

CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND UNIVERSAL ALTRUISM IN INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstract: The unique contours of Indian nationalism, founded on humanism, appreciation for cultural diversity, and spiritual awareness, differ from the Western solipsistic concept of nationalism. India's cultural nationalism, which is rooted in humanism, provides a critique of the Western solipsistic model of nationalism based on political sovereignty. The cultural nationalism that reflects India's civilizational ethos of peace, harmony, and collective human well-being emphasises the reconciliation of self-development and global responsibility. This worldview informs India's foreign policy by promoting engagement that transcends rigid territorial boundaries while preserving sovereignty. By examining how cultural nationalism shapes India's foreign policy orientations, the study suggests that

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upholding the values of cultural nationalism in its foreign policy enhances its normative appeal, expands its global influence without abandoning strategic autonomy, and offers an alternative to the binary of national conservatism and cosmopolitanism.

Keywords: *Cultural Nationalism, Indian Foreign Policy, Soft Power, National Conservatism, Cosmopolitanism.*

1. Introduction

Nationalism is a complex and ubiquitous concept that significantly influences both domestic and international politics. At its core, nationalism is often conceptualized as a form of collective identity that underscores a nation's unity and distinctiveness, typically defined by shared cultural, linguistic, historical, or territorial characteristics (Renan 8-22). Consequently, its origins are frequently traced to pre-modern societies, challenging the dominant Western perspective that situates its emergence within the rise of modern nation-state in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries (Gellner 7). However, this understanding oversimplifies the concept's intricate and often contested nature. Nevertheless, it is evident that individuals develop themselves into an 'imagined community' with a shared sense of belonging, which shapes their identity, loyalty, and engagement with the nation-state (Anderson 6). Moreover, nationalism serves as a mechanism of 'rationalization', enabling individuals to navigate the challenges of modernization by fostering a sense of identity and belonging, thereby contributing to social cohesion and political legitimacy (Haas 712).

In the contemporary scenario, with the rise of right-wing government across the world nationalism has increasingly manifested in form of national conservatism, an ideology premised on traditions, morality, cultural continuity, and sovereignty, in contrast to liberal universalism and cosmopolitanism (Sekerak). This resurgence has raised a renewed scholarly concern with respect to whether nationalist conservatism fosters social cohesion and prosperity or contributes to exclusion and democratic regression. Within this broader debate, India's nationalism presents a distinctive case. With

civilizational ethos, cultural pluralism, spiritual universalism and distinctiveness from Western ‘political’ nationalism, India’s ‘cultural’ nationalism promotes heterogeneity and expands the ambit of nationalism beyond territoriality (Aurobindo; Vivekananda). Even while preserving its own cultural identity, the Indian nationalism supports universalism as rightly highlighted by Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar, “A nationalistic India is willing to do more with the world, not less.”

In this context, while there is a generalized belief that cultural narratives, when institutionalized, actively shape moral hierarchies and social norms, India’s nationalism based on its cultural principles fosters ethical prosperity at large, rather than producing structural asymmetries as seen in the case of western nationalism which operates within the distinction of, we vs. them. Hence, Indian cultural nationalism must be assessed not only as a philosophical ideal but also as a governing discourse especially in the broader framework of its influence on India’s foreign policy in the complex world order. A manifestation of it can be found in employing cultural diplomacy as a soft power tool in the foreign policy which emphasizes on the dissemination of Indian knowledge and culture globally. India’s foreign policy, which is increasingly shifting towards multialigned approach, also fosters pluralism and tolerance and leverage culture as a channel for political advancement and conflict resolution. Additionally, engaging the diaspora in preservation of national identity encapsulates the fundamental essence of cultural nationalism.

