

CIVILIZATIONAL STATES IN A CHANGING GLOBAL ORDER: INDIA'S EMERGING ROLE IN BRICS

SRESHTHA CHAKRABORTY

Sreshtha90@gmail.com

Assistant Professor, Bennett University (India). <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0912-1880>

Abstract

The concept of a non-Western civilisational state, which emphasises preserving and promoting a nation's unique cultural and civilisational heritage, challenges the universality of Western values and contributes to the broader discourse on unipolarity versus multipolarity. India's multifaceted identity, shaped by thousands of years of spiritual, philosophical, and political discourse, positions it as a pivotal actor in the emerging multipolar world order. Through its evolving multi-alignment policy, India maintains an interest-based approach with emerging and existing powers while asserting its civilisational ethos as a model of governance that blends democratic principles with traditional values. This paper also examines India's partnership with Russia and China within the Russia-India-China (RIC) grouping within the BRICS framework, where these states collectively aim to challenge Western ideological hegemony and reshape global governance to reflect a multipolar, civilisational plural world. The paper critiques Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilisations" theory and argues for a more dynamic understanding of civilisational identities, emphasising the interconnectedness of civilisations such as India, China, and Russia. In this context, the paper argues that BRICS emerges as a geopolitical and economic coalition, as well as a force for cultural and civilisational pluralism. The civilisational identities of India, China, and Russia provide a counterpoint to Western liberalism, advocating for a world order based on mutual respect, cultural continuity, and cooperation rather than ideological conflict.

Keywords

BRICS, Civilisational values, Non-Western IR, RIC.

Resumo

O conceito de um Estado civilizacional não ocidental, que enfatiza a preservação e a promoção do património cultural e civilizacional único de uma nação, desafia a universalidade dos valores ocidentais e contribui para o discurso mais amplo sobre unipolaridade versus multipolaridade. A identidade multifacetada da Índia, moldada por milhares de anos de discurso espiritual, filosófico e político, posiciona-a como um ator fundamental na ordem mundial multipolar emergente. Através da sua política de alinhamento múltiplo em evolução, a Índia mantém uma abordagem baseada em interesses com potências emergentes e existentes, ao mesmo tempo que afirma o seu ethos civilizacional como um modelo de governação que combina princípios democráticos com valores tradicionais. Este artigo também examina a parceria da Índia com a Rússia e a China no âmbito do agrupamento Rússia-Índia-China (RIC) dentro da estrutura do BRICS, onde esses Estados visam



coletivamente desafiar a hegemonia ideológica ocidental e remodelar a governança global para refletir um mundo multipolar e civilizacionalmente plural. O artigo critica a teoria do "choque de civilizações" de Samuel Huntington e defende uma compreensão mais dinâmica das identidades civilizacionais, enfatizando a interconectividade de civilizações como a Índia, a China e a Rússia. Neste contexto, o artigo argumenta que o BRICS surge como uma coligação geopolítica e económica, bem como uma força para o pluralismo cultural e civilizacional. As identidades civilizacionais da Índia, China e Rússia fornecem um contraponto ao liberalismo ocidental, defendendo uma ordem mundial baseada no respeito mútuo, na continuidade cultural e na cooperação, em vez do conflito ideológico.

Palavras-chave

BRICS, valores civilizacionais, RI não ocidental, RIC.

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Introduction

The traditional perspective of International Relations (IR) posits that it is a discipline rooted in Western philosophical thought, with its issues and solutions predominantly shaped by Western viewpoints. Academic comprehension of international politics is primarily considered to originate from Western scholarship and institutions, with theories such as realism and liberalism being mainly influenced by Western philosophers, including Hobbes, Locke, and Kant. These theories have become the prevailing paradigms in International Relations (IR) (Rumelili, 2014). Nevertheless, revisionist scholars challenge this perspective, contending that the narrative of the Treaty of Westphalia is a constructed history devised to provide a foundation for traditional or realist theories (Acharya & Buzan, 2007). There is little doubt that the discipline of International Relations (IR) and world politics are transitioning from established global powers to emerging ones. The frameworks led by Western nations that have shaped international governance since the end of World War II are undergoing increasing transformation. As new powers, notably the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), enhance their influence on the international stage, there is a growing call to reevaluate and recalibrate IR theories and practices to comprehend the evolving dynamics of global politics better. Following the end of the Cold War, the West's triumph fostered the belief that its core values —such as liberal democracy, free markets, and human rights—were universal principles destined to sustain long-term global dominance.

