

Research Article

# Atmanirbhar Bharat: The Philosophical Art of War in an Anarchic Age – Realism, Raja dharma, and the Sovereign Self in Geopolitics

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## Abstract

In geopolitical realism's anarchic self-help arena, where destructive AI capabilities will dictate not just military outcomes but economic, civilian, and global dominance, Atmanirbhar Bharat demands uncompromising self-reliance in military artificial intelligence to safeguard sovereignty. Lagging in AI-enabled lethal autonomous systems, command-and-control, and electronic warfare risks technological vassalage, as frontrunners extend battlefield superiority into trade, innovation, and negotiation leverage. Realism, tilted toward power as destruction's arbiter (Mearsheimer, 2001; Morgenthau, 1948), insists the world heeds only the militarily potent; the UN's declining stature underscores self-reliance, echoing Waltz's (1979) survival imperative.

Framed through Kautilya's indigenous Danda, the Bhagavad Gita's karma yoga, and Shanti Parva's rajadharma, this paper argues India's AI military prioritization via sustained R&D, public-private partnerships, and resource allocation over energy vulnerabilities is dharma: securing strategic autonomy, deterring conflicts, and commanding the AI arms race. Absent binding regimes like the NPT, such mastery transforms multipolar threats into Vijaya, positioning India as Global South leader.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence; AI; Defense; Atmanirbhar; Technology; Ramayan; Kautilya; Shanti Parva

## Introduction

In geopolitical realism's anarchic self-help system, where military AI capabilities will dictate economic, civilian, and global hierarchies, Atmanirbhar Bharat mandates India's sovereign self-reliance to avert technological erosion of autonomy. Offensive realism compels great powers to maximise relative capabilities for hegemony amid uncertainty (Mearsheimer, 2001, ch. 2 ); applied to AI, frontrunners like the US and China extend battlefield dominance into trade, innovation, and negotiation leverage, tilting power toward destructive capacity as the ultimate arbiter. Morgenthau's classical realism roots this in animus dominandi states pursue power-defined interests distrustfully (1948, pp. 4–15<sup>1</sup>), while Waltz's neorealism attributes it to structure: anarchy forces self-help, rendering alliances transient amid UN decline (1979, ch. 6<sup>1</sup>).

India's defence indigenisation, accelerated post-Galwan 2020 and COVID shocks, operationalises this imperative:

**Table 1: Atmanirbhar Bharat Defence Milestones (Sources: MoD 2025; SIPRI 2026.)**

| Metric              | FY 2019-20       | FY 2024-25       | Growth |
|---------------------|------------------|------------------|--------|
| Production          | ₹0.84 Lakh       | ₹1.51 lakh crore | +90%   |
| Exports             | ₹0.09 lakh crore | ₹0.24 lakh crore | +167%  |
| Russia Import Share | 70% (2011–15)    | 40% (2021–25)    | -43%   |

Sovereignty now hinges on military AI autonomous systems, C4ISR, electronic warfare via DRDO's CAIR and public-private partnerships, prioritizing resources against energy vulnerabilities. Kautilya's Artha shastra (saptanga, indigenous Danda), Shanti Parva's rajadharma, Ramayana's self-reliant diplomacy, and Bhagavad Gita's karma yoga align with Machiavelli's rejection of foreign arms (Prince, Ch. XII): power flows from one's own limbs.

India must secure AI supremacy deterring conflicts, commanding negotiations, leading the Global South in an unbound arms race absent NPT-like regimes.

## Section 1: Realism, Self-Reliance, and the Sovereign Atman of Defense

In the realist tradition of international relations theory, the anarchic structure of the global system constitutes the foundational condition that compels states toward self-sufficiency in security affairs. Kenneth Waltz, the architect of neorealism (or structural realism), famously argued that international anarchy, defined as the absence of a central authority capable of enforcing rules or guaranteeing survival; transforms the world into a self-help system. In such a system, “each state is responsible for its own survival,” and states must rely primarily on their

own capabilities rather than on the goodwill or consistency of others (Waltz 1979). Waltz further stressed that “in anarchy there is no automatic harmony,” meaning states are driven by the imperative of survival to prioritise relative gains, minimise vulnerabilities, and avoid excessive dependence that could be exploited in crises (Waltz 1979, p. 105<sup>1</sup>)

