Stimson, which actually I feel very much comfortable coming here, it is a third time at them giving a talk. That is a very important question and that is the focus of my book. It argues that India definitely deserves a place in the hierarchy of states, if you want to call it. But it is not focusing on exactly those attributes or markers that would make you a 21st century major power. Such as focusing on its greatest asset, that is the demographic dividend, human development, etc. So, I am very sympathetic to India's desire to be recognized, but I'm also cautioning the decision-maker in particular. You need to focus on India's greatest asset, that is its human asset. And there we have been noticing marked improvement in some areas, but not enough to pull out millions out of poverty and human development.

Human Development Index, [the] UNDP, puts India rather very low in that category. It's not all of India but definitely the northern part and some parts of eastern India too. So, my book is actually a comprehensive look, historical, as well as some theoretical analysis. I'm a student of both South Asia and international agents theory. But it is written as you said, in a way that people can read and understand. India is no longer considered an aspirational power, it is a rising power. And that is because of its key marker, the economic development growth rate. And then of course the U.S. acknowledging and accommodating India as a rising power. And all U.S.

presidents since George W. Bush recognized that. So, the question is this desire to be recognized is very much in from day one, from Jawaharlal Nehru's day onwards, when India had a \$300 per capita income. By the way, China also had only 300 or less than India, until the 1960s. So, it is quite interesting that China got accepted without its income going up for capital income going up.

I look at this understanding of status as a collective beliefs about a country's ranking in terms of valued attributes, placing it in a specific strata in the hierarchical order. But like beauty, status is in the eye of the beholder. I cannot say I have status, the others have to say you have a status. And I think that is often a problem because people or states believe they have the status, or individuals in the states, but they may not have as much as they think. There is a discrepancy between ascribed and aspired status. So there has been a lot of growth in the literature on this subject. There is one in particular that looks at why do countries seek status, especially large entities. That is one-fifth of humanity.

And of course there are intrinsic psychological value, of course people want to be respected. And it is more than respect, it is also institutionalized respect. And then of course there are material benefits. The high-status countries, like high status groups in domestic societies, do benefit by being high status. There are a lot of benefits, they have high role in institutional setup, etc. So, India from the beginning focused on what you call civilizational attributes. And Nehru's understanding of that is a multicultural inclusive civilization, and that has been changing as we know. And it is indeed this problem of status accommodation that has bedeviled India. And if you look at some of the behavior in the nuclear area, or space area, you find the status issue a big deal. India is the number one, or was the number one opponent of the NPT, the Non-Proliferation regime, why is it?

Then I go on to India status markers, hard power, soft power. I go into a full chapter on internal status inhibitors, that is where your question arises, the weak state problem. The most unequal rising power perhaps in history, and this has a lot to do with the pre-existing structural caste and gender inequalities. The message of the book is that the policies are not addressing that dimension adequately. So top 10% or 50% of the wealth is only very slowly trickling down, and that is a problem. And then of course India has not focused on infrastructure enough. So, while visiting India, you do not get the feel that this country has been growing 7 or 8% for the last three decades. That is not case in East Asian states, when they were growing, it was visible in their roads, their bicycle lanes. China, of course, with their urban planning, etc.

India has not really focused in enough to get that thing out. Of course, pockets of India have done very well, southern India in particular. And then of course there is the problem [of] growing intolerance, democratic backslide, religious nationalism, I do not want to go too much into it at this point. And then of course the international constraints, which I think we need to be aware of that, latecomers cannot easily enter the system. In the past it was through war, post-war settlements, and the 1945 San Francisco settlement precluded India and I have a big discussion of that in this book. And 1968, the NPT, Non-Proliferation Treaty,

also excluded India. So, the two markers of great power opportunities, India was not there, and did not get it. And the nuclear test of course created quite a bit of dissonance. However, the partial accommodation by the United States is very critical for whatever India has achieved. Then, along with that, other Western countries, France, Germany, Japan, and the UK.

