

## PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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### ABSTRACT

*India's foreign policy (IFP) has a nuanced blend of ideals and pragmatism, influenced by the nation's intricate geopolitical terrain, historical background, and current issues. India's foreign policy is primarily influenced by major values such as non-alignment, respect for sovereignty, and promotion of world peace and stability. IFP is characterised by its dedication to non-alignment, which is a legacy from the period after its independence. India is committed to maintaining strategic autonomy and avoiding alignment with any major power bloc. India aims to interact with a variety of nations based on mutual respect and common interests to maintain its flexibility and independence in global matters. IFP is based on the principles of dharma, ahimsa, and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. India, as the biggest democracy in the world, resolutely advocates for these ideals internationally. Upholding our traditional values not only boosts India's influence but also strengthens its reputation as a reliable participant in global affairs. IFP is pragmatic, guided by national security, economic growth, and regional stability, in addition to its commitment to principles. India seeks strategic partnerships and alliances with like nations. India employs a nuanced approach in handling the difficulties of foreign affairs by balancing its beliefs with the reality of power politics and strategic imperatives. India maintains a difficult balance that enables it to advance its national interests while remaining dedicated to principles like democracy, pluralism, and peace. India's foreign policy combines idealism with pragmatism to effectively traverse the difficulties of the modern world.*

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**Keywords:** *India's Foreign Policy, Pragmatism, Non-alignment.*

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### Introduction

To promote its interests and tackle common difficulties in response to the quickly changing geopolitical environment, India is using its increasing soft power to boost its worldwide influence via cultural and economic diplomacy and trade agreements to promote prosperity and development.

India has a distinctive foreign policy that is highly influenced by its intellectual legacy, which is intertwined with its rich historical background and diversified cultural landscape. This essay seeks to analyse and comprehend the fundamental philosophical principles that have influenced India's foreign policy since gaining independence. IFP has seen considerable changes since gaining independence in 1947. The country's foreign policy was first inspired by the ideas of its first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and was strongly impacted by the anti-colonial movement and the ideals of non-alignment. At the time of Cold War, India decided not to associate with any major power blocs, emphasising its autonomy and autonomous decision-making, which sprang from its battle for independence.

### Philosophical Underpinnings

India's foreign policy is based on some unique fundamental philosophical notions.

**Ahimsa**, means non-violence, and peaceful coexistence: Ahimsa, originating from ancient Indian philosophy and popularised worldwide by Mahatma Gandhi, has significant importance. India's focus on peaceful cohabitation, non-aggression, and settling issues via nonviolent methods directly

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reflects this value. "The term *Ahimsa*, derived from *Sanskrit (ahimsā)* and *Pāli (avihimsā)*, signifies 'not to damage' and 'compassion'. The term originates from the Sanskrit root *hims*, meaning to strike. *Himsā* refers to damage or harm, whereas *a-himsā* is its opposite, meaning to inflict no hurt or harm." [1] In ancient Indian faiths, ahimsa, which is another word for nonviolence, is a precept that applies to all living things, including animals. The concept of Ahimsa was successfully promoted by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in a number of spheres of life, particularly politics. His nonviolent resistance movement was revolutionary because it was the first to use ahimsa as a political weapon to influence the oppressors. It had a significant impact on public opinion in Western countries as well as India. It also had an effect on a number of notable figures from the 20th century who led social and political rights movements, such as James Bevel, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela.

Gandhi ji felt that practicing Ahimsa meant not only abstaining from physical injury but also avoiding bad mental states such as hatred, wicked thoughts, harsh words, dishonesty, and lying—all of which he saw as acts of violence that went against Ahimsa.

"Gandhi considered Ahimsa to be a powerful creative force that guides individuals towards discovering Satya, the "Divine Truth", via all encounters".[2] Therefore, ahimsa is limitless and unending. Gandhi was a non-violent preacher and practitioner. According to him, humanity can only be destroyed in the absence of truth and nonviolence. "Ahimsa is the first article of my faith," and "the power of the weak, the force of nonviolence, is the power of God, the power of truth and love that transcends the material world into the spiritual realm." [3] Gandhi was the first person in contemporary times to publicly seek this power in the twentieth century. One of the greatest manifestations of ahimsa is the eradication of untouchability. He firmly believes that India's destiny is to spread this message for all humanity.

***Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*** means "The World is One Family". The Sanskrit phrase from the Maha Upanishad represents India's belief in global brotherhood. India's foreign relations strategy is guided by a worldview that prioritises collaboration and understanding above confrontation. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* entails One Earth, One Family, One Future. The passage from the Mahopanishad, Chapter 6, verses 71-72 embodies the essence of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbaka*. The quote suggests that narrow-minded individuals differentiate between relatives and strangers, whereas broad-minded individuals see the whole world as one family. Those who live magnanimously see the whole world as one family. Nonviolence is a potent force that can unite the whole globe as a family. "It connects human beings, nature, and all living creatures, providing answers to personal, societal, and planetary issues. So, it not only binds together other human beings, but also nature and all other living beings; it also offers solutions to many personal, social and global problems".[4]

A country's foreign policy encompasses its ideals, aspirations, and objectives in regard to other nations. India's international relations are influenced by the notion of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. IFP embraces the principle of Unity in Diversity at the international level. Historical archives and data show that India has always pursued international affairs with a balanced approach, avoiding alignment with any certain power centre.

In 2020, the United Nations marked its 75th anniversary since its establishment in 1945, embodying the ancient concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* throughout challenging times for mankind. India significantly contributed to global efforts in vaccine development and medical assistance during the epidemic, aligning with the principles reflected in the Parliament's inscriptions. The Indian PM Modi ji expressed a similar view in his speech at the G20 Summit. Talking about a *Sashakt Bharat*, PM Modi said, "We see the world as a global economy with an interconnected marketplace"[5]. In 2020, India played a significant role in global supply chain logistics by supplying HCQ to over 150 nations, before a vaccination was available. India took the lead in delivering medical assistance via programmes like Operation Sagar and Operation Sanjeevani. The concept of developmental collaboration employed by *Sabka Saath and Sabka Vikas* exemplifies the actual implementation of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. Under its neighbourhood friendly policy, India provided more than 20 million vaccinations to neighbouring nations like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Afghanistan. India provided \$250 million in aid to the Maldives in addition to supplying vaccines to help deal with the pandemic. "This support, in line with India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy, not only helped lessen the impact of Covid-19 but also solidified India's global standing as a country that has maintained unity during challenging times".[6] Leading by example, India has steered the G20 successfully from the fore front. India will keep contributing positively to the creation of an international system that is centred on people during this process. In addition to *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which holds that all people are members of one family, "we also believe in the principle of '*Nishkama Karma*,' that good needs to be done for its own sake." [7]

**Dharma** is a comprehensive notion that embodies moral virtue and obligation. Regarding foreign policy, it is a dedication to abide by international law and respect the autonomy of states. India, being one of the world's oldest civilizations, developed its own unique system of statecraft that included a detailed and mutually accepted practice of diplomacy. It was inclusive among rulers of India and exclusive with states beyond the physical boundaries of the sub-continent. "Diplomacy originally stemmed from the notion of *Dharma*, which refers to morality".[8]

In Indian belief system, morality in all its forms is referred to by the term *dharma*.

S. Radhakrishnan has described *Dharma* as a set of principles of behaviour that is upheld by the collective conscience of society. It is neither subjective, influenced by personal feelings, nor external, enforced by laws. *Dharma* does not compel anyone to be virtuous but rather educates and prepares them for it. The code is not static but dynamic, adapting and evolving in accordance with societal progress. The term *dharma* is multifaceted. Politically, it entails ethical behaviour, avoiding amorality, and complying with international legal standards. The profound significance of *dharma* may not be well understood. The primary reason Indian traditions are not prominent in International Studies is because the field is predominantly based on epistemological and historical sources identified as Western. "Today, the idea of *dharma*, which encompasses values and ethics in governance, is making a comeback. Reconceptualizing *dharma* from ancient Indian traditions might enhance its appeal and influence in shaping a new global order in which India plays a crucial role".[9]