In aligning India’s cultural nationalism with debates on national conservatism, the paper addresses the thematic concern of whether such ideological shaping leads to social prosperity through ethical cohesion or risk reproducing structural inequalities in the guise of civilizational virtue. The paper intends to contribute to the contemporary scholarship that seeks to move beyond binary of national conservatism vs. cosmopolitanism debate and situate India’s cultural nationalism as a strategic balance. Additionally, the research intends to examine how the elements of cultural nationalism are operationalized in India’s foreign policy.

2. Theorizing Nationalism

The study of nationalism is primarily examined through four key theoretical frameworks: (a) the primordialism reflecting primeval attachments (Seton-Watson 18) vs. modernism that view nations as product of modernity and industrialization (Hobsbawm 9; Breuilly 70) (b) ethno-symbolism that seeks a balance by suggesting nationalism as a modern concept with pre-existing ethnic identities (Smith 29; Hutchinson 32) (c) constructivism which challenges the notion of nationalism as a natural phenomenon while emphasizing its construction through discourse, symbols and practices (Brubaker 15), and (d) postcolonialism locating nationalism both as a force for liberation and source of conflict (Bhabha 4).

An essential dimension of the discourse on nationalism is the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism, a categorization introduced by Hans Kohn. This framework differentiates between Western and Eastern nationalism, associating civic nationalism with a Western normative perspective in which political community is formed based on citizenship and shared values. In contrast, ethnic nationalism is characterized as an Eastern construct, rooted in cultural and ancestral affiliations, often perceived as inherently exclusive in nature. Some scholars have advanced the assertion that civic nationalism represents the nationalism of the cultured and emancipated, whereas Eastern nationalism is characterized as the nationalism of the subjugated and uneducated (Ignatieff 17). However, this distinction has been critiqued for its inherent flaws and ethnocentric bias, as well as for being theoretically weak and empirically unsound. It is argued that this classification unjustly subordinates certain forms of nationalism while privileging the Western liberal conception, thereby undermining the broader ideological and value-based dimensions of nationalism which operate through moral narratives and regulating social behavior and authority (Yack 55; Larsen 978). Additionally, this rigid dichotomy and exclusivity have been contested on the grounds that both cultural and liberal concepts of nationalism coexist within the state, with the state strategically shifting between them in response to political exigencies (Bieber 21).

3. Cultural Nationalism: An Alternative to Political Nationalism of West

The conceptualization of nationalism has developed divergently across different regions, resulting in distinct expressions within Western and non-Western contexts. The western notion of nationalism is deeply rooted in liberal principles, permitting it to flourish as long as it does not infringe upon individual liberties (Baron 409). Conversely, the non-Western perspective emphasizes the significance of ethnicity and culture, asserting that cultural identity is integral to nationalism, fostering social cohesion and a unified societal framework as culture plays a crucial role in both nation-building and the legitimization of the State's national political agenda (Dieckhoff 65). Non-Western nationalism frequently prioritizes collective identity and communal solidarity over individual rights, thereby challenging individualistic orientation inherent in Western nationalism. It is often marked by a high degree of hybridity and pluralism, reflecting the diverse cultural and ethnic compositions of many non-Western societies (Hazony 42). Consequently, this form of nationalism tends to be more inclusive and adaptable, accommodating multiple identities and traditions while maintaining its distinct national character. In contrast, the Western conceptualisation of nationalism remains predominantly individualistic, homogenised (Shell 8), and primarily centred on political constructs (Brass 40). While suggesting cultural nationalism as an alternative to political nationalism, scholars have gone to the extent of suggesting that nationalism based on culture can exist independently of political nationalism, as national identities can persist for extended periods without necessitating political unification or sovereignty (Hayes 10).