India has been making serious efforts; of course, there is a China challenge, which is again the focus of two chapters or part of two chapters. Then there is a regional challenge. Pakistan's status quest with India to obtain its parity. In this book, the China challenge is discussed in a lot more detail, from the status perspective. And often analysts often focus on the border question as the big issue. But why China is not interested in India becoming a great power is, very much part of the fact that China wants to be numero uno in the Pacific and India is a potential challenger. And it is actually acting as a challenger too. And of course, from India's point of view, the China comparison comes quite often, for various reasons. But I think India is now facing quite a bit of challenges on the border, of course we discussed that, and why is that the case.

And then China's deep entry in the South Asia, and I call it China has come with material advantages to these smaller states. But clearly it is more than that, it is India's preponderance in South Asia is challenged. And that is partly because India cannot compete with China for the material advantages smaller states gain, and smaller states also have more agency than they used to. So, I conclude by arguing that India is making quite a bit of advances, considering the fact that there is no incentive for others to immediately recognize India as a great power, especially UN Security Council. The raw indicators are part of India's advancements. And the diplomacy too, one has to give some credit that, the so-called multi-alignment probably has some challenges, I think Dan will discuss that with me. I think that the challenge for India is your fundamental question, whether India can be a swing power. I would say that is exactly what it is trying to do. Partly because the current international system offers more opportunities than the Cold War era.

[In] the Cold War era, India was a recipient of foreign aid, and military aid from all these countries, especially superpowers. Today India is much more wealthier in an aggregate sense, and so middle-ranking states or rising powers have a lot more agency than they used to. That is because the system is not polarized, we do not have a bipolar system yet, which may happen. And it's in India's interest that the system does not become bipolar, this is what Narendra Modi is trying to prevent. He may not be saying that in so many words, but when trying to befriend everybody the idea is that you become part of one coalition, then the other will try to undercut you. And so the strategic outcome is more diffused, less ideological kind of a new Cold War. And countries are kind of hedging with buck-passing, which is a concept that we need to think about.

The middle-ranking powers, rising powers, mostly buck-passing the big issues, except South Africa and Brazil have been more active in the institutional arena. And so, this U.S.-China rivalry, deepening of it will have major implications for

countries like India. And can you remain on the sidelines in that conflict if it becomes very polarized? But it is in India's interest to prevent the Russia-China alliance. I think that is why Narendra Modi went to Moscow but in the wrong time, which is another issue. So, India wants to keep its strategic autonomy, and China's escalatory tendencies, border-needling, active conflict in South China Sea, Taiwan, and India border, all will have an impact on where India will place its bets and how India will play. India has opportunities and constraints, but if the system becomes highly polarized, my sense is that India will have no choice but to take a pro-West, pro-U.S. position, given the Chinese rise will not help India's status acquisition. Thank you.

Sahar Khan: Thank you so much for that. I want to turn it over to you, Dr. Markey, your comments about the book, some thoughts that you want to share. And perhaps some questions that you might have.

Dan Markey: Great, thanks Sahar. And thanks to Stimson and to T.V. for this opportunity, I'm happy to be here. Part of what I'm going to do is, with your indulgence, take a bit more academic approach. In part because part of the bio that you did not talk about, and not your fault, is that when I started my academic work, I was very interested in this concept of prestige. About 25 years ago, my doctoral dissertation really focused on a few questions about how and why these concepts at that time, certainly tended to be left out of most of the scholarship, on international relations. Tried to develop a certain conception definition of these terms, that I think has been taken forward in the subsequent couple of decades. And then tried specifically to think about the nature of the connections between this thing, status, prestige, whatever, and conflict or tension or competition in the international system.

And I think I made some decent progress on the first pieces, what is missing from the literature, some okay progress on the conceptual definitions, and less on the connectivity between these concepts and conflict. And so, in the subsequent two decades I have really moved on, focused much more on South Asia. And with T.V.'s book, he has fortunately given me an opportunity to come full circle, and to think about some of these concepts, but in the South Asian and Indian context specifically. So for that alone, I'm grateful. The book is also, for those who are watching, you should know, and I have my own copy here as well. The book is a very good snapshot among other things of India's trajectory as a major power. So, academics and concepts aside, it gives us a good window into understanding where India sits in terms of material power, whether that is economic power or military power.

