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India's Rising Global Influence Demands an Indigenous Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for International Relations

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ABSTRACT

India's accelerating international influence underscores the need for an indigenous theoretical architecture in international relations that is conceptually rigorous and empirically tractable. This paper synthesizes civilizational foundations, strategic multi-alignment, developmental realpolitik, and societal-networked power into a unified paradigm that explains India's behaviour in a multiplex world order. First, it theorizes civilizational strategic culture rooted in plural constitutionalism, dharmic ethics, and long-run political economy as a source of legitimacy, restraint, and preference formation. Second, it formalizes multi-alignment as a rational equilibrium for hedging and issue-specific coalitioning, specifying conditions for minilateralism, forum shifting, and variable-geometry partnerships across security, technology, climate, and trade regimes. Third, it endogenizes domestic transformation, industrial policy, digital public infrastructure, energy transition, and human-capital upgrading as drivers of external bargaining power and standards-shaping capacity. Fourth, it conceptualizes societal power as a distributed capability encompassing diaspora networks, multilingual cultural industries, standards entrepreneurship, and platformed state capacity, with measurable effects on agenda-setting and norm diffusion. Fifth, it advances normative pluralism as a rule-making stance that prioritizes interoperable standards, equity in access to growth corridors, and contextual universals over rigid harmonization. The framework yields falsifiable implications for coalition patterns, supply-chain repositioning, and standards diplomacy, and proposes a mixed-methods research design process tracing, network analysis, input-output/GVC analytics, and text-as-data to evaluate scope conditions and external validity. By integrating civilizational continuities with contemporary geoeconomic and security statecraft, the paper offers a portable, Indigenous paradigm capable of guiding both scholarly inquiry and policy design across the Global South.

Keywords: *Indigenous international relations theory, Strategic multi-alignment, Societal and networked power, Normative pluralism.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has witnessed India's steady rise as a pivotal actor in the global political and economic order. With its robust democratic institutions, dynamic economy, technological capabilities, and growing geopolitical relevance, India is increasingly positioned as both a regional power and a global influencer. This ascent has brought renewed attention to the inadequacy of conventional international relations (IR) theories—largely rooted in Western historical experiences—to fully explain and contextualize India's worldview and foreign policy behavior. Realism, liberalism, and constructivism, though significant in shaping mainstream discourse, often fail to capture the civilizational, cultural, and philosophical underpinnings of India's approach to international engagement.

India's foreign policy choices historically demonstrate a strong tradition of normative thinking, strategic autonomy, and civilizational depth. The principles of non-alignment, the Gandhian ethic of non-violence, and the Kautilyan tradition of pragmatic statecraft exemplify indigenous frameworks that have guided its global interactions. These perspectives emphasize balance, pluralism, and interdependence—values often sidelined in Western-centric IR theories that prioritize competition, power politics, and binary alliances. As India assumes greater responsibility in addressing global challenges such as climate change, digital governance, multilateral reform, and South-South cooperation, the need for an indigenous theoretical and conceptual framework becomes increasingly urgent.

Developing such a framework would serve dual purposes: it would provide more accurate analytical tools to understand India's strategic conduct and simultaneously enrich global IR theory by introducing perspectives drawn from non-Western traditions. Moreover, an Indian lens on IR could offer the Global South an intellectual model that resonates with shared histories of colonialism, struggles for sovereignty, and aspirations for equitable global governance.

Thus, India's rising influence demands more than policy adaptation—it requires theoretical innovation that reflects its civilizational ethos and pragmatic diplomacy, while contributing to the diversification of international relations as a truly global discipline. The involvement of India with the global order is based on long civilizational connections that go far beyond the international system that was established by European colonialists during the modern era. India used to be a great centre of learning, trade, and diplomacy. It had cultural and philosophical impacts even on Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia in non-violent interactions. India made its contribution to statecraft and inter-state relations through the ancient maritime roads and the rich political treatises, such as the Arthashastra.

India, in modern times and especially following independence in 1947, took a unique position in world politics with the policy of non-alignment. India, under the guidance of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, did not want to join any of the two superpowers of the Cold War, the United States or the Soviet Union, but promoted peaceful coexistence, sovereign equality and mutual respect. This was not just a tactical move but more of an Indian value based on its civilizational ethos, like pluralism, balance, and non-violence (ahimsa).

India also has a long tradition of paying attention to civilizational diplomacy by relying on common cultural and historical ties with other regions to promote cooperation and goodwill. Buddhist diplomacy, yoga outreach, and other such tools are soft power tools in foreign policy. Moreover, the post-colonial Indian experience of exploitation, struggle, and rebound led to its dedication to anti-imperialism and world justice, particularly in international forums such as the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

(A) Problem Statement

Nevertheless, India has a rich historical and philosophical tradition in international relations that has been overridden by the Western theoretical frameworks, particularly Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism, in academia and policy formulation. These theories are products of particular historical events in the West, including the Treaty of Westphalia, the two World Wars, and the Cold War, and tend to be Eurocentric. They can therefore not grasp the nuances, values, or strategic practices of non-Western nations such as India.