4. Cultural Nationalism in India: Universality and Spirituality

Nationalism in India is distinctive phenomenon. While nationalism has historically manifested in various forms- ranging from a unifying force to a means of maintaining the status quo, driving independence movements, fostering fraternity, enabling colonial expansion, promoting economic growth, and serving as

both a tool of aggression and a vehicle for anti-colonial resistance (Snyder 11), the Indian conception of nationalism presents a nuanced contrast. It emphasizes unity in diversity, the dissemination of cultural and ethical values, the principle of dharma, and a commitment to inclusivity and pluralism. Western nationalism often upholds the notion that individuals exist primarily for the state, as articulated by ancient Greek scholars such as Plato, who perceived the state as an end. This perspective frequently asserts the dominance, if not supremacy, of one's own nation over others, often advocating for aggressive measures to achieve such objectives (Shafer 6). In contrast, Indian nationalism prioritizes peace, cooperation, and resistance to domination, emphasizing a more inclusive and harmonious approach to national identity.

While the concept of the nation was not yet recognized in the Western tradition, India was well versed with the concept. The idea of '*Rashtra*' in the Indian thought is deeply embedded in spirituality and collective well-being rather than solely a political construct, signifying an "enlightened and stable path for social welfare." Unlike the Western notion of the nation-state, which has often been associated with conflict, '*Rashtra*' represents a unifying and development-oriented ideal that prioritizes both spiritual and material prosperity (Madhav). This construct was based on social and cultural dimensions, rather than purely geographical. Similarly, the hymn in *Yajurveda* "*Ā brahmaṇṇ brāhmaṇo brahmavarcasī jāyatāmā rāṣṭre rājanyaḥ sūra iṣavyo 'tivyādhi mahāratho jāyatām dogdhrī dhenuḥ vodhā naḍvān āsuh saptiḥ purandhir yoṣā jiṣṇū ratheṣṭhāḥ sabheyo yuvā asya yajamānasya viro jāyatām nikāme nikāme naḥ parjanya varṣatu phalavaty oṣadhayaḥ pacyantām yogakṣemo naḥ kalpatām*" (Yajurveda 22.22)*, conceptualizes the nation as a holistic entity that integrates

* This verse is a prayer for national prosperity and harmony. It invokes wise leaders, courageous protectors and righteous rulers, along with abundant resources, productive agriculture and timely rainfall. Emphasizing social balance and natural flourishing, it seeks collective well-being, security and the fulfillment of essential needs for the stability and prosperity of the nation.

cultural, social, and political dimensions, emphasizing their interconnectedness in fostering a prosperous and harmonious society (Mishra 23). Moreover, the universal essence of nationalism is encapsulated in the Sanskrit phrase “*Mata bhumi putro’ham prithvyah/* The Earth is my mother, and I am her son” (Atharvaveda 12.1.12), which expresses a profound reverence for humanity and altruism within Indian philosophical thought underscoring the interconnectedness between individuals and the Earth, reflecting an inclusive and holistic perspective on national identity, extending the idea of nationalism to the earth at large hence bringing into its ambit all biotic and abiotic aspects. Another facet of this ideal is reflected in the verse “*Ayam nijah paro veti ganana laghuchetasam Udācharitānām tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*” (Maha Upanisad 6.71), as mentioned in the *Maha Upanisad*, which translates to “this is mine, that is theirs, such thinking is characteristic of narrow-minded individuals, for those with a noble heart, however, the entire world is one family.” This notion challenges the Western conceptualization of nationalism, which often emphasizes common ancestry as a fundamental component, by advocating a more inclusive and universalistic approach to collective identity.

While Western perspectives often regard the nation and nationalism as products of conflict among intra-homogenous groups with distinct origins, Indian nationalism is rooted in a sense of cultural commonality. This idea is exemplified in the *Kishkindha Kanda* (4.40.19 - 4.43.58) of the Ramayan where Sugriva delineates the expanse of the nation by referencing interconnected regions bound by a shared civilizational heritage. Similar notions are echoed in the *Bhisma Parva* (Mahabharata 6.9 1-76) of the Mahabharata, which describes the Indian nation as extending far beyond the territorial boundaries of contemporary India. These accounts provide a strong justification for the notion that India has historically existed as an ancient nation, characterized by immense diversity yet bound by a shared civilizational heritage. While India may not conform to the Western definition of nation-state, these references underscore its longstanding cultural and geographical unity.