We see both the promise and the shortcomings in these spaces, T.V.'s pretty unsparing on the shortcomings but I think correctly so. But he also talks about maybe soft power or ideational elements of India's place in the international order. And here he gives particular focus to how India's democratic practices, and their potential erosion, could affect its standing in the international order and draw some interesting connections there. He also talks a lot about how India relates to other players in the international system. So he talks about global players, and

those are the ones he just mentioned, United States, China, Russia. These are ones that India perceives to be its status peers or wants aspires to have as peers. But he also spends some good time on thinking about regional neighbors, and India's problems in its own South Asian neighborhood. So here he's talking about Pakistan and others. These of course India has traditionally, historically seen as lesser partners. But they are especially important now in part because of China's greater influence in the region.

And that context and the competition for influence in the region, really drives a lot of the dynamics there and I think more globally. So what you have here is a solid snapshot, anybody who wants a book to better understand India's international prospects, now and looking into the future, would find a lot to like about that book. Now in terms of my own questions or observations, I would say, this framing India's motivation in the context of status, is fascinating. Of course, to me, but I think it should be to others as well. And this definition, and I want to highlight this because T.V. said it, but I want to say it again. Collective international recognition of an actor based on its valued material and or non-material attributes. So that is status. And he also, at various points, explains how status, as I tried to do many years ago, can relate to tensions and competitions in the international order.

There can be status anxiety, a sense that somehow your status is being threatened, India or China may have this. Where this disparity between ascribed status and aspired status, that can lead states to do things to achieve more or to get other states to see them differently. Now all of this is great, but as I found when I was writing my dissertation, leaves a lot of space for interpretation. This concept is still very open-ended, and some of that is good, but some of it raises questions. So, among them, how do we know when this collective international recognition has been achieved, or what exactly it is? What are the things that we need to look for? How do we know when a state has achieved what it believes is acceptable status, and is no longer suffering from status anxiety, or this discrepancy between aspiration and acquisition? And all this takes me back to so many of the questions that I fielded as a then graduate student.

Political science may have its faults, but it forces the mind to sharpen the concepts. And I was grappling with critiques from a realist or materialist perspective, which would suggest that status is just another way of talking about various aspects of power. Whether it's power for security or economic power, all of that seems a lot more straightforward. You can measure it, you can see it, it is more tangible. Why not just focus on power instead of getting distracted by status? From a very different perspective, people who you might loosely group as constructivists, the question here has more to do with, how do you know which aims will be associated with status at any particular time by the international system? So, if those status markers are constructed through some kind of a social interaction among states, why not focus on how those markers are determined, rather than thinking about the particular motives of any given state?

Are those markers and their definition where the action is, in the international system? And those things change, so since they change so much, why not just talk about how states are seeking those things, rather than status per se? Lots of other questions, people into more methodology, again, more materialistic in terms of their approach or materialist will ask, how do you measure this stuff? How do you quantify it? How do you compare India's status relative to China's status or anybody else's status? Or even India's status today to what it enjoyed 20 or 50 years ago? How do you think about those things? A certain category of theorists, you might say liberals, loosely defined, would also want to know whether the discussion of status really should focus more on domestic determinants of status. Leadership, particular leaders like Narendra Modi seeking status in certain ways. Or particular interest groups within societies.

Do not those determine how a state thinks about status more than anything else? And should we focus on trying to understand what the people of India want in the world? Whether status driven or otherwise, rather than thinking about how it is an outside in concept. Or granted status by outside powers, is it just something that is sought by domestic interests? And then for the historians or area studies folks, I think they would wonder, why go down this path at all? Why talk about such a general or universal aim-like status? Does that just distract us from thinking about the specific aims or aspirations, or ideologies that define India? And are maybe uniquely Indian in terms of the way that they shape what India seeks in the world today, and what it is sought in the past. Does this distract us or kind of confuse us, make India look like something that it is not?