This excess use of the Western models leads to a conceptual mismatch: when Indian policymakers may be engaging in diplomacy according to the civilizational values and multi-alignment, the scholarly discussion tries to explain this practice through the Western terms of power politics or economic rationality. As a result, there is a misconception or simplification of the foreign policy of India in theoretical terms.

This is an even bigger problem as the world status of India is increasing. Since India is a country that wants to redefine how the world functions in its norms and institutions, it is also time to reconsider what intellectual tools it employs to comprehend and articulate its position in the world. The fact that the Indian foreign policy is still being understood in terms of Western theories only restricts academic creativity and also compromises the genuineness of the Indian vision in the world.

(B) Objectives of the Study

The main point of this study is to highlight the necessity of an indigenous theoretical and conceptual framework that can help us in understanding and explaining the international

behavior and aspirations of India better. This implies coming up with theories using Indian philosophical traditions, past experiences, and cultural values.

The paper also attempts to examine the role played by the increase in power of India as a global power in terms of its catalyzing effect on intellectual decolonization. Political and economic decolonization took place in the mid-20th century, whereas now it is necessary to perform this process on the international level of thought. With such a proposal of indigenous frameworks, India can play a significant role in a more pluralistic and balanced international relations discipline that will represent the diversity of worldviews.

The research will be more exact in the following ways:

Fulfill the gap between the foreign policy practices and the theoretical models that are present in India. Discuss the philosophical material that exists in Indian traditions that can be added to the IR theory. Stimulate the academic institutions and policymakers to create an alternative paradigm to fit with the worldview of India.

(C) Research Questions

In order to facilitate the analysis, the study will answer the following main research questions:

1. What are the limitations of the Western theories of IR in the case of India?

The question will critically analyze how the Western theoretical frameworks can misrepresent or even be unable to explain the diplomatic, security, or regional role of India.

2. What do the emergence of India entail in terms of new theories?

This question explores the relationship between the growing international responsibilities of India and the necessity of the development of theoretical frameworks, which would reflect on its civilizational peculiarities and strategic culture.

3. What are the sources that can be used to establish an indigenous Indian IR framework?

This is the question that explores possible intellectual sources, both ancient and contemporary, such as Gandhi and Nehru, who can guide the creation of a specifically Indian method of international relations.

These questions are intended to form the outline of a thorough analysis that not only criticizes the existing paradigm but also opens the path to new contributions of the Indian point of view.

(D) Methodology Overview

This study follows a qualitative approach, and the information used in this study is based on a

wide variety of sources such as historical writings, philosophical treatises, policy addresses, and scholarly writings. It focuses on interpretation, contextualization and theoretical innovation, and not on quantitative data or statistical modelling.

The most significant elements of the methodological approach are:

II. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

1. Examining the historical development of the foreign policy of India at various phases, ancient, colonial, and post-independence, to acquire the long-term trends and changes.

2. Philosophical and Cultural Inquiry

Studying Indian philosophies (e.g., Vedanta, Buddhism, Kautilyan thought) to derive the ideas that apply to diplomacy, war, peace, and international order.

3. Textual Analysis

Examination of speeches, writings, and doctrines by Indian leaders (e.g., Nehru, Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose) that lay out other visions of global engagement.

4. Theoretical Comparative Analysis

Comparing Western theories of IR with the Indian views and pointing out their differences and drawbacks. It is not to dismiss the Western theories completely, but to demonstrate where they fail and why, in the Indian context.

5. Policy Review

Examining the Indian conduct in international organizations and key global processes (e.g. climate negotiations, security alliances) to determine to what degree theory and practice coincide or conflict.

The study aims to present a credible intellectual backing through this multi-layered qualitative exploration, to build an Indian school of international relations that would not only be globally relevant but also rooted in cultural context.

III. THE RISE OF INDIA AS AN INTERNATIONAL POWER

(A) Trade Networks and Economic Growth

The rise of India to a world economic powerhouse is probably the most dramatic change in the 21st century. India has been steadily increasing its economic presence since it began the process of economic liberalization in 1991. It is currently ranked as one of the five largest economies of the world in nominal GDP and third in the world in purchasing power parity (PPP). Such

long-term economic growth is not a coincidence; however, it is coupled with a specific mix of demographic advantage, growing domestic consumption, and a flourishing services sector. The Indian economy is also marked by its resilience and adaptability, and this has enabled it to withstand global financial shocks and continue its positive growth path.

In recent years, progressive reforms, tax incentives, and the efforts of the government, such as Make in India and Ease of Doing Business, have raised the level of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into India sharply. India is also being seen as a consumer market with a demand in the middle-class by multinational corporations, not just as a manufacturing base. Along with the conventional industries such as the textile industry and the pharmaceutical industry, India has emerged as a pioneer in information technology, the software industry, and digital innovation. India is now a global hub of IT and fintech services with major cities such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Gurugram being home to some of the largest tech companies in the world, which has changed its position in global value chains.

The Indian trade is on the rise with the active involvement in the multilateral trade negotiations and regional economic systems. The connectivity between India and Central Asia, the Gulf, and Europe is being enhanced by strategic economic corridors such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC), and the port infrastructure development. The growing involvement of India in the global supply chains and the move towards high-value exports are indicators of India breaking out of the periphery of global trade networks and becoming a core point in the global trade networks.

