



Bhāratīya: The Underlying Foundation of Unity in Diversity of India

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Abstract:

India is a country of great diversity and is more aptly called a civilisation rather than a nation-state or a republic, with an extraordinary diversity of languages, castes, classes, creeds, religions, regions, and ethnicities. Yet, despite these apparent differences and diversities, there has been a profound sense of unity in India spanning millennia. This paper argues that the foundation of this unity is the idea of Bhāratīya: being a Bhāratīya is a civilisational identity rooted in the ancient imagination of Bhārata or Bhāratavarṣa as māṭṛbhūmi: a sacred motherland, and that being Bhāratīya precedes and transcends religious, social, and political identities and serves as the foundational unifier of Bhāratīya pluralism. In contrast to Western models, where nationalism and a sense of exclusiveness and belonging to a particular state are often associated, and secularism means a complete negation and rejection of religion, in the Bhāratīya model, nationalism has been redefined as patriotism, and secularism has been defined as a principled and age-old acceptance and promotion of all religions, always secondary to Bhāratīyaness. Therefore, unity in India has been based on a civilizational ethos and not merely on legal frameworks and structures. Unlike other models, Bhāratīya nationalism has placed a greater emphasis on patriotic unity than on exclusivist ideology, and secularism has meant religious pluralism and not a negation of religion itself. This unique Bhāratīya model of civilizational ethos, predating and surmounting all distinctions and differences of caste, class, creed, religion, race, politics, and status, has been and continues to be an essential part of India's evolution as a cohesive and responsible global entity. This paper, therefore, ends with a conclusion that for India to emerge and become a successful and responsible global entity, a renewed commitment to being a Bhāratīya, rooted in a sense of duty, responsibility, and honour, is essential.

Keywords: Bhāratīya, Nationalism, Secularism, Patriotism, Civilizational Identity.

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Introduction:

The concept of Indian unity in spite of its vast diversity has always been a subject of interest for historians, philosophers, and political theorists. The concept of “unity in diversity” is often equated with the concept of Bhāratīya, but its underlying philosophy remains an under-explored area. This paper proposes that the unifying force is neither merely constitutional nationalism nor modern political identity, but the far more ancient and pervasive idea of being Bhāratīya.

उत्तरं यत्समुद्रस्य हिमाद्रेश्चैव दक्षिणम्।

वर्षं तद् भारतं नाम भारती यत्र संततिः ॥ (Vyasa, 2019, 2.3.1)

The land that lies to the north of the great ocean and to the south of the white, snowy mountains known as the Himalayas is the land Bhārata; the people who dwell there are known as the Bhāratīya, the descendants of Bharata.

The notion of Bhārata as a sacred geographical, cultural, and moral space predates modern nation-states and continues to inform India’s underlying self-understanding today. (Chodavarapu, 2025) Therefore, the very concept of Bhāratīya has always been defined in the context of "unity in diversity," which in turn means an amalgamation of cultures, religions, languages, and social structures of an exceptional kind. (Nationalism and Secularism in India's Freedom Struggle, 2025) Yet, the concept of unity cannot be understood in the context of administrative or political unity alone. Instead, it is grounded in a civilizational identity as a Bhāratīya and the duties that come with it, in the form of Dharma, a concept that predates modern constitutional structures and modern nationalism. While Western accounts of the formation and nature of the nation-state are often rooted in ideas of territorial sovereignty and exclusionary identity, the Indian idea of national consciousness was rooted in moral, cultural, and philosophical commitments that are part and parcel of its civilisational responsibilities. (Doty, 1996, pp. 121-147)

Bhārata as One Land:

The idea of India as Bhārata or Bhāratavarṣa is not a modern construct. As exemplified by the shloka from the Vishnu Purana, similar references to Bhārata can be found in the Rig Veda, the Sam Ved, the Varāha Purāna, and the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna as well.

दक्षिणापरतोह्यस्य पूर्वेण च महोदधिः।

हिमवानुत्तरेणास्य कार्मुकस्य यथा गुणः ।

तद्देशं भारतं वर्षं । मार्क. 57. 59। (Vyasa, 2014) (Singh, 1996, 189).