This research is qualitative and interpretive, grounded in constructivist and postcolonial understandings of International Relations (IR), with a focus on discourse analysis. The research is based on various primary and secondary sources. It uses official government communications, policy texts, and academic literature. The research critically analyses how India frames its place in the BRICS system using the discourse of civilisational identity. This study adds to de-centring Western-oriented IR paradigms by highlighting India's role as an emerging power and civilisational state, articulating an alternative vision for global governance based on cultural pluralism and spiritual heritage. It constructs BRICS as a possible platform for civilisational discussion and South-South cooperation. However, the research possesses several shortcomings. The findings may not be generalised across all BRICS members, as they exhibit distinct historical trajectories and national identities. Due to the dynamic nature of world politics, the research limits its consideration of the influence of recent geopolitical events, such as the



Russia-Ukraine conflict or shifting Sino-Indian realities, on the future of BRICS. Despite these limitations, the study makes a significant contribution to understanding India's evolving foreign policy and its ambitions in an increasingly complex, multipolar, and culturally diverse world order.

Evolving Non-Western International Relations

There is nothing new about scholars of international relations criticising Western centrism in the field of IR theory; it is a theme that keeps resurfacing. Dependency School and World Systems theorists have questioned the Western-centric approach to international relations since the 1960s and 1970s, particularly during decolonisation (Wallerstein, 2004). The development of non-Western international relations theories within peripheral states has recently gained prominence. The most significant and striking factor in the transformation of the world is that non-Western civilisational states are playing an increasingly important role (Acharya & Buzan, 2010). What we mean by this concept is that we think of states that weigh their legitimacy not on a nation but on their civilisational heritage. In the West, the primary condition for a state's legitimacy is its democratic functioning. Nevertheless, in a civilisational state, the presence or absence of democracy holds minimal significance. Henry Kissinger (2014) expressed concern that competing conceptions of civilisation could lead to conflicts that could be even more dangerous than the conventional conflicts between states. He contended that the fundamental conflict in the modern world is not merely a struggle for political power or economic influence; instead, it is a struggle for deeply ingrained cultural and civilisational values. As a result, states often use historical and cultural narratives to legitimise their power, making the significance of culture in this context frequently surpass that of political calculations. This concept is presented in the "civilisational state," which, according to the assertions of some Asian academics, is defined not only by political authority but also by an extraordinary moral authority that distinguishes it from the Western state model (Mahbubani, 2023). Huntington opines that the major civilisations of the world, Western, Islamic, Confucian, and Hindu civilisations, among others, will be the dominant sources of conflict in the post-Cold War period. In his argument, Huntington asserts that civilisational identity, based on religion, culture and historical experience, is an enduring force that influences global politics. This argument was reawakened in "The Great Convergence," as referred to by Mahbubani (2013), who claims that the world is currently shifting from a Western-dominated international order to a multipolar world, where, especially in Asia, non-Western civilisations assert their values and models of governance. The ideological hegemony of the West, including liberal democracy, is now increasingly challenged by civilisations with different historical narratives, values, and ways to govern. Non-Western powers, such as China, India, and Russia, are asserting their civilisational identities in an increasingly purposeful manner and promoting alternative governance approaches based on historical legitimacy, cultural continuity, and moral authority within institutions. These nation-states no longer assert their political influence alone; they also offer political legitimacy based on their civilisational identity.

Mahbubani (2013) argues that the world is transitioning from an international order dominated by the Western world to a more multipolar world in which non-Western civilisations, particularly those in Asia, assert their values and models of governance.