(B) Strategic and Geopolitical Reach

The geopolitical emergence of India is closely associated with the process of foreign policy rebalancing and the establishment of security architecture. Strategic autonomy has been traditionally guiding India, but during the past few years, it has shifted to a more assertive and multi-aligned policy. The strategic doctrine has changed to meet regional and international security challenges, especially those in the Indo-Pacific, which is seen as the epicenter of great power competition.

The reasons behind India having a strategic involvement in the Indo-Pacific include the issue of freedom of navigation, maritime security, and balance of power, especially against the aggressive conduct of China. The Act East Policy of India, along with naval capacity building and increased collaboration with ASEAN and the Pacific island countries, makes India a key actor in the Indo-Pacific order. There is also increased engagement of India in multilateral groupings that underscore common interests and values. These are BRICS, where India leads

the call of multipolarity and Bretton Woods institutions reform; Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which assists India in interacting with Eurasian powers; G20, where India is leading on inclusive development, digital infrastructure, and global financial stability; and Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) where India is cooperating with the US, Japan, and Australia on regional security, climate resilience, cyber governance, and pandemic preparedness.

Modernization of India's defense has also been very strong. It has nuclear armaments and has a No First Use policy, which also highlights its responsible deterrence. Indian missile development, space-based observation, and naval resources through programs, such as Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) contribute to Indian defense. India has also stepped up military exercises with other nations and continued to pay close attention to defense diplomacy, particularly in Africa and Southeast Asia. All these initiatives are indicators of India becoming a strategically critical player in the world.

(C) Civilizational Identity and Soft Power

Besides its economic and military capabilities, India also wields significant soft power in the form of its civilizational history and cultural diplomacy, as well as its democratic pedigree. Indian civilization is perhaps one of the oldest in the world and has a treasury of philosophical, spiritual and ethical thinking that is appealing to the world. Indian external behavior is affected by such concepts as Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family), Ahimsa (non-violence), Dharma (righteousness), and is core to its image in foreign countries.

One of the most effective tools of foreign policy practiced by India is cultural diplomacy. Indian music, dance, cinema (Bollywood film industry), literature and food are highly popular on the other continents. The most recognizable example of Indian soft power is possibly yoga, which acquired more international recognition after being adopted by the United Nations as the International Day of Yoga in 2015, which is now celebrated all over the world every June 21. These cultural exports are not only a form of entertainment or health practices, but also a form of civilizational outreach and non-coercive influence.

The other pillar of the Indian soft power is its diaspora. The diaspora has a strong presence of more than 30 million people of Indian origin in various parts of the world and they serve their host countries and India. They are informal ambassadors, which enhances the economic, cultural and political connections of India to the world. The Indian government has identified this potential and developed close diaspora connections through such programs as the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card and Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conventions.

India is also posing as a democratic alternative to dictatorial forms of government. It is the largest democracy in the world with its pluralistic society, independent judiciary, an active press and regular elections. Such values are very close to the democratic countries and multilateral organizations and this can further strengthen the credibility of India as a partner based on transparency, human rights, and the rule of law.

(D) Multilateralism and Global Governance

India has been stressing on the role of inclusive and equitable global governance. Being a nation of the Global South, it has always been promoting new changes to the international institutions to become more representative and responsive to the current reality. It is not only a reactive part of global governance but is becoming more and more proactive.

India has shown a balanced approach in the field of climate governance. It recognizes the sense of urgency in climate action but demands climate justice, claiming that developed countries are under an obligation to contribute more to the past emissions. The fact that India has signed the Paris Agreement, its role in the International Solar Alliance (ISA), and national targets on renewable energy highlight the country's intention to take the lead. India has become a major advocate of sustainable development that does not sacrifice the interests of the poor and the vulnerable.

India is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and has been pushing to reform the rules to make them fairer, particularly in the area of agricultural subsidies, food security, and medicines. Through its Vaccine Maitri program, India has provided humanitarian support to dozens of nations, including vaccines. It also led the intellectual property waiver on vaccines, a move that would make vaccines more affordable. Such initiatives are an expression of the principled stand of India on global equity and solidarity.

India has also been very vocal in the need to reform the United Nations Security Council. Being a nation of more than one-sixth of the global population, an economy that is rapidly expanding, a nuclear power and with a long history of contributing to UN peacekeeping efforts, India believes that not being a permanent member compromises the effectiveness and legitimacy of the UNSC. The Indian demand for reform is in line with the larger demands of the developing countries to have more voice in world decision-making bodies.

Moreover, India wants to give voice to the Global South. The fact that it will host the Voice of the Global South Summit in 2023 is a testament to its desire to become a bridge between the developed and the developing worlds. This is both a strategic and moral vision, it is not only a vision of the world order transformed to be based on plurality, fairness, and dignity of all.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF WESTERN THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

(A) Dominance of Western Theories in IR Scholarship

The Euro-American historical experiences and intellectual traditions have had a lot to do with the discipline of International Relations (IR), as it is currently known. The major theories, namely Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism, are Western-oriented and they are based on the European political history, especially on the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the formation of the modern state, colonial expansion, and the two World Wars. Such theories seek to explain state behavior based on universal principles, but in many cases, they are based on assumptions that are Western in nature, values, priorities, and historical developments. Consequently, they end up casting a rather limited outlook that diminishes the various experiences of non-Western nations such as India.