Those are somewhat academic questions, but I think they have practical consequences. The real question that I would focus on is, what is talking about status and India's status quest tell us about its behavior that we will not understand otherwise, what is the real payoff here? And I think your book is telling us that status, though it is connected to lots of other issues that we care about, really status helps us understand why India seems to care a lot about certain things, that a purely material approach might not lead us to understand. It forces us to see that India cares not just about wealth or power, but about respect and other things. And it seems like also that these status-oriented competitions tell us something about how we need to manage India's relations or understand India's relations with countries like Pakistan or China, in ways that would be different if they were just about security.

And it also seems that India puts a particular premium because of status, on membership in certain kinds of clubs, clubs of nations. Like the UN Security Council, that goes beyond their practical value, tells us something else. Now, if that is all true, sitting here in Washington D.C., the last thing we want know is, how does that or how should that affect how policymakers see India and respond to India? What's the punch line here in a policy sense? How do we move from the analytical to the prescriptive? And here I think what you are also telling us is that India's history, its status consciousness, and its sense that it is been left out, leads it to be particularly susceptible to overtures by certain types of states in certain types of ways. And you point out a good relationship between India and Russia or

formerly the Soviet Union, where it seemed like the Soviets and now the Russians understand how to play the status game with India. And maybe the United States, need to learn to do that more effectively. Or maybe we have learned.

It also seems like including India in favored groups, again, if not the UN Security Council, maybe the Quad or other groups, might be something that really earns us some points with India. So, the question policy-wise is, can we use this as leverage to achieve other things in our relationship with India? Can understanding the status angle help us understand how better to avoid a conflict between India and China, or India and Pakistan? How should we approach those conflicts differently? And will understanding the nature of the status quest and its connections to India's nuclear program, help us understand how India will respond to China's growing nuclear program maybe differently than if it was just a matter of security? Again, there is something different going on here. Last and briefly point would be, T.V., you make the point that status today is different from status in the more distant past, say the 19th century. You don't get it just from fighting wars, you get it from how you take care of your own people, and maybe even whether or not you are democratic.

But you also notice that China has gotten a great deal of status and respect, or it appears to have in this international order. And clearly China is not liberal, not democratic, so what should we make of that? And if as some scholars are pointing out, part of what China is trying to do in the international order, is shape the narrative of global institutions. And in doing so, maybe change the things that are associated with status ultimately away from a democratic order and toward just focusing on material success. Might that also have a consequence for how India sees status. You're very optimistic that India would need to learn to be a better democracy and take better care of its people, so as to achieve status. There is an optimism in there or hope at least. But what if status is not associated with those things as we look forward, in part because China does not want it to be? So anyway, I hope I put some things on the table for us to talk about. And again, thank you for the opportunity. This is a great book and I appreciate it.

Sahar Khan: Absolutely. Now to T.V. Paul for any response.

T.V. Paul: I'll just take a few of those things. Robert Gilpin writes in his book *War and Change in World Politics*, "Prestige is the currency of day-to-day international politics." He meant actually status. Prestige has a very limited meaning. If you hold a prestigious chair, that does not mean automatically a status, which means higher social group with privileges, and institutionalized recognition. So, prestige is winning an award, but does not necessarily produce status in a lingering fashion. I have an edited collection for status in world politics where we discuss the differences between power, prestige, honor, glory. They're all cognate concepts, but status is a big theme in sociology, we are familiar with social status, social status groups, etc. And that is why it is important to bring in. And in a contemporary world, you are witnessing right now a big status conflict with Mr. Putin.

And that conflict cannot be explained as simply for security alone, it is the idea that Russia is status humiliated by the west, expansion of NATO and not following through. And then of course China again using status humiliation, 100 years humiliation by the West, as its claim for higher status. India it's using a thousand-year humiliation by first Islamic invaders, then of course the European great powers. So this concept really needs to be brought in. And one of the things that really puzzled me was that the India's nuclear behavior cannot be explained in a security terms. [In] 1974 India conducts a test and does nothing afterwards, causing considerable insecurity to it because now everybody's energized against India. And the Carter administration comes with all this rules second against India. And for 30, 40 years India was isolated, it was suffering from this action. Why did they not go for a deterrent capability, and sat over it? And even until Rajiv Gandhi starts the program, but even then it was not coming out.