This perpetually evolving geopolitical dynamic highlights the escalating tension that manifests on the international stage between a universalism driven by the West and the resurgence of distinct civilisational values, which compete or cooperate. Huntington has encountered considerable criticism, predominantly for his reductionist and essentialist approach to civilisational identities, with numerous critics concentrating on deconstructing the debates (Adib-Moghaddam, 2010). Nevertheless, one of the most concerning aspects of his theory is his categorisation of civilisations such as Chinese, Hindu, and Eastern as discrete, separate entities. This perspective fails to recognise these civilisations' historical and contemporary interconnectedness and affinities. In contrast to Huntington's reductionist framework, International Relations (IR) scholarship has largely overlooked the long-standing and enriching interactions between Chinese and Indian civilisations. This paper critiques the assumptions underlying civilisational identities defined solely by cultural, religious, or geographical distinctions and highlights their limitations. It examines the discourse surrounding civilisations in International Relations (IR) and discusses the concept of "civilisation-states" within the context of the BRICS. Specifically, it explores the critical components of civilisational overlaps and exchanges between these countries and how both invoke their "civilisation-state" identities in contemporary bilateral relations.

Civilisations are dynamic entities that evolve through their internal diversity and interactions with one another (Cox, 2002). Unlike the rigid borders of nation-states, civilisations surpass national limits and challenge traditional ideas of territoriality. Historical inter-civilisational exchanges have been crucial; for example, Europe's journey towards modernity was significantly shaped by exchanges with China, India, and the Islamic world (Arnason, 2006). These interactions take on political importance when civilisations are used to construct identities. Civilisational identity is vital in defining a community's boundaries by distinguishing between "self" and "other." How individuals, states, and regions position themselves globally and assess others is essential. In China and India, both at the institutional and societal levels, the narratives of their rich civilisational histories have been utilised to guide their transformations from less prosperous eras to potentially brighter futures. The histories of these states extend beyond museums, artefacts, or archaeological finds; their civilisational legacies are vibrant narratives that continue to influence their definitions of national excellence. This perception of their civilisational heritage is meaningful in enhancing national identities, shaping their ambitions, and preserving national interests. However, asserting such an identity is insufficient. For civilisational identity to possess social and political significance, other international actors must recognise it as legitimate.

It is China and India who are in constant tussle to prove their assertion as the custodians of their ancient civilisations. These assertions are not universally recognised but are in the process of receiving acknowledgement from and within the international order. Such recognitions not only influence both domestic and international relations but also indicate political relevance within the BRICS framework. It asserts that it comprises emerging powers united not only by political or economic aims but also by shared cultural and civilisational values. These values directly challenge Western dominance. The political significance of civilisational heritage, rather than being a matter of history, continues to play a vital role in shaping contemporary geopolitical discourse. Sharing a sense of cultural heritage may facilitate the resolution of past disputes, instead of being



entrenched in a perpetual cycle of inevitable conflict over cultural differences, as Huntington posits, the clash of civilisations. These two civilisations demonstrate that a common history and culture can foster coexistence and enhance their present relations. Recognising their civilisational inheritance is essential for promoting diplomatic engagement and cooperation.