An example of this is realism, which views the international system as anarchic and rational actors, which are in pursuit of power and survival maximization. The operations of the European power games and military competitions have had a very strong influence on this lens. Liberalism on the other hand focuses on cooperation, institutional, economic interdependence and democratic peace that is a post-WWII Western-led system. Constructivism is more flexible, as it is concerned with the ideas and social structures, but it is also based on the same Western academic discussions and philosophies. Although these frameworks may be useful, they are not applicable in non-Western societies since they do not take into account cultural, normative and civilizational factors that shape state actions in a society like India.

(B) Epistemological and Historical Biases

The epistemological bias of Western IR theories is one of the most significant criticisms of the theories because it presupposes that there is a single, objective, and universal manner of knowing and understanding global politics. This perception does not attach any significance to non-western epistemologies such as indigenous philosophies, oral traditions and worldviews of civilizations. The mainstream IR theory suggests this lack of an Indian, e.g., dharma (duty/justice), rajdharma (ethical governance) or ahimsa (non-violence). The concepts of these concepts are ingrained in Indian political and moral thought, dating back thousands of years, and cannot be readily accommodated in thinking that gives precedence to rationalism, materialism, and utilitarianism.

The other problem with Western theories is that it is inclined to believe that a modern state of a

nation is a universal and fixed area of study and do not take into account the different political structures that exist with various cultures. India has a rich heritage of empires, kingdoms and republics and their political paradigm was based on the overlapping sovereignties, moral leadership and regional cooperation, which is not well reflected in the Westphalian paradigm of the state. Such historical prejudice limits the explanatory power of the Western theory in the Indian context, where political action, as much as it is informed by strategic or economic considerations, is also informed by spiritual, cultural, and normative considerations.

(C) Inadequacy in Explaining India's Foreign Policy Behavior

India's foreign policy conduct has often defied easy categorization within the traditional Western IR frameworks. For example, India's long-standing policy of non-alignment is often viewed through the lens of strategic neutrality or hedging, but such explanations fail to capture the normative foundations of the policy. Non-alignment, as articulated by Nehru, was not simply a balancing act between power blocs—it was a moral stance rooted in anti-colonial solidarity, peaceful coexistence, and civilizational dignity. Realist theories, with their emphasis on power politics, often overlook such value-based motivations.

Similarly, India's practice of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment in recent decades does not fit neatly within either the realist or liberal framework. While India engages in military cooperation with the U.S. and participates in QUAD, it simultaneously maintains defense relations with Russia and deepens trade with China. This behavior cannot be reduced to cost-benefit calculations alone. It is guided by India's desire to retain decision-making sovereignty and to avoid becoming entangled in zero-sum rivalries—principles derived from its unique historical and civilizational experience.

India's vaccine diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic also highlights the limitations of Western IR theories. Whereas Realism would interpret such actions as a quest for influence and power, and Liberalism would frame it as global cooperation, India's actions were rooted in the philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*—the belief that the entire world is one family. This deeply embedded cultural value defies reductionist interpretations based solely on material self-interest. The foreign policy behavior of India has been rather difficult to classify into conventional modes of Western theories of IR. An example to illustrate this would be the long-term policy of non-alignment India pursued which can be better explained in terms of strategic neutrality or hedging, but not in terms of the normative foundation of the policy. Nehru, the leader of the movement was not only balancing between the power blocs, but was morally oriented which was on the basis of the anti-colonial solidarity, coexistence and the dignity of

the civilizations. Such values based motives are often overlooked by the realist theories that concentrate on power politics.

In equal measure, strategic autonomy and multi-alignment of India in the recent decades does not easily fall into the realist or liberal camp. India is cooperating with the U.S. in the military sphere, but at the same time, it has defense ties with Russia and enhances trade with China. Such action cannot be narrowed down to cost-benefit analysis. It is informed by the Indian aspiration to preserve the sovereignty of decision-making and not get entrapped in zero-sum game rivalries, which are the insights of the Indian historical and civilizational experience.

The inability of Western IR theories to explain the phenomenon of vaccine diplomacy in India in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic should also be mentioned. Where Realism would see such actions as a desire to exercise influence and power, Liberalism would see it as a global cooperation, in India it was based on the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam- the idea that the whole world is one family. Such a strong cultural value cannot be reduced to the material self-interest.

(D) Theoretical Rigidity and Failure to Accommodate Pluralism

The other major shortcoming of Western theories of IR is the systematic exclusion of non-Western academics, literature, and traditions of thought in the international academic discourse. The syllabi of most courses in IR, journals, and conferences are Anglo-American in their dominance. Indian thinkers, old or new, are not well integrated into the global IR canon. The works of Kautilya, Swami Vivekananda, Gandhi, Tagore or Ambedkar are hardly ever studied in the mainstream IR departments, yet their writings contain deep insights into politics, ethics, identity and international order.

It is not a coincidence that this marginalization exists and is a result of the legacies of colonialism and institutional gatekeeping, which have firmly established the borders of Western intellectual domination in knowledge production. Even when independent theorizing is done by Indian scholars, it usually has to fit within Western categories in order to be taken seriously as scholarship. This has the effect of leaving truly indigenous views underdeveloped or at the periphery as alternative or area studies as opposed to mainstream theory.