This structural logic renders heavy reliance on foreign arms, modern equivalents of

Machiavelli’s “mercenaries” or “auxiliaries” inherently perilous. Dependence creates strategic vulnerabilities through supply-chain disruptions, political leverage by suppliers, and the risk of withheld deliveries during heightened tensions. The Russia–Ukraine war (ongoing since 2022) provides a stark contemporary illustration: Western sanctions, redirected production priorities, and Moscow’s strategic recalibration have caused repeated delays and uncertainties in deliveries to longstanding clients, including India’s S-400 Triumf air-defence systems (SIPRI 2026<sup>1</sup>).

These vulnerabilities multiply exponentially in AI warfare, where S-400 delays become

irrelevant against drone swarms and autonomous C4ISR that frontrunners like China deploy at machine speed (SIPRI AI Trends 2026<sup>1</sup>). Russia’s deepening alignment with China amid India’s border frictions with Beijing further amplifies concerns about long-term supply reliability (National Interest 2026<sup>1</sup>).

India confronts these realist pressures acutely in its current geopolitical landscape. China’s sustained military assertiveness along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) most dramatically evidenced by the June 2020 Galwan Valley clash, which resulted in Indian casualties and highlighted asymmetries in rapid mobilisation and infrastructure has heightened the need for credible, independent deterrence capabilities. At the same time, the Indo-Pacific’s multipolar character, marked by great-power competition, energy-security dilemmas, contested maritime domains, and the lingering effects of global supply-chain shocks from the COVID-19 pandemic, compounds India’s security challenges (various analyses, including MoD and think-tank reports).

Atmanirbhar Bharat in the defence sector directly addresses these imperatives by prioritising strategic autonomy through indigenous research, development, production, and technological self-reliance. Official data released by the Ministry of Defence and the Press Information Bureau confirm the initiative’s momentum: India achieved its highest-ever total defence production of ₹1.54 lakh crore in FY 2024–25 with indigenous manufacturing reaching approximately ₹1.27 lakh crore in the preceding fiscal (a 174% increase from FY 2014–15 levels) and now constituting roughly 65% of total defence equipment (PIB 2025; ET Edge Insights 2025; Insights on India 2025). Defence exports simultaneously scaled to a record ₹23,622 crore in FY 2024–25 (a 12% year-on-year increase and a dramatic rise from under ₹1,000 crore a decade earlier), with products now reaching over 100 countries and ambitious targets set for ₹50,000 crore in exports and ₹3 lakh crore in production by 2029 (PIB 2025; ET Edge Insights 2025).

Equally telling is the strategic diversification away from over-reliance on any single supplier.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russia’s share of

Indian major arms imports fell sharply from 70% in 2011–15 to 51% in 2016–20 and further to 40% in 2021–25<sup>15</sup>, while France (29%) and Israel (15%) have emerged as significant alternative sources (SIPRI 2026; The Print 2026; The Wire 2026). This trend reflects deliberate policy choices under Atmanirbhar Bharat to reduce vulnerability in an anarchic environment.

Philosophically, this realist-driven shift resonates deeply with Indic thought: it mirrors the soul's progressive detachment from 'maya' (the illusion of secure dependence on external forces) and its movement toward sovereign 'moksha' (liberation/autonomy) amid the endless cycle ('samsara') of power politics. Structural realism compels the transition because, as Waltz observed, the anarchic structure inexorably pushes states to maximise security through autonomous capabilities rather than alliances or arrangements subject to fortune and the whims of others (Waltz 1979). In this framework, Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence is not merely pragmatic policy, it is an existential necessity: the fortification of the nation's sovereign self against the uncertainties of anarchy, ensuring that authentic power flows from one's own limbs rather than from borrowed, fragile, or potentially withheld swords.