Viswa-Guru: India's claims to civilisational exceptionalism

India's claims of civilisational exceptionalism in the international system have deep historical origins. In the fight against colonialism in the years before independence in 1947, Indian leaders and thinkers often espoused the idea that India's moral and spiritual heritage was a counterpoint to Western preoccupation with material advancement and superiority of Eastern spirituality vis-à-vis Western materialism, thus situating India in a singular position to offer moral leadership to world society (Estrada, 2023). This civilisational identity became central to India's conception of itself and worldview, especially as it struggled to establish an alternative world order based on moral and religious values (Volodin, 2020). It later helped India secure its post-independence position as a strict defender of the Global South. Civilisational entitlement was used to justify India's assertion to act on behalf of humanity as a nation-state and moral model. Post-independence, the civilisational narrative further changed. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, espoused a secular and plural vision of Indian civilisation based on diversity and peaceful coexistence. Influenced by a liberal intellectual tradition, Nehru thought of Indian civilisation as open-ended and internally diverse, shaping his approach towards foreign policy. His emphasis on non-alignment and peaceful coexistence of nations was a direct carryover of this civilisational outlook (Estrada, 2023). India's right-wing government offered a more exclusivist view, asserting that Hinduism fundamentally and solely defines Indian civilisation. This definition repeatedly recurred within India's foreign policy framework, particularly when the right-wing party assumed power. With Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), civilisational discourse in Indian politics has taken a more essentialist and assertive turn since the party came to power in 2014 (Srivastava, 2023). The emphasis on Hinduism today is accompanied by greater assertiveness and an integral understanding of India's role in the world, linked to its Hindu civilisational identity. While a part of the state is involved in the globalisation process, a civilisational identity has emerged, both as a reaction to it and as a component of the process itself. Globalisation claims to recognise and value the distinctions and plurality of identities within and between states across our new global contexts. While there is an ongoing debate as to whether using "civilisation" is an adequate analytical category, it is, or has become, clear that the frequent references made to it in cultural and political contexts indicate its presumed utility after a long time. Yeşiltaş (2014) believes that civilisation is an institution and a participant in international politics. Civilisations are cultural constructs based on actual or perceived social relationships. In this Indian context, civilisational thinking is revitalised by three broad changes to the global political order and discourse. Since its inception, the liberal international order has been overwhelmingly shaped by Western powers. However, it has faced significant challenges, particularly following the 2008 global financial crisis, which revealed deep-seated flaws in neoliberal economic models. Europe has grappled with quasi-



constitutional crises, including the stalled EU constitution, the Eurozone debt crisis, setbacks in foreign policy in the Middle East (the Arab Spring) and Ukraine, migration issues, and the Brexit referendum. These developments have highlighted a substantial limitation in liberal democratic values and the EU's soft power (Öniş & Kutlay, 2019). Furthermore, the West has lost its monopoly over globalisation, with alternative development models and value systems emerging. This crisis of the international neoliberal order has overlapped with a global upsurge in identity politics and populism, which have emerged from both left and right movements, mobilised against international governance and cosmopolitan elites, stressing sovereignty and national culture (Kriesi et al., 2008). It emerges simultaneously with the rise of Asian powers, namely China and India, breaking the assumed link between modernisation and Westernisation, as they prefer to embody political and economic paths that are foreign to liberal democratic norms (Acharya, 2020).

Technological advancements have disrupted the global information landscape, creating competing narratives amplified by digital platforms and state media. In this context, civilisational identities are making a comeback and becoming politicised. In the newly emerging multipolar world, regional powers such as Russia, China, India, Turkey, and Iran are adopting civilisational discourses to validate their global roles and expand their influence. These developments have brought civilisations back into the forefront of international politics, transforming them from mere cultural categories into strategic narratives.

A foundational part of Modi's foreign policy narrative is the assertion that India possesses a unique and valuable worldview, predicated on unity and universalism —a perspective that Prime Minister Modi frequently expresses through the phrase "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (Hall, 2019). This concept has been a prominent feature of Modi's speeches on global platforms. As recently as 2020, PM Modi's comments to the 75th United Nations General Assembly included the assertion that India has embraced the ideals of the UN since time immemorial because our cultural philosophy has long viewed the world as one family. In this instance, he highlighted India's long-standing commitment to peacekeeping and the country's desire for an increased role in the UN. Modi's references to 'One World, One Family' have appeared in other contexts, with policy circles and foreign policy elites in India discussing both ideas on multiple occasions. However, as Hansen (2013) notes, even discourses that claim universalism are based on implicit distinctions. For example, 'universal human rights' create the distinction between those who support and oppose such rights. The same logic applies when applied to civilisational values. Although Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam suggests a global collective identity, the contemporary nature of Foreign policy immediately localises that notion within Indian culture by stating it is an element of "our culture, character and thinking." It creates a binary situation between India, which holds these values, and others who do not hold or reject these values. This inclination to culturally ground universal values appears in various contexts. At the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), Modi opened his speech with a Sanskrit mantra promoting collective unity in thought and action. He highlighted that his inspirations derive from a cultural heritage that advocates for "Happiness for All" (Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah). The seemingly universal goal is again portrayed as an Indian addition to the global discussion.