There is also theoretical rigidity in the Western IR theories. They tend to apply international politics in terms of fixed variables, models and deterministic assumptions. This does not allow much pluralism and contextual interpretation that is typical of most non-Western cultures. Institutional structures are not the only factor that determines the political behavior in India, but also the philosophical traditions, history, memory, regional identities, and moral considerations.

The Mandala theory, as explained in the Arthashastra, looked at local and interstate relations as circles of influence, which are always shifting according to the situation and common interest. This is in contrast to Western Realism's zero-sum power. Similarly, Gandhian philosophy holds that truth, moral restraint, and grass-roots action are central to political action, which cannot be said in theories of international relations that center on the state.

Moreover, Indian foreign policy can be characterized by what can be termed as pragmatic idealism, that is, a combination of moral commitments with strategic interests. The Western theories find it hard to embrace this duality, with realism and idealism being on opposite sides of the spectrum. Consequently, they do not reflect the depth and nuance of the Indian way of approaching global politics.

V. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR AN INDIGENOUS INDIAN IR THEORY

(A) Ancient Indian Political Thought

Indian intellectual life has a rich and unexploited source of philosophical and political thought that could be used to provide a source of indigenous theories of international relations. The best known in this regard is the Arthashastra, a book on statecraft, economic policy, and military strategy by Kautilya (also called Chanakya), the prime minister of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya in the 4th century BCE. The Arthashastra presents a very practical and systematic idea of governance and diplomacy that is comparable and in certain ways even pre-dates the thoughts of Machiavelli.

Political realism as seen by Kautilya acknowledges the role of power, espionage, and deterrence as an essential aspect of a stable state, but, as opposed to Western Realism, great focus is put on the ethical responsibility, internal stability, and moral duty of the ruler to serve the good of the people. His theory of foreign policy, Mandala, which is founded on the basis that neighboring states are natural enemies and the distant ones potential allies, is a dynamic and flexible model of alliance-building which mirrors the Indian multi-aligning in the current global order. It is an old normative and situational but strategic native model.

In addition to the Arthashastra, the Indian epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana also have great insights into the international behaviour. These are not only mythological narration but tales of morals, philosophical and political ideas. More specifically, the Mahabharata is full of arguments of war, politics, justice (dharma), and royal responsibility. The Shanti Parva, a part of the epic, talks about the responsibilities of kings in peace and war, the morality of politics, and the need for justice even in the political opposition. Such concepts provide other paradigms of conflict and cooperation that go beyond material interests to incorporate moral

reasoning and the human condition.

The civilizational identity of India is not one that is within the territorial or institutional framework, but is the one that has a value system that has evolved over millennia. The most significant aspect of this worldview is the notion of Dharma that entails the concept of duty, righteousness, cosmic order, and social harmony. In contrast to the Western legalistic interpretation of international law that is more oriented on the treaties and ways to enforce the law, Dharma is more about voluntary responsibility, moral leadership, and balance of relationships. What this may mean in international affairs is ethical conduct of states, restraint on the exercise of power, and a focus on the welfare of the world as opposed to national aggrandizement.

Even more this ethical framework is enhanced by the philosophy of Gandhi, Ahimsa (non-violence) and Satyagraha (truth-force). His political campaigning and diplomacy in India during the freedom movement brought the world to a totally new way of resistance that was not based on force, but on moral appeal and civil disobedience. These concepts break the paradigm of violence and conflict being the center of the traditional IR theories and provide a way to think of power as ethical rather than military power. The fact that these values were universal can be explained by the fact that Gandhi influenced world leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela.

Foreign policy in this civilizational scheme of things is not merely a game of national interests but appears to be on the larger cosmic and moral scheme of things. This can be seen through the harmonious coexistence, respect and cultural interaction that India has placed a high priority on in its foreign affairs. The principle of Sarvodaya (universal upliftment), Lokasangraha (welfare of the world) and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family) also supports the fact that the world has to be governed by compassion, inclusivity and shared destiny.

Indian traditions do not only think of power as material ability but also as moral authority, knowledge and spiritual training. Chakravartin ideal is an ideal of leadership that is defined by ethical actions and universal responsibility of a ruler. In contrast to hegemonic leadership in Realism where hegemony is the end, the Chakravartin employs persuasion, benevolence and good advice to establish a harmonious order. This is an ideal that is echoed in current thoughts of responsible leadership and can offer a normative guideline to the global ambitions of India.

Further, the traditional Indian use of diplomacy emphasized dialogue, tolerance and flexibility. Since ancient times, Indian rulers were involved in peace missions, exchange of knowledge and cultural communication with other civilizations. The change of conquest to the moral

internationalism is the post-Kalinga transformation of Ashoka and his propagation of Buddhist ideals in Asia. The habit still exists nowadays as India is an active participant in the South-South cooperation, peacekeeping and humanitarian aid.

Notably, even the concept of pluralism in international relations can be found in the Indian thought. The Indian philosophy does not have a single way to go and a single truth like some of the western theories that seek to establish one explanation or one universal law. The fact that schools of thought such as Advaita (non-dualism), Dvaita (dualism) and Buddhism co-exist with each other indicates an epistemological openness that best fits the multipolar world. This kind of intellectual plasticity is capable of giving a theoretical explanation of international actor and norm heterogeneity in a post-Western international order.