Nationalistic sentiment in India is evident throughout

history market by resistance against foreign forces, from Mahajan padas opposing Greek invaders to the Marathas resisting the Mughals, framing the land as 'motherland', land of 'our' ancestors, to be protected and self-governed. In the modern era, the anti-colonial struggle reshaped the concept of nationalism in India, emphasizing a return to its rich cultural and civilizational heritage to foster unity against colonial rule. Literature played a pivotal role in this process, with *Anand Math* by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay emerging as a seminal work. Bankim is often regarded as the father of Indian nationalism, as it is argued that before his writings the idea of nationalism was not recognized as an indigenous phenomenon (Mondal 25). Bankim's writings illustrate how Indian nationalism simultaneously challenged colonial stereotypes while grappling with the internal complexities of constructing a distinct political identity through transformative intellectual movement which is primarily Orientalist in its outlook (Chatterjee 124). Bankim has famously opined that Indians should not dismiss their rich past under the influence of European scholars and famously quoted that "*do not lose your reverence for the past; it is on the past that you must plant your foot firmly, ... You are not a race of savages who have no past to remember...*" (Muller).

In similar vein, Swami Vivekananda rejected the dominant Western view of the state as a purely political entity, arguing instead that, as individuals are microcosms of the universe and inherently linked to their spiritual and cultural essence, state function as a means to facilitate spiritual growth. He further asserted that Indian nationalism is fundamentally spiritual in nature, centred on the upliftment of the oppressed and the inner awakening of the individual (Jha 50). Vivekanand countered the Western conception of homogeneous nationalism by emphasizing that while a nation may possess a unified set of aspirations and ideals, its people inevitably differ in terms of religion, language, and customs. He asserted that any attempt to enforce uniformity is characteristic of political or religious fanaticism. Along the same lines, Vivekanand conceptualized Indian nationalism as inherently inclusive and accommodative of diversity. He further posited that India, as a nation, has a unique 'mission' to preserve

and disseminate its spiritual heritage for the benefit of the world. Thus, Vivekanand emphasizes the establishment of cooperative and harmonious international relations, based on India’s indigenous knowledge systems and spiritual heritage.

Sri Aurobindo’s works advanced the concept of the spiritual nation, portraying India as the embodiment of ‘Shakti’ the divine feminine power and thus as the mother, which must be free to flourish, and its endeavours must not be subdued by any foreign powers. He emphasized the necessity of disciplined nationalism, rooted in the recognition and preservation of India’s civilizational heritage by the youth, as essential for the nation’s regeneration. Critiquing Western models of nationalism rooted in liberal individualism and rational secularism; Aurobindo advanced a vision grounded in collective spiritual identity and the doctrine of Political Vedantism which is based on the idea that “each nation should choose the means best suited to its temperament and the objective situation and environment” (Varma 28). Through his writings, Aurobindo transcended the confines of nation-state, articulating a distinctly internationalist perspective. He envisioned a spiritually integrated global order founded upon deeply internalized values of liberty, equality and fraternity, which provide the necessary condition for not only for human evolution but also liberation (Mahapatra 150).

The ideas articulated in ancient Indian texts and by prominent Indian thinkers have not only reflected the unique characteristics of the Indian nation but have also played a pivotal role in shaping India’s self-identity. In the modern context, the thinkers have highlighted that nationalism is not an exclusionary ideology but a prerequisite for ethical internationalism. Gandhi’s assertion that one cannot be internationalist without first being a nationalist (Ragi 26) reflects self-preservation grounded in openness, where civilization ethos enables responsible engagement with wider world. Similarly, V.D. Savarkar’s conception of nationalism was based on ‘Pitrubhumi’ and ‘Punjabhumi’ transcends the nationalism beyond land and boundary to allegiance to a shared cultural system. M.S. Golwalkar further critiqued the ‘territorial nationalism’ of the west attributing it as a narrow understanding which reduces