Understanding the ideological stakes of Modi's universalism requires an appreciation of the intertextual and philosophical elements in his rhetoric. It must also be noted that while these aspects of Modi's rhetoric are not always meticulously referenced, they are an essential part and, again, a normative, robust appropriation of the contemporary neo-Vedanta thought system. Modi's rhetorical genres and representations assimilate well as discursive formations, which draw heavily on the neo-Vedanta, as presented by nineteenth-century figures such as Swami Vivekananda. In this, not only were Vedic texts favourably interpreted, but they were also situated as foundation texts of Hinduism and, hence, the core of the spiritual essence of Indian civilisation. This perspective is reflected in contemporary nationalism. Advaita Vedanta, a Hindu philosophical system, was founded in the 8th century CE and is associated with the philosopher Shankara. Advaita Vedanta is the singular or non-dualistic conceptualisation of the universe; however, in the nineteenth century, thinkers like Vivekananda and Aurobindo developed a national interest and interpreted Advaita Vedanta, albeit vaguely, into a nationalist perspective with a transcendental or metaphysical basis for those constructs in India.

India-China Civilisational Claims: Cooperation and Contestation

India and China are the two leading Asian powers that express their roles in the world through the narrative of the "civilisational state." Both claim legitimacy not just from economic growth and geopolitical stronghold, but also by referencing their long civilisational histories. This parallel positioning creates a dual dynamic of cooperation and conflict that increasingly shapes the conversation about world order.

China and India both base their foreign policies on civilisational narratives, but they do so in very different ways. China relies on Confucian ideals of harmony, order, and hierarchy. It presents itself as a guardian of ancient wisdom while showcasing its technological and developmental strengths. India, on the other hand, emphasises pluralism, democracy, and spirituality. India views itself as a civilisational actor that can provide moral and philosophical guidance while remaining open to diverse identities and democratic practices. Their civilisational narratives create openings for cooperation. Both countries reject the universality of Western liberal values, advocate for cultural pluralism, and support a multipolar world. The relationship between India and China is not merely a "clash of civilisations" but a competition over who truly represents Asia's civilisational heritage. How these narratives develop, whether they promote dialogue within the BRICS or lead to rivalry, will have a significant impact on regional and global governance. These approaches come together most clearly in multilateral forums like BRICS. Both countries use this platform to assert their civilisational identity and challenge Western universalism. However, their strategies differ. China prefers centralised, state-led development. India supports inclusivity and pluralistic governance. This disagreement makes it difficult for the BRICS to present a clear non-Western vision of the world order. It also influences the group's internal dynamics, with India often trying to balance China's dominance through more decentralised, dialogue-focused initiatives. BRICS serves as a space where multiple civilisational narratives coexist, provided there are mechanisms to ensure dialogue, build consensus, and manage conflicts informally. Shared philosophical principles, such as harmony, community, and shared leadership responsibilities, can be applied to discussions about development justice, multipolarity, and sovereignty. Recognising these



common values enables India and China to collaborate effectively without losing their differences.

India and BRICs: Civilizational Ethos

The ongoing debate about BRICS is important, especially for India. The global political landscape has undergone significant changes since the group formed in the early 2000s. BRICS is a varied coalition made up of powers focused on different issues. These members lack a common overall strategy or shared vision (Nafey & Kashyap, 2020). These countries often differ in political systems, economic strength, and foreign policy directions. China's significant economic influence starkly contrasts with the more balanced aims of countries like India, Brazil, South Africa, and Russia (Kumar, 2018). Moreover, personal and societal links among BRICS nations are still underdeveloped, which makes the grouping loose and informal. Despite these differences, India sees value in BRICS as a collective force to counter what is often viewed as a Western-dominated and unequal global governance system. The BRICS nations share a normative criticism of the Bretton Woods institutions and the UN system, which still fail to adequately reflect the realities of a multipolar world (Dutta, 2021). Although their economic power has grown, their political influence remains relatively limited. India utilises BRICS to underscore its emerging status and advocate for the aspirations of the broader Global South, aligning with its civilisational values.