So that opposition to the regime cannot be explained away as a security challenge, it was largely a status challenge. India knew that it'll be in perpetuity, because if you associated that weapon with great power status, which is questionable sometimes, and that is part of the problem. How do we know collective recognition? You are absolutely right, different markers emerged in the past, it was Christian civilization. There is a lot of literature on the standards of civilization that Europeans would not recognize, Ottoman, Turkey, or even other powers that are not part of the European Christendom. That changed, and of course we have today, China you mentioned. But China's goals also change, this is one problem with status, status is like alcohol, when you get something, you are happy the first drink and then you need more, and your capacity increases. Then your status goals also change, because you now know you have more possibilities.

So that is what is exactly happening to China, which is no longer interested just being treated as another great power. And there was a period when China thought of as a co-equal with the United States, but now I think their goal is to replace the United States we know that. And that is, what is replacement? Which is a globally recognized lead power, like the U.S.. And that is where I think your last question of can China get there, why will India not imitate China? See that's where if you only focus on material capacity, your ideational and other aspects, there is a deficiency which China suffers from legitimacy deficiency, and status requires legitimacy. And so China was already recognized in 1945. India actually contributed the largest number of troops to India, means British, India, to World War II, and why it was not given its role. And Indian elite also did not push hard, which is another puzzle which I address in this.

So the issue is, India will get to a position where its status is not accommodated. They will be considerable conflict, potential internally and externally. Because we know, this is the Thucydides trap problem, countries reach a certain threshold, and they are not recognized institutionally. And here the UN Security Council right now is the critical place. And even yesterday, Mr. Modi said the Security Council should be reformed to reflect. What is that? The Security Council is often an ineffective body, but it is actually a status recognition, that is the number one marker of the post-war institutional settlement, which India is seeking. But the

system has no mechanism for peaceful accommodation of the rising power, with the exception of the U.S. accommodating China, for balance of power reasons.

You have a lot of fascinating questions. And the question of legitimacy is something that I'm quite interested, how do actors get legitimacy? And that is where soft power is very important. What is your soft power attribute that gives you a heft compared to other actors? India's uses Democratic secular liberal attribute to get recognition in the West and in particular the United States. At the official level a lot of things are going on: Indian ministers are visiting, there's defense cooperation. But people to people, the recognition that we are hoping to give to India or gain, is today actually to be honest, hampered by India blocking scholars and journalists from visiting India, interacting, and engaging. India is closing India for scholarship exchanges, and research, almost like Indira Gandhi did in the 1960s, which hurts India because soft power is only when you engage others.

Your civilizational attributes will be known only if you tell me what you are contributing. So that is why I argue that India's asset is this democratic tradition. Also, internally this generates conflict if you do not have this inclusive society. India is different than China and more diverse ethnically. And if you look at China's behavior in Xinjiang or in Tibet, has that really brought China the kind of status that it is seeking? And it is clear that China managed to isolate those issues better than other countries, partly because of impossible to get there I guess.

But that model will not work for India; to legitimate India's position in the global arena, it needs others acceptance. And China has actually done a lot more other things to achieve its goal. The Belt and Road Initiative is not just an economic instrument, it is a status instrument. It is actually taking a little bit from the East India company model, but of course not territorially taking over. So China is doing other things, infrastructure development, helping the other countries, and not getting involved in their domestic issues as western countries do. So it is doubtful that India can compete with that. As we know, India does not have that much wealth. So what are your assets then? That it is of course helping these countries in other ways, so far our development and their democratic transition. So India really needs to go beyond a typical great power, military power, economic power, hard power, because its soft power is very important for India.

Understanding recognition is actually a weakness of realism in the Mearsheimer sense. Because they always talk about power, power for what? If power is the capacity to influence others' behavior, and that power is material only, but realism is mostly material. But influence not going to give you automatic recognition by others. There are a lot of powerful actors out there, but their status is not adjusted. So in the literature we have something called Club Good and Positional Good. Club Good is membership, people want membership in clubs for psychological reasons and material reasons. That is a big challenge for studying the international order. Without that dimension, we are really narrowing it down to a conflict for power and military strategy, all in a very narrow sense.