On the south of this land lies the unbounded vast sea, and on the East, similarly, lies the great unyielding ocean; it has in its hand the qualities of an undefeated bow in the form of the Himalayas, this land (surrounded by the three: Arabian sea, Bhāratīya ocean/Bay of Bengal, and the mountain range of Himalayas) is Bhārata. The ancient Bhāratīya literature always depicts this land as a single cultural and spiritual entity. (Sanujit, 2011) In a similar vein, epics like the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyana reflect an idea of territorial and cultural integration that transcends geographical boundaries. “The Viṣṇu Purāṇa describes Bhāratavarṣa as a distinct land where people are bound by dharma and shared civilizational values” (Wilson, 1840/2006). Indeed, in Rāmāyana, the territory does not exist merely as geographical space, known and owned by one, but also as a deeply sacred motherland. Rāma’s reluctance to give up his duties to the motherland, even in return for heavenly pleasures, marks one of the earliest manifestations of patriotism through a sense of duty. The often-cited verse, “Janani janmabhūmiśca svargād api garīyasī” (Mother and motherland are greater than heaven), underscores the supreme value accorded to the land of birth (Vālmīki, trans. Goldman, 1984). This sentiment forms a foundational pillar of Bhāratīya consciousness. The entire verse is as follows:

अपि स्वर्णमयी लंका न मे लक्ष्मण रोचते।

जननी जन्मभूमिश्च स्वर्गादपि गरीयसी ॥ (Vālmiki, 2017, 6.124.17)

Hey Lakshmana, even this golden Lankā has no appeal in front of the mother and the motherland, because they are always greater than even heaven itself. One can see here that the significance of patriotism is at its inculcation in the concept of Dharma since the ancient times of Bhāratīya philosophy, which has been exemplified in the Sanskrit epics, Vedas, and the purāṇic texts, which conceive Bhārata as an integrated land of sacred significance. Bhāratavarṣa is envisaged as a dharmic territory, or the land of the Dharma, a civilisation which lives by its values, ethics and responsibility, binding each other through the Dharma. People live in this land of Bhārata through a shared sense of duty, a shared symbolic geography, many different rituals, and a core ethical system of values rooted in Dharma. This worldview is characterised by a deep sense of belonging to a collective whole. Textual evidence of the existence of Bhārata as a recognised geographical and cultural whole can be found in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa long before the colonial construct of the nation-state. Works such as the Rāmāyana, which can arguably be said to be at the core of the Bhāratīya worldview and imagination, are a testament to civilisational oneness and belonging. (Oliveira, 2024) To be

a Bhāratīya is a civilisational identity and not a political or legal construct. It brings people together despite differences of caste, class, creed, colour, religion, race, status, pride, and politics. While there may have been stratification of societies, the overarching sense of belonging to the whole of Bhārata has always provided a common moral and cultural template. (Social Stratification, n.d.) This civilisational identity emphasises dharma (duty), kartavya (responsibility), and ṛṇa (obligation)—not merely rights. It is this sense of shared duty that enables unity despite diversity. The acceptance of plurality is not chaotic relativism but a disciplined harmony grounded in Bhāratīya values (Radhakrishnan, 2008, p. 46). Civilizational unity, therefore, is one of the important inputs for the idea of composite nationalism, and this is an all-embracing idea, which includes all ethnicities and faiths under a collective entity called the Bhāratīya nation. Unlike religious nationalism, composite nationalism is a concept that believes that people retain their own unique religious traditions and are still a unified entity. (Oommen, 1994)

Bhāratīya Nationalism: Patriotism over Ideology

Western nationalism often emerged in opposition, defined by borders, exclusion, and ideological uniformity. In contrast, Bhāratīya nationalism is fundamentally patriotic rather than ideological. It is rooted in love for the motherland (māṭṛbhūmi) rather than hostility toward others (Chatterjee, 1993). Nationalism in India is not in opposition to diversity; it assimilates it. (Ansari, 2016) Nationalism thus equates with patriotism, ‘Deshbhakti’ or devotion to the nation, and not a political ideology. It is this difference between nationalism in India and other countries that helps explain why India remains united in spite of its internal diversities. (Bilgrami, 2025) Research on Bhāratīya nationalism highlights its uniqueness, i.e., nationalism based on patriotic unity rather than ethnic exclusiveness. (Nationalism and Politics in India, 2021) Bhārtīyata nationalism developed out of a collective opposition to colonial domination, based on cultural and ethical principles of pluralism and toleration. (Chakraborty, 2022) There is an account of how Swami Vivekananda was an inspiration for this nationalism, based on his philosophy of spiritual unity and social cohesion. (Singh, 2025) His life and teachings have been cited as an example of Bhārtīyata nationalism, emphasising selfless service to the motherland and humanity. (Gehlotra, 2024) Unlike the definition of nationalism based on the Western intellectual tradition, Bhāratīya nationalism does not focus on political sovereignty and exclusiveness. (Chakraborty, 2026) Rather, it inculcates it in an individual’s duty by making it a part of an individual’s Dharma. (Taber, 1998) Unlike law, Dharma is flexible, ethical, and personal. (The Concept of Dharma: Understanding Indian Ethical Traditions, 2023) While people have different customs and traditions, they are united through a common principle of right action, harmony, and responsibility through Dharma. (Bhatt, n.d.) Dharma unites people without forcing them to conform to a