Pragmatic interests and civilisational values drive India's participation in BRICS. India views collectivising its platforms and agents in BRICS as a reservoir for its civilisational and institutional task of promoting the democratisation of global governance and South-South cooperation - activities that are offered to BRICS member states as an ode to India's former historical identity as a postcolonial champion of non-alignment and supporter of multilateralism. BRICS is at the hub of the broader shift in power to the Global South, with India supporting BRICS while strengthening its internal institutionalisation, promoting the use of cooperative mechanisms among members, and cautiously welcoming external institutionalisation that includes interested, like-minded developing countries.

India's civilisational worldview provides BRICS with a normative basis for its role within the organisation. For example, India's promotion of dialogue over dominance, multipolarity over unipolarity, and developmental equity over-exploitation supports a BRICS agenda of a more equitable global architecture (albeit with a multitude of competing actors). Ultimately, the effectiveness of BRICS will depend on its ability to transcend its members' internal contradictions and establish deeper levels of trust among its members and with the broader community of emerging powers.

Nye (2001) argues that the ability to attract and co-opt through foreign policy, political values, and culture is just as important as, if not more so, economic or military might. However, according to Dugin, this neoliberal framework of influence lacks the ingrained underpinnings that a civilisation is said to be built upon. According to him, when freedom and democracy are divorced from their metaphysical underpinnings and historical continuity, they become tools of cultural homogenisation rather than authentic expressions of civilisation. Dugin views soft power as a cover for ideational hegemony



that undermines authentic cultural identities, whereas Nye sees it as a civilising force that promotes global security and liberal principles (Kalinin, 2019). India appears to be pursuing a hybrid strategy that blends Alexander Dugin's concept of civilisational identity with Joseph Nye's soft power theory.

India balances its practical international participation with a deeper expression of cultural difference within BRICS, which offers a unique platform to promote its soft power and civilisational identity. Following Joseph Nye's concept of influence through appeal, India presents itself as a responsible and attractive partner through its efforts in health, education, digital innovation, and cultural exchange within the BRICS framework. However, its goals for global governance changes and focus on connections among ancient civilisations highlight a desire to resist cultural uniformity and amplify the voices of other civilisations. Therefore, India can both establish its civilisational identity and project modern soft power through BRICS, thereby creating a distinct identity that transcends Western liberalism and its alternatives. India seeks to establish a more inclusive and multipolar global order, resonating with the goals of BRICS, a multilateral entity that exists alongside the West-led order. The objective is derived from India's own historical identity as a non-Western culture with its unique intellectual traditions. BRICS provides a platform to highlight a model that promotes technological advancement and developmental expertise, along with a civilisational ethos, thereby enhancing soft power in the Global South.

The civilisational vision of BRICS is presented as a provider of "strategic autonomy of the non-West. This positions India's engagement not just in economic or geopolitical terms but more broadly as a civilisational assertion. This would be alongside China's Confucianism, Russia's Eurasianism, and Iran's Islamic republicanism. In this light, BRICS serves as a space that enables its members' diverse cultures and orientations to coalesce and share without being bound by a Western liberal agenda. However, ethnopluralism and cultural integrity could also lead to conflict. While preserving the distinct civilisational values of its members can add to the BRICS project, it could equally maintain distinct worldviews, policy interests, and historical tensions. The challenge is to manage the civilisational diversity in BRICS and realise economic and political cohesion, and a normative commitment to multipolarity without isolationist cultural identity and geopolitical rivalry.