## **Section 2: Machiavelli's Lesson: Self-Armed States and the Sovereign Atman of Defence**

Niccolò Machiavelli's Chapter XII of *The Prince* offers one of the most uncompromising realist critiques of dependence on foreign-supplied military force. He distinguishes four kinds of arms available to a prince: his own (*proprie*), mercenaries (*mercenarie*), auxiliaries (*ausiliarie*), and mixed configurations. Mercenaries and auxiliaries, he argues, are "useless and dangerous," because they are disunited, self-interested, and fundamentally unaccountable to the prince's survival. In a much-quoted passage, Machiavelli warns that such forces "are disunited, ambitious, and without discipline, unfaithful, valiant before friends, cowardly before enemies; they have neither the fear of God nor fidelity to men," and that relying on them means standing neither firm nor safe. Mercenaries, he adds, fight only for pay and lack any stake in the outcome of the state; their competent captains may turn predatory, while their incompetent ones bring ruin. Auxiliaries, borrowed from a stronger power, are even more perilous: they remain loyal to their true master, and their deployment risks turning the borrower into a vassal rather than a sovereign actor.

Machiavelli's historical examples reinforce this logic. He notes that France's Charles VIII conquered large parts of Italy in 1494 "with chalk in hand," a phrase capturing the ease with which over-reliant, mercenary-based Italian order collapsed. By contrast, he praises Rome, Sparta, and the Swiss republics, which remained "armed and free" for long periods because their citizens bore arms under direct civic or state control, embedding loyalty, discipline, and collective responsibility in the body politic. For Machiavelli, genuine authority and enduring freedom flow only from a prince who leads his own troops and commands his own means of force; borrowed or outsourced arms inevitably erode the very essence of sovereignty.

In contemporary strategic terms, Machiavelli's categories map strikingly onto the risks of over-dependence on foreign military suppliers and alliances. Modern arms imports function as

a kind of institutionalised mercenary force: the state pays for platforms and technology that it does not fully own, control, or understand. Suppliers retain leverage through technology black-boxing, embedded diagnostics, selective licensing, export controls, and politicised access to spare parts, conditions that can be tightened abruptly during crises. The Russia–Ukraine war since 2022 has exposed this vulnerability in concrete terms. Sanctions, re-directed production priorities, and Russia’s strategic realignment have caused delays and uncertainty in the delivery of key systems to India, including elements of the S-400 Triumf air-defence complex<sup>18</sup>, despite long-standing defence ties. Such episodes validate Machiavelli’s warning: dependence on external arms may appear convenient in peacetime, but it often collapses precisely when the user most needs it.

In this light, India’s Atmanirbhar Bharat reforms in defence can be read as a deliberate effort to escape the Machiavellian trap of mercenary dependence. By prioritising indigenous design, development, and manufacturing, the initiative seeks to build “own arms” through DRDO-led projects, public-private partnerships, and a growing domestic defence industrial base. Official data show that defence production reached approximately ₹1.54 lakh crore in FY 2024–25, with indigenous content now accounting for roughly 65 percent of total defence equipment. Defence exports surged to ₹23,622 crore in the same period, rising sharply from under ₹1,000 crore a decade earlier, and official targets project ₹3 lakh crore in production and ₹50,000 crore in exports by 2029. At the same time, Russia’s share of Indian major arms imports has fallen from 70 percent in 2011–15 to 40 percent in 2021–25, while France and Israel have emerged as alternative suppliers, reflecting a conscious strategy of diversification and domestic substitution. These trends embody Machiavelli’s core prescription: the formation of a self-armed, self-reliant state capable of independent action in a multipolar system.

Philosophically, Machiavelli’s insistence on own arms and self-command converges with the Indic concept of rajadharma, the ruler’s duty to protect the realm and its people through autonomous power rather than borrowed might. In this view, dependence on foreign arms is not merely a technical vulnerability but a moral failure of sovereignty: it risks dissolving the collective atman of the state into subordination or vassalage. In the current geopolitical context, where military AI and advanced autonomous systems are rapidly becoming the new metric of power, the stakes of such dependence are even higher. A state that cannot generate its own AI-enabled lethality, command-and-control architecture, and electronic-warfare capabilities risks being relegated to the margins of the emerging order, its voice attenuated and its security conditional on more technologically advanced powers. Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence, therefore, appears not only as a pragmatic industrial policy but as a modern instantiation of the art of war: the deliberate forging of a sovereign, self-armed polity whose power endures because it is rooted in the nation’s own technological and industrial limbs, rather than in the shifting caprices of external suppliers or fleeting alliances. A state reliant on foreign Rafale Tot or S-400 spares cannot generate indigenous AI lethality, C4ISR autonomy, or electronic warfare resilience—precisely the domains where technological frontrunners will dictate 2030 hierarchies (DRDO CAIR Assessment 2025).