So broadening it with this inner psychological desire of groups, is very important. The other thing you mentioned, it is the domestic politics. In fact, Prime Minister Modi used status politics very powerfully for his electoral campaigns. The G20 meetings, the all over Delhi, all over India, this placard showing, India is now leading power, and all that. It is clearly become big part of this narrative domestically. The other dimension I would say is the domestic conflict, that is another thing that I have brief discussion. You look at what happened in Germany and Japan, and the treatment of minorities. Often the minorities become the fifth columnists, because they're not with us for this ambitious goal we have. The Lebensraum, we want to get there and they are the ones stopping us. What Mr. Trump is trying to say, make America great again, that is a status quest of a certain group of people.

Many countries want to be great and that greatness comes through the good old racial groups that were dominant in the system, now they are challenged by minorities or infusion of different cultures and society. So this literature is not sufficient, I absolutely agree with you that lot more needs to be done. And I do not think we need to look at it as either or. We need to look at it as, what I notice is that, much of the literature on South Asian security ignores it. Of course, there is literature on rising power and all that. But the rising power literature is mostly talking about material rise and how that affects their behavior. But the socio-psychological aspect is messy, but we need to do it. And how to measure it, how to quantify it all big challenges.

My book is one of the few trying to understand South Asian dynamics, and the regional conflicts, India's conflict with Pakistan is, I am arguing that it has not been purely for territory. And how the Russians influence India? When an Indian prime minister visited Moscow during the Cold War, it is like a festival, all of Moscow will be Indian flags. Where an Indian prime minister visited Washington D.C., she will be received often by a junior official. And it will be a small news item of course, unless you have a conflict or something. And I remember seeing the Russian leaders visiting India, or Soviet leaders, and it was a big deal. And the Russians somehow understood that giving the India that status position in the Global South gives them a lot of advantages. But then so my question is, how do we give this entity the kind of role it's seeking? And is material capability alone is enough?

You are absolutely right, it is a social recognition. It also has to show that it does not treat its people differently. That it is offering something unique, not simply a kind of narrow nationalism, but a broadened nationalism. And that is the attractiveness of the United States. Whereas is it feasible in many other countries? Can you go to China and do this? And I think all of us benefited from the American liberal educational system, and that is America is a big soft power and why it is attractive. India is seeking to be at least a quasi-American model or a Chinese model, and I think a Chinese model will not work for India.

Sahar Khan: A lot of your book focused a lot on the potential of India's soft power, especially its human capital. Your book discusses the educational challenges that India has

faced, problems with accessible healthcare, et cetera. And of course in this discussion here we have talked a lot about what does power mean in terms of material interests, hard power versus soft power.

Can you talk a little bit about, what are some of India's soft power resources? Because what you are arguing in your book and even here, is that India's leg up is actually not necessarily its material powers. And it is certainly making advances in military and technological capabilities. But its strength really is not that, it is people, and that it should invest in essentially human resources and capital. So can you talk a little bit about what does that mean, especially when we think [in] theoretical terms, and to some extent in policy terms. When we think about soft power, we are thinking more about people. So is there room, theoretically and perhaps policy-wise, to move the human capital into a different sphere of power? And what does that mean for India?

T.V. Paul: Actually the investment in people is both soft power and hard power. So demographic power gives you, if people's per capita income is higher, then your GDP is going to be higher. If people are productive citizens, your labor capacity is higher. So your whole overall economic activity depends a lot on your human capital, in the modern era in particular. Especially a country like India with very few natural resources that you can say like oil or anything you can sell to the rest of the world. So one of my biggest challenge in this book is, why India consistently has been spending about 2% of its GDP on education, about 2% of its GDP on healthcare. This is a big challenge for India.