#### **Influence of Indian Philosophical Thought**

As seen in writings such as the Bhagavad Gita, Vedas, and Upanishads, has had a significant influence. India's attitude to responsible and ethical behaviour in the international arena is influenced by the notion of *Karma*, which relates to deeds and their repercussions. Mahatma Gandhi found inspiration in the principles of Vedanta, especially as outlined in the Bhagavad Gita, which he considered to be a spiritual guidebook. In 1924, Mahatma Gandhi said in a series of lectures on the Gita that it is a text suitable for individuals of all religious beliefs to study. It is impartial towards any sectarian perspective. It alone imparts pure ethics. "The universalist message of the Gita led the Father of the Nation to adopt ideals of non-violence, tolerance, and secularism".[10] India, like Nehru, has always had a unique perspective on the world influenced by its intellectual tradition, particularly *Advaita*. Despite being agnostic, *Vedanta* values had a prominent place in his worldview. "The strategic principles of *Panchsheel* and unity in diversity likely originate from the universalist and pacifist principles of *Vedanta*".[11]

The tradition of 'just war' is prominent in *Vedanta* works such as the Bhagavad Gita and its parent book, the Mahabharata. It is argued that achieving peaceful conflict settlement is crucial and that concessions should be made to prevent war. The Mahabharata has a portion called the *Udyoga Parva*, which focuses on the Pandavas' meticulous attempts to prevent conflict. When evil is too egoistic and unyielding, then war can be justified as a final resort. The justification for fighting is essential to victory. Apart from the directive on the justification for initiating a war, there are also allusions to moral behaviour during armed conflict. Thus, "the five brothers (Pandavas) in Mahabharata discuss the criteria for righteous conduct in war with the principles of 'proportionality' (chariots cannot attack cavalry, only other chariots; no assault on people in distress), 'just means' (no poisoned or barbed arrows), just intentions (no attacking out of rage), and fair treatment of captives and the wounded". [12]

These war principles are ingrained in the religious and cultural legacy of the Hindu people, who have historically shied away from carrying out heinous acts of violence and aggression (including major war crimes and genocide), even centuries before such ideas became widely accepted on a global scale. These principles are essential to India's magnificent strategic culture and part of its enormous gift to the world's military rules.

- **An Amalgam of Realpolitik and Pragmatism:** In international relations, realpolitik emphasizes the value of strategic and tactical decision-making based on national interests. Realpolitik in its pragmatic form as well as philosophical aspirations impact India's foreign policy. India prioritizes national interest and security in its strategic ties and economic diplomacy. India's participation in the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War is a prime example of Realpolitik, as it opted to retain its foreign policy autonomy rather than formally aligning itself with the US or the USSR. India, a Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) member, strategically allied with the Soviet Union to offset threats from Pakistan and China. The 1998 nuclear tests and India's nuclear program as a whole revealed a Realpolitik approach centred on strategic deterrence and national security.

A Realpolitik approach is evident in the Quad framework's strategic alliances with the United States, Japan, and Australia, in managing relations with China, and enhancing marine security. "India's strategic manoeuvring between the U.S. and Russia, particularly over defence acquisitions like the S-400 missile system from Russia and energy agreements, demonstrates Realpolitik in managing intricate geopolitical relationships".[13] India's approach is a blend of flexibility, pragmatism, and a strong focus on safeguarding and promoting domestic interests in a difficult international arena.

- **From Non-Alignment (NA) to Multi-Alignment:** India changed its position during the Cold War (CW) from being non-aligned to multi-alignment in the 21st century, including interactions with several global powers while retaining strategic independence. This change demonstrates a harmony between intellectual principles and the practical aspects of a multipolar world. During the first two decades after India gained independence, its foreign policy was greatly influenced by the NA policy, which later evolved into the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 amidst the intense US-USSR Cold War. Today, India is a skilled negotiator who can move between alliances led by China or Russia, such as the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and US-led organizations like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), which brings together Australia and Japan.