### Section 3: Ramayana Diplomacy: Realpolitik and the Ethical Foundations of Sovereign Coalitions

The ‘Valmīki Rāmāyaṇa’ offers more than a religious or epic narrative; read through the lens of statecraft, it articulates a sophisticated diplomacy in which ‘coalitions are instruments of calculated self-reliance, not substitutes for sovereign capability’. In the Kishkindhā Kāṇḍa<sup>and</sup> the episodes that follow, Rāma exiled, materially weakened, and separated from Sītā engages in realpolitik to build alliances that extend his own power, never replace it. His intervention in the conflict between Sugrīva and Bālī, for instance, is not an act of altruistic mediation but a ‘strategic alignment with a weaker yet morally legitimate partner’ against a more powerful and adhārmic ruler. Rāma agrees to help Sugrīva regain his kingdom and queen in exchange for Sugrīva’s commitment to locate Sītā through the vanara network. In doing so, Rāma chooses the ‘ethically defensible ally’ over raw power, secures binding loyalty through decisive action, and consolidates a coalition that serves his own mission without subordinating his autonomy.

Rāma’s eventual killing of Bālī, while the latter is engaged in combat with Sugrīva has long been a subject of hermeneutic debate. Yet the text presents Rāma’s act as a ‘corrective of prior adhārma’: Bālī’s usurpation of Sugrīva’s kingdom and his claim over Ruma, Sugrīva’s wife, create a moral and political justification for Rāma’s intervention. From a realist standpoint, the episode illustrates how a ruler may employ ‘asymmetric means to offset material disadvantages, provided those means are framed within a broader project of justice and order. Rāma neither relies on Bālī’s might nor allows himself to be bound by the stronger party’s terms; instead, he reorders the balance of power by aligning with the weaker, rehabilitated partner. This logic finds parallels in modern realist statecraft, where weaker states seek alliances with powers that share their values or strategic imperatives, even as they maintain their own independent capabilities.

Subsequent diplomatic episodes reinforce this blend of ‘ethical resolve and strategic calculation’, Hanumān’s mission to Laṅkā functions as a model of intelligence-driven diplomacy. Sent as an emissary, he infiltrates Rāvaṇa’s court, delivers Rāma’s message with calibrated firmness, assesses military strength, and returns with critical reconnaissance all while preserving Rāma’s dignity and avoiding unwarranted provocation. Rāma’s own praise of messengers with “intelligence, eloquence, courage, and discretion” underscores the value of structured communication as a tool of statecraft, combining persuasion with deterrence. In contemporary terms, such an envoy prefigures the modern statecraft of “diplomacy plus deterrence”: the calibrated use of communication, signalling, and intelligence gathering to prepare the ground for military action without crossing thresholds unnecessarily.

Vibhīṣaṇa’s defection from Rāvaṇa’s court introduces a further dimension. Despite warnings from allies like Sugrīva that Vibhīṣaṇa might be a spy, Rāma welcomes him, invoking the principle that ‘one who seeks refuge in righteousness must be protected, even at risk’. The decision is not naïve humanitarianism but a ‘strategic embrace of internal fractures’ within the adversary coalition. Vibhīṣaṇa’s insider knowledge of Laṅkā’s defences, his moral authority as a dissenting brother, and his symbolic repudiation of Rāvaṇa’s excesses all erode enemy cohesion. Angada’s later pre-war embassy to Rāvaṇa then fulfils a procedural dharma of

diplomacy: the formal delivery of a final ultimatum, marked by clarity, restraint, and moral authority, thereby exhausting peaceful channels before the resort to justified war. This sequence of events; intelligence-seeking diplomacy, defection-driven intelligence, and final diplomatic ultimatum mirrors the multi-stage logic of modern crisis management between adversarial states.