VI. CASE STUDIES ILLUSTRATING THE NEED FOR INDIGENOUS THEORY

(A) India and their strategic role in Russia Ukraine War

The subtle and autonomous approach to the Russia-Ukraine conflict of 2022-2023 by India is a vivid illustration of its breaking of the traditional Western-oriented strategic thought. Instead of taking an automatic stand on the side of the West or Russia, India took a balanced stand that is in line with India long-term principles of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment. It did not participate in the United Nations votes that criticized Russia, but also asked to resolve it peacefully, follow the territorial integrity, and obey international law. This stand mixed up most of the Western observers who anticipated a binary choice of either the U.S.-led coalition or Russia.

Realism and other Western theories of IR would explain the actions of India as a calculated move to safeguard its defence relationship with Russia, which supplies a large percentage of the Indian military equipment. However, India might be criticized by liberalism in the name of not following liberal concepts of democracy and sovereignty. Nevertheless, neither of the frameworks adequately describes the logic of civilizations and the balancing of morality that is behind the Indian posture. The choices that India makes are not only subject to material interests but also to a worldview that does not polarize hegemonically but rather tries to achieve a multipolar world order; a world-view that cherishes the use of non-interventionist diplomacy. Such a stratified response can be explained by an indigenous strategic culture that combines realism and restraint and normative considerations, which is not properly reflected in current Western theories.

In addition, India had a long history of the Non-Aligned Movement, which considered moral sovereignty and resistance to taking sides in the rivalry of great powers not as a sign of weakness

but as reaffirming ethical independence. In this case, Arthashastra Mandala theory, which suggests that one must be flexible when forming alliances depending on the situation, can be more aligned with the behavior of India than any other Western concept of IR. The case highlights the fact that a framework that is contextual and context-sensitive needs to be factored in when it comes to Indian diplomacy.

India During the COVID-19 pandemic, India announced the Vaccine Maitri (Vaccine Friendship) program, as a result of which the country donated millions of doses of vaccines to more than 90 countries, including low-income countries and small island states. This gesture of goodwill was quite prominent as most developed nations were practising vaccine hoarding and nationalism. Indian strategy was not only proposed as a foreign policy measure, it was also proposed as a civilizational obligation in the tradition of seva (service), karuna (compassion) and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family).

This is the behavior that is contrary to a Realist. Why should a country which is yet to resolve its own pandemic problems be able to offer life-saving vaccines to the rest of the world at such a rapid pace? Even Liberalism, as much as it shares the advantages of international cooperation, cannot justify the extent of Indian commitment to those countries that do not have much strategic or economic importance. The value system that dictates India is that the health of the world is a shared moral responsibility and therefore, the vaccine diplomacy was not merely a way of creating a reputation or international legitimacy.

Gandhian ethics can be applied in this context better than any Western theory. The Sarvodaya principle of Gandhi can be observed in the demand of India that life-saving technologies should not be a monopoly of the rich. Also, the Indian advocacy of the temporary suspension of intellectual property protection of vaccines by the WTO was a manifestation of a globalism that was developmental, rather than based on materialist profit and power calculations. The case illustrates the inefficiency of the current IR theories in explaining altruism based on the ethos of civilization as o The Indian relations with China and especially after the Galwan Valley incident in 2020 is another example of a complex situation in which the Western theories fail to describe the actual behavior of India. Even at the time of the border conflict and increased tension between the armies, India has been leaning towards the policy of gradual increase rather than the direct confrontation. It has also deployed more military on the Line of Actual Control (LAC), prohibited Chinese mobile apps on the basis of national security and desired to have a wide range of trade relations to lessen economic dependence. Nonetheless, it did not break diplomatic ties, and it did not aim at transforming the conflict into an open war.

The sharp balancing response may be anticipated by the realist IR theory which may be in form of military alliances or economic decoupling. The liberalism may anticipate that India would solve the problem through institutional channels such as the BRICS or SCO. India was, as it were, round? It was self-help and symbolic posturing, strategic forbearance and long-term deterrence that was not blind to the larger objective of non-violent coexistence.

This is more comprehensible in the light of the Arthashastra by Kautilya that focused on the multi-layered response to the threat that is inclined towards diplomacy and negotiation as well as other covert measures and deterrence. This was not because India was a weak country but because it was the part of a strategic reading of the moral tradition of statecraft, which had insisted on the judicious use of power, not on a direct response. This is the Hindu and Buddhist philosophy of the middle path (*madhyama marg*) the middle way rather than the extreme. Therefore, the complexity and duality of the India China policy cannot be explained by the binary Western paradigms as well as by the indigenous thought.pposed to transactional diplomacy.

The Indian approach to climate diplomacy is a combination of the environment awareness, the development needs and ethical leadership. India has also stressed on the Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) principle in the numerous international forums especially in the Paris Agreement and the COP summit. This principle proposes that even though all countries are to tackle climate change, more responsibility should be directed to the developed countries as they are historically the biggest emitters and have more resources.