nationhood to material boundaries overlooking the spiritual dimension of collective identity. In the same vein, Deen Dayal Upadhyay's doctrine of integral human situates individual within interconnected social, national and cosmic order as part of his *Dharma*. These formulations collectively indicate that India's nationalism does not fit within the dominant binary of national conservatism vs. multiculturalism or cosmopolitanism. While contemporary national conservatism emphasizes defensive sovereignty and cultural preservation, Indian cultural nationalism articulates a form rooted in universalism that seeks to preserve national identity while affirming ethical responsibility beyond boundaries. This orientation positions nationalism not as a source of exclusion, but as a normative foundation for cooperation, collective action and constructive global engagement. Furthermore, these deep-rooted cultural and philosophical traditions continue to influence India's contemporary global engagement, particularly as reflected in 21st century foreign policy, which is increasingly informed by principles of cultural nationalism and the ethos of universal altruism.

5. Cultural Nationalism as Foundation of India's Foreign Policy

Culture occupies a strategically significant position within India's policy framework, particularly in addressing concerns related to security and economic prosperity. The principles embedded in cultural nationalism offer a conceptual foundation for fostering people-to-people engagements, grounded in shared civilizational heritage and a sense of spiritual interconnectedness. Nehru and Krishna Menon articulated that India's Foreign policy has sprung and evolved from the traditions and culture and was inherent in the ancient national ethos and philosophic postulates. The foundation of India's foreign policy rests upon a profound commitment to peaceful co-existence, the repudiation of absolutist position, and the pursuit of global harmony and cooperation by bridging between competing global ideologies without succumbing to either, principles that were clearly reflected in India's early adoption of the non-alignment policy in the immediate aftermath of independence (Shridharani, 1958).

The decision to choose non-aligned stance also lies in the ideals embedded in the culture of India which rejects unquestioning adherence to any bloc in the Cold War era, rather deliberate, discuss and decide (*Sastratha*) each issue on own ideological and other predilections (Jha). Moreover, the Indian ideal of tolerance, evident in its rejection of the Two-nation theory and the adoption of the Panchsheel principles, is deeply rooted in the Sankhya philosophy, which emphasizes discernment and balance, and from the Upanishadic vision of treating the world as one family, underscoring the principles of universal kinship. These values are further reinforced in the teachings of Buddha, Vivekananda and Aurobindo, who advocated compassion, human unity and ethical engagement with the world, while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of safeguarding one’s homeland. In later decades, India’s responses to armed conflicts with Pakistan and China, which were unavoidable between neighbours according to Kautilya’s Mandala theory*, particularly through efforts at reconciliation and diplomatic negotiation, reflect an enduring commitment to the ideal of mediation and peaceful resolution, rooted in Krishna’s action in the Mahabharata** which emphasized on dialogue and mutual benefit over destructive conflict. Additionally, India’s support for the anti-colonial struggles of African nations reflects its broader civilizational ethos of pluralism and tolerance, as embodied in the Jain philosophical doctrine of *anekantavada*, which advocates the recognition and respect for multiple perspective and truth, hence advocating harmonious co-existence.

Further, India’s involvement in the Bangladesh Liberation War in the early 1970s was driven not only by strategic national interests, such as the pressing refugee crisis and the security threat posed by the Pakistani military on both its Eastern and Western borders, but also by deeper philosophical and civilizational

* Kautilya’s Mandala Theory suggests that the ruler should view neighboring states as potential enemies and form alliance with distant powers.