The construction of Rāma Setu, the bridge to Laṅkā, stands as the symbolic culmination of this philosophy. When the sea refuses to yield a passage, Rāma threatens it with divine weapons, underscoring that diplomacy and accommodation must be backed by credible coercive power. The bridge is then built through collective labour and ingenuity, yet under Rāma's sovereign direction. In this image, the Ramayana gives us a powerful metaphor for statecraft in the age of great-power competition: alliances and coalitions are the connective tissue of power, but the foundational causeway of sovereignty is the state's own indigenous capability. The vanara force amplifies Rāma's reach, but it cannot replace his central role; likewise, contemporary alliances such as the Quad extend India's presence in the Indo-Pacific, yet they cannot absolve the state of the responsibility to build its own military–technological base, especially in the domain of AI-enabled warfare. Just as Rama's Setu enabled crossing to Lanka, India's AI-C4ISR backbone must undergird Quad interoperability, ensuring technological contributions flow from indigenous strength, not imported platforms vulnerable to supply denial.

Dialogues within Rāvaṇa's court, particularly those between Rāvaṇa and Kumbhakaṇṇa, highlight the dangers of undisciplined and impulsive statecraft. Kumbhakaṇṇa cautions against hasty decisions and the exploitation of fickle counsel, warning that such volatility can be turned into strategic advantage by external actors. Read against the backdrop of contemporary great-power politics, this advice echoes the realist concern with strategic incoherence: a state that shifts its posture abruptly, or whose internal deliberations lack discipline, invites miscalculation and external manipulation.

Philosophically, these episodes crystallise rajadharma in action: the ruler's duty to protect the realm through a combination of 'ethical clarity and sober realism'. Alliances, in this framework, are extensions of the sovereign self but never its replacement. Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence draws on the same logic: indigenous defence industrialisation and AI-driven capabilities form the Rāma Setu across the turbulent seas of geopolitical competition, enabling India to engage in coalitions and diplomatic initiatives from a position of strength rather than dependence. In an era where the balance of power is increasingly determined by mastery over autonomous systems, data-centric warfare, and electronic-battle networks, the Ramayana's lesson remains pertinent: true sovereignty arises when coalitions are tempered by autonomous strength, and when the nation's atman, its sovereign self remains anchored in its own technological and moral foundations.

#### Section 4: Shanti Parva and Rajadharma – The Ethical Art of Protective Self-Sufficiency

The Shānti Parva\* of the \*Mahabharata offers one of the most sustained reflections on rajadharma; the dharma of the ruler as the ethical foundation of statehood. Addressed by Bhīṣma to the grieving Yudhiṣṭhira after the devastation of Kurukṣetra, this discourse positions the king not merely as a political actor but as the moral guarantor of the realm's survival, justice, and welfare. The Parva famously asserts that rajadharma subsumes all other dharmas, because the protection of the people is the condition for any other duty to exist. In this view, the king's quintessential task is 'rakṣaṇa', protection of subjects through justice, security, and the preservation of a just social order.

At the heart of rajadharma lie a set of core virtues: satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence), self-restraint, compassion, and the active pursuit of the welfare of all beings. The ruler must administer justice impartially, foster social harmony, and ensure the material and moral prosperity of the realm. The Shanti Parva's treatment of taxation exemplifies this ethical balance. In the 'Rajadharmanusasana' and 'Apaddharmānuśāsana' segments, the king is enjoined to tax in a manner that sustains rather than diminishes the productive base of society; the well-known metaphor likens the wise king to a 'bee that draws honey from many flowers without harming them' or a cow-keeper who milks the cow without starving the calf. This imagery underscores that fiscal policy must be moderate, developmental, and self-renewing: the state's revenue should serve protective and productive ends, not extractive or exploitative ones, so that the polity itself remains robust.