The effort to become a green leader is clear through India efforts, including the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) movement, which does not mean sacrificing the development imperatives of its large and poor population. Whereas Liberal theories can describe these actions in terms of institutional cooperation, and Constructivists could take into consideration the fact that India is a responsible state, none of them can represent the spiritual and ethical side of Indian environmental philosophy.

The Indian culture is also very keen on harmony between man and nature, which can be traced in traditional customs such as water conservation, sacred groves and non-violence to animals. The ancient scriptures such as Rigveda and Atharvaveda refer to the Earth as a mother (*Prithvi Mata*) whereas Gandhian philosophy encourages simplicity, sustainability and moderation. The values can be seen in Indian environmental advocacy in the world today, not just as a strategic move but as an ethical aspect of a civilization, the Earth is not a resource to be used but a life form to be preserved.

The anthropocentric models of Western development are criticized in this vision and the ecocentric paradigms based on Dharma and responsibility are introduced. Therefore, India climate diplomacy cannot be fully comprehended without discussing the indigenous worldview that India has- again, a testament to the fact that contemporary theories in IR are inadequate when it comes to evaluating Indian inputs towards the global environmental governance.

The creation of an exclusively Indian approach to international relations involves the establishment of its fundamental aspects that determine the Indian approach to the world and a vision of international relations. This framework would not merely be a replication of western theories with Indian names but would be based on civilizational consciousness, moral philosophy and pragmatic statecraft of India. This would be based on a pluralism, ethical and context sensitive model.

One of the key components is ethically realistic that is a combination of ethical dedication and pragmatism. Unlike the traditional Realism of self-interests and survival, the Indian statecraft has traditionally integrated the power and principles. To give an example, Arthashastra by Kautilya does not ignore morality but it is a part of a strategic approach. In the same vein, Gandhian and Nehruvian thought was focused on the fact that power should be used to be just, not to control others. Ethical realism in Indian IR would enable them to have flexible reactions to security and diplomacy without sacrificing normative integrity.

Civilizational pluralism would also be another characteristic. India has always interacted with the world not as a hegemon, but as a cultural interlocutor-promoting diversity of beliefs, coexistence of world views and inter-civilizational dialogue. This spirit does not believe in such black and white opposites as East vs. West or Democracy vs. Autocracy. Rather, it advances the notion of a world, in which there can be the existence of many truths and forms of governance co-exist in peace. It is this philosophical openness that allows India to have strategic relations with countries on both sides of the ideological and political divide.

One of the pillars of India foreign policy long regarded as strategic autonomy would continue to be a pillar. But under an indigenous conceptualization, it would be thought of not only as the freedom of action, but as self-respect and epistemic sovereignty. The reason why India is not willing to be absorbed into ideological groupings or forced alliances is because of the civilizational feeling of independence as inner power, rather than isolation. This principle will enable India to pursue its national interest and at the same time lead to equitable international cooperation.

Finally, the Indian IR system would give much more weight to the overall well-being compared

to a narrow gauge of success like military dominance or economic wealth. Based on the ideas such as Sarvodaya (universal welfare) and Lokasangraha (collective good), the international behavior of India would be focused on sustainability, social justice, and peacebuilding. This changes the world discourse to one of common prosperity.

To be able to become a global IR theory, India cannot be insular and self-referential. Instead, it needs to be sceptical and constructively involved in the current global theories and practices. It cannot be employed to dismiss the Western approaches to IR but to add to the field the voices and experiences of the others. This necessitates India to present its thoughts in a way that would be palatable to other cultures and other systems of knowledge.

India with the other postcolonial societies can assume intellectual leadership in developing a more inclusive and pluralist discourse on IR at the global level. India can present its own brand of diplomacy much like Chinese scholars have formulated the concept of Tianxia or African thinkers have formulated the concept of Ubuntu based diplomacy. This type of cross-cultural exchange will make the field of IR richer and it will also take IR beyond the boundaries of European universality.

This also opens space to South-South knowledge partnership, in which developing countries collaborate to come up with theoretical tools that capture the shared histories, development issues and collective aspirations. The academic exchanges within BRICS, IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa), and G77 will allow India to form a multipolar epistemology and the theoretical pluralism and intellectual solidarity that will come with it.

Academic transformation is one of the most pressing needs of the construction of an Indian IR framework. Presently, the Indian universities continue to be largely dependent on the Western syllabi, scholars, and textbooks in their IR programs. In order to correct this imbalance, the institutions will have to invest in curriculum change that incorporates Indian thinkers, texts and traditions in addition to international theories.

The courses on Kautilya, Gandhi, Tagore and Ambedkar should be included in the IR programs and cannot be left as peripheral electives. Likewise, the lessons based on epics such as Mahabharata and Ramayana can be taught in another way without being taught as mythology but as the book of strategic and diplomatic wisdom. The incorporation of the philosophical schools such as Vedanta, Nyaya and Buddhism would provide the students with alternative logic of power, ethics and order.

It is also necessary to develop institutional platforms of theory development. This is composed of think tanks, research institutes and policy discussion groups that deal with non-Western IR.

They are able to play a role in forming interdisciplinary interactions between political scientists and historians, philosophers, linguists and strategic analysts. This framework needs to be anchored in the local intellectual traditions through the subsidizing of Indian language scholarship, translation of classical texts and the entry of Indian intellectuals into the public sphere.