** Krishna went to Duryodhana to persuade him to give autonomy over five villages to Pandavas to avoid war.

values. The decision to intervene aligned with the ideals articulated by thinkers like Bankim and Aurobindo, who upheld the moral imperative of armed resistance when the sanctity of the motherland is threatened. The ethical justification for India's intervention is further reinforced by the principles outlined in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2.33)*, which asserts that refraining from a righteous struggle and neglecting one's duty constitutes a moral transgression. Following its emergence as a nuclear power in the mid-1970s, India adopted a nuclear doctrine centered on the principle of 'No First Use'. This policy reflects the civilizational ethos of 'Ahimsa', a foundational tenet in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions. Moreover, the restraint demonstrated in India's nuclear posture resonates with the ancient wisdom encapsulated in the Sanskrit maxim "*Ati Sarvatra Varjayet/excess should be avoided in all things*", and 'Madhyam Marga' of Buddhism. Thus, India's nuclear strategy underscores its commitment to deterrence over dominance, reinforcing a foreign policy rooted in restraint, balance, and moral responsibility.

India's Neighbourhood First policy is underpinned by a shared civilizational heritage, particularly reflected in the cultural and religious linkages of the Ramayan tradition and the Buddhist circuit across the region. This policy orientation is further reinforced by India's long-standing philosophical commitment to religious tolerance and intercultural respect, principles prominently advocated by thinkers like Vivekananda who gave the idea of "*ekam satt vipra bahuda vadanti*" which translates to "that which exist is one; sages call it with various names." These values have played a crucial role in shaping India's diplomatic engagements and fostering enduring partnerships not only within South Asia and the Middle East but also across Europe and Africa, contributing to its image as pluralistic and culturally inclusive actor in the international system. India's engagement in the Indian Ocean region, including its participation in the revitalized QUAD,

* Verse 33 mentions *atha cet tvam imam dharmyam saṅgrāmaṁ na kariṣyasi, tataḥ svadharmam kīrtim ca hitvā pāpam avāpsyasi* / "But if you do not engage in this righteous war, then abandoning your duty and honour, you will incur sin."

reflects not only strategic responses to China’s growing influence but also embodies its commitment to a free, open, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific, grounded in democratic values, Hindu civilizational thought, and a tradition of Indian exceptionalism that promotes an inclusive, rather than exclusive, approach to regional order, often termed as “India’s liberal distinctiveness” (Sullivan de Estrada). Furthermore, the four member states of the QUAD have been symbolically likened to Lord Rama and his three brothers by External Affairs Minister, evoking the ideal of Ram Rajya, a just and rule-based order, as a metaphor for the alliance’s envisioned role in shaping a normative global governance framework. This analogy underscores the QUAD’s dual strategic orientation: deepening engagement with the East while articulating a unique philosophical foundation for its ‘natural’ partnership with the West (Hall).

Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) constitute a critical dimension of India’s foreign policy, rooted in the state’s enduring cultural and spiritual ethos (Upadhyay 320). India’s approach to HADR reflects a synthesis of normative and strategic imperatives (Meier & Murthy), utilizing aid as a tool of ‘smart power’ to project itself as a responsible and emerging global actor (Singh 92). At the same time, this approach is deeply informed by the philosophical tenets such as *seva* and *dharma*, which emphasize moral responsibility in the times of crisis. India’s consistent effort to ‘delink emergency relief from politics’ and desist “politics of assistance” (Chandran et.al 68), exemplified by its assistance to Pakistan and Turkey despite strained bilateral ties, underscores a value-based humanitarian orientation grounded in the principle of *paropakara* (benevolence or altruistic action). Through this integrative approach, India effectively balances its strategic interests with its civilizational commitment to ethical conduct in international engagement.

India’s presidency and hosting of the 2023 G-20 Summit served as a strategic and symbolic assertion of India’s civilizational identity and evolving role in global governance as an emerging global power (Chivvis & Breiner). It represented a distinct model of foreign policy, one that merges strategic interests with philosophical values, and positions India as both a

civilizational state and a proactive global actor in a multipolar world. By foregrounding the theme “*Vasudhaiva Kutumbhaka*: One Earth, One Family, One Future,” derived from the Mundaka Upanishad, India projected a vision of international relations rooted in interconnectedness, ethical responsibility and universal brotherhood. This symbolism was further operationalized in India’s active support for the inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member of G20, reinforcing its longstanding commitment to become the voice of Global South. India also drew upon its traditional value of ‘*Atithi Devo Bhava*’, a reverence of guest as divine, as a guiding principle in its diplomatic conduct which reflected in hosting Chinese Premier Li Qiang, despite strategic antagonisms between both the states (Cooper 480). India’s foreign policy has thus adopted a calibrated and strategic posture within the evolving multipolar world order, combining both geopolitical pragmatism and cultural ethos.