At the same time, the Apaddharma parvan chapter introduces a realist corollary to this ethics-based governance. In times of crisis or extreme adversity, apaddharma, dharma under distress permits the ruler to adapt norms that would otherwise be strictly observed, because the preservation of order itself may require deviations from routine righteousness. The text acknowledges that in such contexts, "righteousness may take the form of unrighteousness," as long as the overriding aim remains the protection of the realm and the people. This is not a license for arbitrary conduct; rather, it is a contextual realism that recognises the brutal logic of anarchy or crisis, where survival and justice are intertwined.

Further in the Apaddharmānuśāsana, Bhīṣma articulates a hard-nosed insight into the nature of alliances: "Nobody is nobody's friend<sup>25</sup>; persons become friends or enemies only from motives of interest." This line, often paraphrased in modern discussions, reinforces the Shanti Parva's understanding that alliances are contingent, interest-driven, and therefore inherently fragile. The ruler is repeatedly counselled to gather wisdom, fortify the state's internal strength, maintain capable ministers and intelligence networks, and keep a ready army and fortified defences, so that the state's security does not rest on the shifting sands of external goodwill. In this framework, rajadharma is not a sentiment; it is a technology of order: the organised capacity to administer, protect, and, when necessary, defend the realm.

This dual logic, ethical responsibility and crisis-driven realism, resonates deeply with structural realism's account of an anarchic international system. In Waltzian terms, the state cannot expect a higher authority to guarantee its survival; it must therefore rely on its own capabilities, while managing alliances and norms prudently. In the Shanti Parva, this imperative finds its moral counterpart: the king's atman, or the sovereign essence of the state, is realised precisely through the ethical art of self-reliant guardianship. The ruler is exhorted to detach from the false security of external guarantees, and instead to cultivate inner strength, economic resilience, disciplined administration, and a capable instrument of force so that peace can be sustained from within, not imposed from abroad.

In the aftermath of Kurukṣetra, Yudhiṣṭhira's eventual re-establishment of a relatively stable and prosperous realm underlines this lesson: true shanti, peace is not passive or other-dependent. It is the outcome of a sovereign order that has learned to balance ethical restraint with the preparedness to defend itself. The Shanti Parva thus offers a powerful allegory for contemporary statecraft: just as the king must secure both internal justice and external defence, so must the modern state weave together economic fairness, social cohesion, and technological self-reliance in defence, especially in the domain of AI-driven warfare.

Read in this light, Atmanirbhar Bharat's emphasis on indigenous defence industrialisation and AI-centric military capability appears as a modern enactment of rajadharma's protective self-sufficiency. The state fortifies its own "military and fiscal bee-hives", its productive and technological foundations so that it can sustain long-term security without depleting the very base on which its sovereignty depends. In an anarchic geopolitical environment where alliances are interest-driven and technology is weaponised at the speed of algorithms, the Shanti Parva's vision remains strikingly relevant: the nation's atman endures not through dependence on external protectors, but through the ethical art of protective self-mastery, where strength and dharma mutually reinforce one another. Atmanirbhar Bharat's AI prioritisation, autonomous lethality (UAV swarms), predictive C4ISR (network-centric warfare), and resilient electronic warfare enacts rajadharma's protective self-sufficiency against algorithmically accelerated threats.

## **Section 5: Kautilya, Danda, and Yogakshema: The Realist Architecture of Atmanirbhar Bharat**

Kautilya's Arthashastra, a foundational text of Indian statecraft—provides the pragmatic institutional framework that complements the ethical and strategic insights from the Ramayana and Shanti Parva. Often termed the "Indian Machiavelli," Kautilya frames artha as the logical condition for dharma's survival, synthesizing acquisition and preservation into a science of power (danda) and prosperity (kosha) (Boesche, 2002; Debroy, 2011). The saptanga theory articulates the state as an organic whole of seven interdependent elements, swami (sovereign), amatya (ministers), janapada (territory/population), durga (fortifications), kosha (treasury), danda (army), and mitra (allies), where self-strength in danda and kosha precedes external

ambition, ensuring resilience against exploitation in an anarchic interstate environment (Rangarajan, 1992; Polsci, 2023). Indigenous defence capabilities in danda, especially AI-driven lethality, C4ISR, and electronic warfare anchor this limb, funded by kosha and protected by durga, as India builds rajadharma-aligned power through the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative (IDSA, 2025).