Huntington would likely perceive the BRICS coalition as a strategic yet precarious bloc formed in response to Western hegemony. This perspective aligns with his broader argument that civilisational, rather than ideological, conflicts will govern the post-Cold War era. While BRICS represents a collective push for a multipolar world, Huntington's work challenges the notion that its members, who are rooted in distinct civilisations, lack a unifying cultural foundation, making sustained cooperation inherently difficult. He would interpret the emphasis on civilisational identity and cultural preservation as a double-edged sword. While it enables non-Western nations to exercise sovereignty and counter cultural homogenisation, it brings the danger of internal fragmentation due to alternative worldviews and regional aspirations. Therefore, in Huntington's view, BRICS might be an effective alliance in the short term. However, its stability in the long term is doubtful unless its members overcome their profound civilisational differences through shared interests and diplomatic equilibrium.



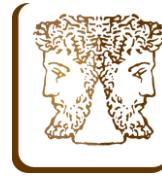
A significant motivating factor contributing to the growing popularity of BRICS is its commitment to uniting nations with diverse national interests, while also striving for enhanced strategic autonomy. Even nations that maintain relatively favourable relations with the West regard BRICS as a means to integrate more deeply into an increasingly fragmented global economy, progressively diminishing Western dominance. However, BRICS should not be perceived as a monolithic and self-proclaimed anti-American bloc; instead, there are ongoing internal discussions concerning the extent to which the bloc should explicitly challenge U.S. interests. While nations such as Russia view BRICS as a counter to Western dominance, others are more content with an approach that strives for multipolarity, yet does not sever relations with the United States. The success of BRICS in reshaping global governance will depend on whether it can reconcile these rival visions, ranging from strategic hedging to outright systemic revisionism, and how united the West is in its response.

Conclusion

India's involvement with the BRICS coalition transcends a mere strategic, economic, or geopolitical alignment; it is ultimately interconnected with a more expansive civilisational proposition that challenges the epistemic narratives of Western liberal internationalism. This paper argues that the emergence of BRICS should be interpreted not just as a pragmatic response to a changing multipolar world, but as part of a civilisational claim in which countries, including India, China, and Russia, seek to assert governance models rooted in their own India's involvement with BRICS stands out because it lies between its history as a diverse, democratic nation born from colonial rule and a revival of a civilisational identity that has evolved over thousands of years of spiritual, philosophical, and political thought.

India often bases its foreign policy on its deep-rooted cultural values, particularly the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which translates to "the world is one family." This provides India with a moral foundation to view itself as a responsible global player. It is a different approach from the Western narratives, which usually emphasise liberal democracy and free-market economies as the standards for international order. Instead of conforming to the Western order, India focuses on its cultural heritage and civilisational values, advocating for a more comprehensive and diverse global community. It seeks to strike a balance between material interests and moral principles, presenting itself not only as an emerging power but also as a civilisational state that brings unique perspectives to global governance.

BRICS provides a crucial foundation for this vision. It enables India to lead reforms in global governance, act as a representative for the Global South, and resist pressures for cultural uniformity. India's emphasis on a multipolar structure and cultural diversity exemplifies its broader approach to fostering dialogue among different traditions, rather than endorsing the dominance of one single model. Within the BRICS framework, the relationship between India and China extends to various regions globally, where both states utilise civilisational narratives to influence these areas. India highlights shared colonial histories and spiritual connections to promote goodwill. They propel competing efforts in infrastructure, technology, and political involvement throughout the Global



South. At the same time, past interactions, like the dissemination of Buddhism and exchanges along the Silk Road, show that shared civilisational traits can facilitate dialogue instead of strife.

However, BRICS also faces its own conflicts. Economic inequalities, varied political systems, and conflicting historical narratives complicate the effort to maintain a unified identity rooted in civilisational diversity. For India, this presents both challenges and opportunities. Its impact will depend on how effectively it can balance civilisational dialogue with practical governance, employing diplomatic flexibility to strengthen its position while avoiding the pitfalls of rivalries among BRICS states.

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