India, unlike the East Asian country, there is an interesting book by Myron Weiner on *The Child in the State in India*. You should actually read that book, it talks about the cultural reason for this underspending on education. 1% of that went into the IITs and IIMs in the high level, and 1% to everybody else. As a result, a large segment of India did not get that education except in some pockets like Kerala or now southern states. And of course there are some excellent good schools, et cetera. This is part of the reason why India's human capital is not coming out properly. You have a large segment, especially the Dalits and women in particular, [that] do not have the educational skill sets to excel. But that is changing because of a lot of private schools. So, we have a middle class that is now aspiring to become a global workforce, but the domestic capacity is very weak, and that is partly because of this lower focus on education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

I argue this, undercut India's possibility in both economic and perceptual level. If status is a perception of others, of you, you look at India, you have too many poor people who are not getting the daily subsistence. Of course, India has made progress from before the liberalization today, I mean every decade, every year we go, actually India is changing. But it is very truncated, it is sectoral change. It is not the overall improvement that will happen only if you develop the skill sets. You need 6% of GDP on education, more than 8% for healthcare. And of course similar or more for infrastructure. When you say infrastructure is urban planning to basic things that we talk about. So all these areas, India has underinvested. And

as a result, it is claiming international status on the basis of certain aggregate markers like GDP growth rate.

So what I'm saying is necessary conditions, some of them, but not sufficient. Not enough to get status, for that, you need to improve the lives of these people. And especially a country and its culture that is highly hierarchical, you have deep divisions based on religious beliefs about caste, about culture, about minorities, etc. So that is also the problem of if you become an intolerant state, you will have a large number of your minority being less developed. So right now you have the Dalits or the other groups, they are coming up slowly but they are not sufficiently getting there. But do you want more people going into the marginalized groups? And some of these problems deeply Indian problem, it's a structural. And for that you need real engineering, social engineering to transform. India has done quite a bit through the reservation system.

So until you get there, your status globally will be perceived as problematic. Even if you have the 3rd largest economy in the world, you still go there, you see children not going to school, instead they are doing the other jobs, menial jobs. So it has to really refocus, and in my reading the budgets unfortunately do not do enough, my reading of it. Some states do, but not the central government's recent budget. Educational and healthcare spending I believe has come down. But until we discuss this issue clearly to the Indian elite that you really need to focus on spending on healthcare and education if you want to get the international recognition you are seeking on a legitimate basis and other developing countries to look at it as a model.

India was a model democracy for a period of time. But now of course that's a challenge, so what else you got? Is it a particular vision, coming out of religious nationalism? See, the problem is, unless you are a member of the religious group, are you going to be happy with that? You are not going to be getting the recognition. This is a problem for China too, China cannot accept others in its society as equals, because it has a vision of its own people.

And India has the same problem. I mentioned America, the liberal countries, Anglo-Saxon countries, whatever their deficiencies are, their greatest advantage is that you can become part of the society. I do not think it is easy for a foreigner to be part of any of these so-called rising powers today.

Sahar Khan: I want to draw our attention to geopolitics a little bit. And this goes into the title of today's conversation, the question that we ask is, is India a swing power? This is something that you discuss in your book as well. And when we think about India's national power, we tend to think about it in terms of two pathways. One that it is going to use international institutions and rely on Western powers, specifically its relationship with the United States. It is going to use the Quad and other minilateral, multilateral organizations. And as you have also talked about in your book, India's desire to be part of the UN Security Council, and have a permanent seat there, et cetera.

And the other pathway is, is it going to get closer to Russia? And what does that mean? So, I wanted to push you a little bit on some of the comments that actually both of you have made. And Dr. Markey, I welcome your thoughts on this too and then we'll have to conclude. But how will U.S.-Russia or U.S.-China great power competition impact India's ability to be a leading power in the future? And this status of swing states — or perhaps I should not say status, since that is a loaded term now — but this reputation that it might be developing as a swing state, how does that help India? What is in India's advantage?

T.V. Paul: Swing power claims work when the system is not polarized deeply. So, if you get a bipolar order, I think India will have a tough time playing the swing power role because you have to either join us on most of the issues or the other side. India cannot join China because China's goals are inconsistent with India's, if it wants to be the dominant power. China does not want to give India a role, status role. In the past it did, BRICS or SCO. And before Xi Jinping's time, China was willing to give India a role in the creation of the BRICS bank system for instance. But that time is gone, the Brick and Road Initiative has a purely Chinese instrument for status acquisition. So the swing power works for a period of time, when the system is not clearly polarized.