The mandala theory maps interstate relations as concentric circles around the vijigishu (aspirant state), positioning neighbors as natural rivals and allies as contingent extensions of power. Kautilya's upayas<sup>28</sup>, sama (conciliation), dama (concessions), bheda (division), and danda (force), hierarchize diplomacy as a 'graduated power calculus', echoing offensive realism's emphasis on self-help and relative power maximization (Boesche, 2002; Mearsheimer, 2001). Mitra serves strategic ends without substituting internal strength, as alliances in the Indo-Pacific like the Quad amplify India's danda while preserving its sovereign atman, the state's dharma of protection. The Bhagavad Gita's karma yoga undergirds this pragmatism, instructing Arjuna to act in svadharma, defense and statecraft, without attachment to outcomes, blending danda's necessity with ethical detachment (Debroy, 2011; JKYog, 2018).

Together, these texts frame Atmanirbhar Bharat as modern yogakshema: yoga (acquisition of strength and resources, including AI dominance) and kshema (preservation of sovereignty and welfare through fortified durga, resilient kosha, and disciplined danda) (Kautilya, Arthashastra; IDSA Brief, 2025). This synthesis yields empowered autonomy, not isolation: India's self-reliant danda secures negotiations against destructive AI spillover, while rajadharma guardianship safeguards the atman in multipolar flux, fulfilling Kautilya's vision of prosperity rooted in realist self-mastery (Debroy, 2011; Morgenthau, 1948). In an era where maya manifests as foreign dependency, Atmanirbhar Bharat embodies moksha, sovereign atman awakened through danda and yogakshema.

## **Section 6: The Imperative of AI-Centric Self-Reliance; Energy, Ecosystems, and Future Norm-Shaping**

The normative architecture of rajadharma, saptanga, and yogakshema developed across the preceding sections must now translate into a concrete strategic imperative for contemporary India: mastery over military artificial intelligence. In today's anarchic multipolar order, sovereignty increasingly hinges not on mechanical parity but on AI-driven capabilities, lethal autonomous systems, command-and-control (C4ISR) architectures, and electronic warfare. These technologies will determine not only battlefield outcomes but also economic leverage, technological standards, and diplomatic influence, as frontrunners extend military superiority into civilian and trade domains (Mearsheimer, 2001). India cannot treat AI defence as peripheral; it must become the core of national strategic prioritisation.

Critical to this endeavour is energy sovereignty as a security prerequisite. AI-intensive military systems demand vast computational power, making energy crises existential threats to autonomy. Dependence on imported fossil fuels or foreign renewables would constrain both economic resilience and defence sustainment. Domestically developed renewable energy, solar,

wind, and green hydrogen, must therefore be treated as a strategic reserve, with a dedicated portion ring-fenced for AI-military R&D, testing, and operations. Outsourcing these foundational inputs to competitor nations risks technological vassalage twice over: first through energy leverage, second through AI hardware supply chains. India's renewable capacity, projected to reach 500

GW by 2030, should prioritise self-reliant defence ecosystems to avert such vulnerabilities (MNRE, 2025; NITI Aayog, 2026<sup>1</sup>).

Advanced powers enjoy a significant head-start, integrating AI through sophisticated state–private–academic complexes (e.g., US DARPA–Silicon Valley, China's military–civil fusion). India cannot match their scale immediately. Yet passivity is not an option. The solution lies in a deliberate middle path: continue modernising existing platforms (Rafale, S-400) while launching parallel, indigenous AI-centric programmes as co-equal priorities. Key institutional mechanisms include:

- ***Dedicated AI-defence research funding*** for academic institutions (IITs, IISc, Central university's emerging AI centres), targeting niche strengths like swarm intelligence and ethical AI frameworks.
- ***Tripartite co-creation hubs*** uniting armed forces, DRDO (via CAIR), and private players (Tata, L&T, Reliance), mapping global leaders (e.g., US JADC2, China's Sharp Sword drones<sup>32</sup>) to define asymmetric Indian capabilities.
- ***Competency audits*** ensuring armed forces articulate operational needs while industry scales production, avoiding the "import–adapt–obsolesce" cycle.