"India may expand its position as a bridge power and act as a mediator in the Quad, G7, BRICS, and the SCO as its influence grows. India's strategic autonomy and non-alignment policy have transformed into a multi-alignment strategy. India may strategically engage with several parties to maximise its influence on the world stage".[14]

- **Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy:** India's foreign policy strategically utilises its cultural history as a kind of soft power via cultural diplomacy. Its culture, customs, and philosophy, including as Yoga and Ayurveda, have a strong influence on its diplomatic efforts due to their worldwide popularity. Cultural diplomacy and soft power are crucial tools for fostering regional and international collaboration, especially in South Asia. Culture and cultural diplomacy have become powerful tools for connecting, fostering bilateral ties, and repairing rifts caused by historical and political differences. India's soft power had a global influence much before it became a commonly used word in the 21st century. Indian arts, culture, and spiritual beliefs have captivated people across for hundreds of years. The phrase *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* was one of the early influences on the notion of Global Citizenship, emphasising the idea that all people have a communal responsibility towards each other and their common destiny. It serves as the foundation for UNESCO's continuous exchange across cultures, faiths, and civilizations. India's soft power is shown by its rich cultural legacy, civilization, and global Diaspora, highlighting principles such as secularism, inclusivity, and cultural exchange.
- **Environmental Diplomacy:** Indian environmental diplomacy had a significant impact at the United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. India has signed or approved over 200 environmental conventions. Environmental issues are intricately connected to global political matters such as resource production and trade principles, North-South relations, India's security concerns, and internal social and political stability. Participating in the international environmental system involves national accountability, and the results impact ordinary citizens. India's dedication to sustainable development and environmental conservation is rooted in its longstanding reverence for nature and the philosophy of '*Prithvi Sukta*'. It is seen via its leadership in worldwide environmental efforts and dedication to the Paris Agreement. India has used climate policy to gain an advantage. The country has aimed to integrate the strategic implications of climate change into a broader transformation of its foreign policy. India has adopted a cooperative approach to highlight its duty via diplomacy and sustainable energy investments on a global scale, which enhances its position as a global power and expands its influence among partner nations. India has sought to establish its leadership in the Climate Domain with the formation of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) in 2015, which serves as a flagship for India's increased climate involvement.

India's abundant natural resources and expertise in protecting intellectual property rights (IPR) through initiatives like the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) are crucial for preventing exploitation of its biological resources and traditional knowledge." India also advocates for integrating traditional Indian medical practices into modern healthcare systems, has proactive IPR policies

concerning human well-being and national progress, and is prepared to address food security issues within trade agreements. Developing countries can benefit greatly from studying India's approach in these areas".[15]

### The Road Ahead

India's foreign policy has obstacles in reconciling its philosophical principles with strategic objectives, managing conflicts, and addressing global concerns such as climate change. Critics often highlight inconsistencies between philosophical principles and real-world behaviours. India should prioritise a creative and responsible global policy in a multipolar world, while staying true to its philosophical foundations. India should take on a leadership position to actively engage and contribute to the evolving global order with a forward-thinking strategy to promote growth. During the 2021 Raisina Dialogue, Indian PM Modi ji said that the Covid-19 epidemic has provided a chance to reform the global system and adjust our perspectives. We need to develop systems that tackle current issues and anticipate future concerns. We must consider the whole human race, not just those inside our borders.[16]

India's primary concern in foreign policy is to guarantee that its participation in global forums aligns with contemporary reality. The contemporary global environment is facing difficulties and navigating through trying times since World War II. In order to overcome obstacles to our development and prosperity, we need a forward-thinking dedication and practical solutions on strategic and diplomatic fronts to address both conventional and unconventional challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated the interconnectedness of the global community, emphasising the need for nations to uphold their territorial integrity and adopt a forward-thinking, responsible, inclusive, and innovative approach for the benefit of all.

### Conclusion

The Indian government's approach to foreign policy is a unique combination of old intellectual knowledge and contemporary pragmatic requirements. These conceptual roots give it a unique character on the international arena, and they direct the activities and methods that it employs. When it comes to understanding India's position and attitude in international affairs, having a solid understanding of these underpinnings is very necessary. In addition, India's foreign policy has to take action to address non-traditional security threats, such as cyberattacks and bioweapons, in order to effectively combat these threats. Also referred to as Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, or Sabka Vishwas, the Indian value-loaded model of development is comprehensive and runs on a range of platforms, such as grants-in-aid, credit lines, capacity building, and technical assistance. Not to mention, a flexible, effective, and efficient foreign policy that positions India as a global leader and fosters goodwill among nations.

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