In contemporary times, in contrast to its earlier restrained stance, India has adopted a more assertive approach with respect to its counter-terrorism goals, particularly in the aftermath of incident of Pahalgam attack (Mohan). This shift has been framed not only through strategic imperatives but also through cultural and civilizational narratives. Drawing upon the verse of Ramcharitmanas, “*Vinay na maanat Jaladhi jad, gaye teen din beeti; bole ram sakop tab, bhay binu hoye na preeti/ The ocean remained unmoved by humble requests, three days passed. Then Lord Rama, with rising anger, declared without fear, there can be no love*”. Air Marshal of India, in the press conference post Operation Sindoor, underscores the Indian principle that when peaceful overtures are exhausted, decisive and proportionate action becomes necessary. This philosophical grounding serves to justify India’s evolving approach to cross-border terrorism, which now includes not only sustained diplomatic engagement but has gone as far as treating any cross-border terrorist activity as an act of war against India (PIB). India’s current posture reflects dual strategy- asserting its right to self-defence while simultaneously engaging in global norm- setting. The deployment of an all-party delegation to foreign capitals represents a strategic exercise in soft power, intended to convey India’s preference for peace and dialogue,

while affirming its sovereign right to defend its territory and citizens. This integrated approach reflects a nuanced balance between Indian values of non-violence and pragmatic demands of national security within the broader framework of foreign policy.

Lastly, India’s foreign policy based on its cultural nationalism seeks universal altruism while both preserving its sovereignty and engaging with the world. Instead of perceiving national interest in territorial and material terms, this worldview situates the nation within an interconnected moral and ecological order which is reflected in its engagement with the world. The orientation closely aligns with normative ethos underpinning the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in its emphasis on sustainable development, environmental stewardship, and collective global responsibility. India’s advocacy for consumption based on need rather than greed, emphasis on climate justice, participation in cooperative environmental protection initiatives and biodiversity conservation efforts aligns with different SDGs. These choices are not merely instrumental responses to contemporary challenges but are rooted in cultural national imagination of the world as a nation.

6. Conclusion

Cultural heritage of India is treated as the culture of whole mankind and the oldest continuous cultural tradition in the world (Basham 45). Cultural values act as a motivator for India’s foreign policy by influencing the leaders in the matter international issues are dealt, including the matter pertaining to nuclear policy and human intervention (Pethiyagoda 60). The cultural underpinnings like moral obligation, non-violence, universal brotherhood have consistently played a pivotal role in shaping the ideological orientation and strategic vision of India’s foreign policy. India’s understanding of nationalism is distinct from the materialist and often utilitarian framework of the West and is based on the normative and ethical considerations that is prevalent in India’s rich cultural heritage. India’s asserts its cultural values while simultaneously having a universal outlook.

These features have acted not only as symbolic markers of India's identity in global affairs but has also impacted its decision-making pertaining to issues of national interest. Moreover, India's cultural nationalism also serves as a crucial foundation for New Delhi's commitments towards Sustainable Development Goals which seeks global cooperation and partnerships to deal with the contemporary challenges by prioritizing the world as a collective entity rather than narrow individual or national benefit. Hence, the nationalism of India functions beyond the compartmentalization of national conservatism and provides an intersection point between preservation of self-identity and multiculturalism and universalism. The sustained articulation of these values in diplomatic discourse and practices illustrates how India's cultural heritage continues to inform and enrich its external engagements, making its foreign policy both distinctive and strategically beneficial in a complex global order.

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