But the challenge is swing power for what? A swing power also has to look at collective action problems, climate change issues, and the whole two or three big international security challenge today that is Ukraine, Gaza. Where India is kind of, I would not use the word buck-passing, but most of the rising powers do not seem to have much to contribute. Of course, some of them went to the International Court of Justice. But they were more active in the non-aligned movement, the initial part, the Bandung process onwards, to influence the great power system through institutions. So this is a problem for many of the states, including India, if a swing power just wants to be in the club. What am I going to do with the club? What is our conception of international or regional order? What kind of change you want to see?

And if that is not there, it is very purely real political oriented notion of being a power player. But I do not think that the U.S. can ignore, or the western countries can ignore India. Swing power is also useful for economic purposes, this is something that we do not discuss, why U.S. companies are going to India? It is actually an economic swing capacity that you are offering them the market. There are strategic and economic goals in that. But I think if you play too much, and when you have a serious situation, for instance, a conflict on the India-China border, I think it will crystallize that you'll need to be part of something, and that will be a U.S. support system. As long as it does not escalate the China behavior in Taiwan or South China Sea or India border, India can play swing state up to a point. But my reading is that that will change if there is a major crisis in Taiwan Straits, where India may have to do indirect support to keep the Asian order from going. But clearly India itself has to think about, what do we really need? How can you play the system? This idea of multi-alignment or strategic autonomy, all have some value if you want to be a poll by yourself. But the challenge is, crisis comes and do you need others help, and are they willing to help you and are you

willing to help them? This is the problem for the U.S., are they willing to help us when we are in a crisis situation?

Dan Markey: Two sets of comments. The first would be, as India looks out into the international system, its interest in multipolarity and preservation of multipolarity as I think T.V. was getting at, is acute. I think status has a lot to do with that, because only in a preserved multipolar order. For instance, one that continues to have Russia as a poll, Europe as a poll, the United States as a poll, China as a poll, only in that system as compared to a bipolar system, dominated by the United States and China. Only in that multipolar system does India have a pretty good shot of reaching a similar level of respect or status with the other players. So I think that helps to explain a lot of what India is trying to do, as it continues to have an outreach to Russia. It also explains India's perceptions which are born partially of its aspirations, its perceptions of Russia is likely to continue as a great power are partly because India wants it to be. But that ultimately traces back to an incentive or a desire, a motivation for that status or in my terms, prestige on its own.

Second very quick point. You asked about soft power, about India's attractiveness to the world. There are some really interesting questions about how Indians define those things. And how they are driven in part by how the world responds, but also in part by what India presents. And India is presenting now something under Narendra Modi, which is quite different than what it had presented historically, and I will be very simplistic about it. It used to be Bollywood, and now it is yoga. And there's something to that which is to say that, its current leadership wants to characterize India's soft power and the markers of that power and its attraction to the rest of the world, in a certain type of Hindu nationalist and chauvinist terms.

Which are not fully appreciated often by the audiences themselves, you just like yoga because yoga is great. But which is embedded into a much deeper cultural civilizational approach in India, in a way that Bollywood quite frankly was not. Bollywood is reflective of a multicultural in a sense, definitely a part of India that is Muslim, and a very modern approach to culture and also to the arts. And that was something that was very attractive during the Cold War, it was a point of Indian soft power. When we look things in terms of ways that states try to compete for international status, some of it is what is acceptable to the rest of the world. However, really important parts of it are driven from the inside, and reflect dynamics within societies as well. And I think that is fascinating, also important for us to appreciate as we look at India from the outside.

Sahar Khan: Well, thank you both. I feel like we could sit on the stage for another hour. Thank you audience for tuning in. And again, I would highly recommend this book. There is a link also on the event description, it is called Unfinished Quest, India's Search for Major Power Status from Nehru to Modi.