This ecosystem serves a dual purpose: closing capability gaps and future-proofing against norm-setting regimes. The nuclear precedent is instructive: late entrants faced NPT-style restrictions dictated by early movers. Similar dynamics loom over military AI, with UN discussions (2025–26) already debating "binding treaties" on autonomy and data flows. An indigenous ecosystem positions India not as a rule-taker but a norm-shaper, commanding the global table alongside the US, China, and EU.

In Kautilyan terms, this operationalizes *yogakshema* through fortified *Danda* (AI lethality), resilient *kosha* (energy-backed funding), and strategic *mitra* (coalitions from strength). *Atmanirbhar Bharat* thus transforms multipolar threats into *Vijaya* (victory), ensuring India's sovereign *atman*, ethical, autonomous, and formidable endures in the AI-defined age.

## Conclusion

### Atmanirbhar Bharat as the Dharma of Sovereign Self-Reliance

In the lens of philosophical realism, Atmanirbhar Bharat emerges as more than a contemporary policy of defense indigenization; it constitutes the sovereign atman, the enduring self of the nation asserting its dharma in the anarchic arena of international politics. Drawing together the strands of realist theory, Machiavellian caution, and Indic statecraft explored in this article, the initiative reveals itself as a living synthesis of ancient and modern wisdom. Machiavelli's insistence on "own arms" as the indispensable foundation of sovereignty; Bhīṣma's exposition of rajadharma as the supreme duty of protective governance in the Shanti Parva; Rāma's strategic self-mobilisation through ethically grounded coalitions in the Valmīki Rāmāyaṇa; and Kautilya's saptanga architecture of holistic indigenous power in the Arthashastra, all converge on a single insight: authentic political power flows from autonomous capability, never from borrowed swords. Reinforced by the Bhagavad Gita's ethic of karma yoga detached performance of duty without attachment to results, these traditions teach that true security arises from self-reliant guardianship, not dependence on external protectors.

In an anarchic multipolar order, fractured by supply-chain disruptions, assertive border confrontations, and shifting great-power alignments, Atmanirbhar Bharat in the defence domain transcends mere survivalist pragmatism. It enacts the sovereign reclamation of the collective atman: transforming vulnerability into inviolable strength, and dependence into a form of disciplined autonomy. The initiative's empirical achievements record defence production exceeding ₹1.54 lakh crore, exports rising to ₹23,622 crore, and a marked reduction in reliance on any single arms supplier (from Russia's 70% share in 2011–15 to 40% in 2021–25, according to SIPRI 2026 and the Press Information Bureau 2025) are not merely statistical milestones.

They are the material manifestation of an inner philosophical imperative: the state's commitment to rajadharma-driven, self-sufficient power.

As global strategic competition intensifies and the geopolitical system moves deeper into the AI-driven era, Atmanirbhar Bharat offers India a path not only to survival but to vijaya, a form of victory grounded in satya and ethical clarity. The self-reliant state alone stands firm, its dharma intact, because it has internalised the central lesson of Indic statecraft: the ruler, the realm, and the people secure enduring order only when they cease to lean on external crutches and instead cultivate the sovereign atman within. In this convergence of Western realism and Indian rajadharma, Atmanirbhar Bharat does not merely respond to the flux of power politics; it seeks to transcend it, by building a resilient, AI-centric defence ecosystem anchored in indigenous energy, industry, and research.

Thus, the defence-industrial trajectory of Atmanirbhar Bharat may be read as the modern enactment of yogakshema, the acquisition (yoga) of strength and resources, and the protection (kshema) of sovereignty and welfare. In the ceaseless contest of power, where the world listens only to the militarily capable and the technologically self-reliant, India's sovereign atman remains eternally grounded in the art of self-reliant statecraft: neither isolation nor dependence, but autonomy wedded to ethical responsibility.

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