Along with this, India ought to participate in knowledge diplomacy- the sale of ideas through academic conferences, fellowships and international alliances. There should be more Indian journals in international databases. Indian scholars should be motivated to publish in the best international journals and present Indian points of view. India can make a difference in global IR discourse when it starts being a knowledge provider and not just a knowledge consumer.

(B) Re-Construction of the Theoretical Track of India in the International Relations

The increasing stature of India in the international scene is not just a change of balance of power but also a great potential to transform the intellectual landscape of international politics. Although the material signs of the Indian ascent are becoming more evident, i.e. economic growth, strategic power, and diplomatic activity, there is still a huge theoretical gap in the conceptualization and explanation of the Indian international behavior. The use of Western-centric International Relations (IR) theories, which developed based on the European historical experiences, still dominates the academic and policymaking world. Such theories are more likely to obscure the personal thinking, motivation, and values of the Indian diplomacy and strategic choices.

This study has shed light on the deficiencies of mainstream IR theories to explain the behavior of India and its desires. It is not only India and its calibrated approach to key conflicts, its humanitarian relief during the COVID-19 pandemic or its climate leadership in terms of civilizational ethics that cannot be explained through existing models in terms of their normative, philosophical and cultural dimensions of foreign policy. The presented case studies indicate that India is not only a rational power-seeker or institutional actor but it also perceives itself as a civilizational actor, which is driven by the ideas of justice, harmony, and global responsibility.

A multi-level approach is needed to make the transition from aspiration to action, and this should be at the levels of education, policy, research and international engagement. The next steps that could be taken to develop this intellectual mission are as follows:

1. Revival of Indian Philosophical and Political Texts in the teaching of IR:

Reform university curriculums to include such prime sources of Indian thought as the

Arthashastra, Manusmriti, Mahabharata and Upanishads as political-philosophical texts that can be used in international relations. Include contemporary Indian intellectuals such as Gandhi, Ambedkar, Nehru and Tagore in the mainstream of IR texts.

2. The promotion of the interdisciplinary theoretical practice

Disintegrate political science silos, philosophy silos, history and religious studies silos. Encourage collaboration among scholars in these areas to come up with comprehensive models which will have the capacity to look into the ancient and modern Indian thinking.

3. National and Regional Centers of Native IR:

Create think tanks and academic institutions that would be focused precisely on non-Western and Indian traditions of IR. Encourage such centers to do both academic and policy relevant work that can be utilized in diplomacy and strategy.

4. Invest in Mobility of Scholars and International Presence:

Assist the Indian scientists to publish and present at international level. Promote Indian voices to be published in large IR journals and conferences and, in that way, disrupt Euro-American intellectual paradigm dominance.

5. Incorporate Diplomats and Practitioners in Theory Building:

Create forums where diplomats, civil servants and military strategic thinkers can add their on-the-job experience to what can be added to the academic theorizing. They are able to improve local versions of international governance and conflict resolution and diplomacy depending on their experience.

6. Nurture South-South Theoretical Cooperation:

Examples of African, Latin American, Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian scholars who are trying to deal with the Eurocentric models. Form political alliances that can be heard by common postcolonial experiences, cultural difference and world building aspirations.

7. Indian Languages must be used to be the Instruments of Theory:

Foster the development of research and theoretical creativity in Hindi, Tamil, Sanskrit, Urdu and Bengali and other Indian languages. Indigenous ideas need to be translated and spread across the languages of India and the world to make them inclusive and culturally authentic.

India has been making material and moral contributions to the development of norms in the world. India has been capable of showing a world order of dignity, equity, and coexistence since its stance in decolonization and the Non-Aligned Movement to its efforts in climate justice and

vaccine diplomacy. Nonetheless, to align its practice with theoretical leadership, India now needs to express its intellectual grammar of international relations.

This does not mean insular nationalism, does not mean the substitution of one orthodoxy by another. Instead, it is a plea to intellectual pluralism, to the fact that the global system is far too diverse, far too interconnected and far too complex to be explained in line with only one cultural or theoretical approach. With its own civilizational background and responsive to modern predicaments, an Indian framework can be a mirror and a bridge, a mirror in the sense of a reflection of India and a bridge in the sense of a meaningful interface with the world.

VII. CONCLUSION

By doing so, India will not only be in a better position to know itself, but also enable the world to envisage alternatives to domination, exploitation, and hierarchy. The ultimate outcome is to build a better balanced, more inclusive and just world order that listens to the concerns of all civilizations, celebrates diversity of thought and pursues the prosperity of all. The increased role of India in the world arena necessitates the development of an indigenous IR framework that will take into account the specificities of the country in terms of history, culture, and strategy. It is also an effective alternative to the Eurocentric theories of IR since it introduces dharma, vijigishu, and inclusivity to diversify global scholarship. Not only does it elucidate the foreign policy options of India, it also undermines the core-periphery dichotomy in IR, and prepares the field of IR to be more pluralist in nature. The opportunity to develop and improve this framework with the help of cross-cultural discussions and empirical verification should be viewed by future research and make sure that India has a say in the discourse of IR in the global context.

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