particular pattern. (Howard, 2023) Ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti. Truth is one; sages call it by many names. This idea allows multiple religions, philosophies, and lifestyles to coexist without mutual exclusion. The Bhāratīya tradition values this experience of unity and emphasises sādhanā (practice) to achieve it rather than just blind faith, thus giving an individual or community complete freedom. (Nationalism and Secularism in India's Freedom Struggle, 2025)

Bhāratīya Secularism: Acceptance of All Religions

Secularism in the Western context broadly implies the rejection or strict separation of religion from public life. Bhāratīya secularism, however, signifies sarva-dharma-sambhāva and sarva-dharma-svikār equal respect for all religions and equal acceptance of all religions. (Bhargava, 1998). Importantly, this acceptance of religion is always secondary to being Bhāratīya. We are first and foremost Bhāratīyas, and only then followers of whatever religion we are. This is the philosophy that guarantees that religious affiliations do not take precedence over the unity of the nation. (The Enduring Principle of Secularism in India, 2023) The philosophy is clearly visible in the Bhāratīya Armed Forces, where soldiers from all religions serve alongside each other, and war cries from all religions are found. However, they always follow the primacy of national slogans, Jai Hind, Bharat Mata ki Jai, or Vande Mataram, before any religious invocation. This practice symbolically and practically reinforces the precedence of Bhāratīyaness over all other identities. ('Jai Hind', 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' slogans reverberate nationwide, 2025)

The Bhāratīya Constitution embodies secularism distinct from Western secular models. The Preamble of the Constitution affirms liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship (Constitution of India, Preamble). The Constitution also prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion (Article 15) and guarantees freedom of religion (Articles 25–28). These provisions reflect a model of secularism that does not separate religion from social life but instead ensures equal respect for all religions—Sarva Dharma Sama Bhava. Mahatma Gandhi coined Sarva Dharma Sama Bhava to highlight equal feeling toward all religions, a principle that influenced India's secular imagination. This idea is in contrast with Western secularism, as the latter often suggests the separation of religion and the public sphere. In the Indian case, the concept of secularism promotes the idea of plurality under the umbrella of the idea of the nation, and religious differences are subordinated to the idea of Bhārtīyātā. The idea is also reflected in the Bhārtīyā armed forces, as religious differences are combined with the idea of unity among the citizens.

Bhāratīya Consciousness as the Solution

For India to emerge as a prosperous nation and a global power, a renewed emphasis on Bhāratīya consciousness is essential. Nationalism, or a sense of collective responsibility rather than a sense of entitlement, is the only way forward. Being Bhāratīya means no longer asking “What can my nation give me?” but “What can I do for my nation?” This is a change that is evident in civic cultures such as that found in Japan, where national honour is about discipline, cleanliness, and accountability. If honour becomes integral to being Bhāratīya, civic sense, environmental responsibility, and ethical public conduct would naturally follow.

“The Bhāratīya Constitution declares India as a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic committed to justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity” (Waughray, 2011). It upholds the values of the integrity and unity of the nation while at the same time safeguarding the linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity of the people. This constitutional provision represents a civilizational contract that has evolved with the ages and now upholds the value of ‘unity in diversity’ as a guiding principle of governance. (Singh & Deva, 2005, pp. 649-686) It thus balances the civilizational ethos of the ages with the values of the present-day democratic system of governance by asserting the value of ‘unity’ rather than ‘uniformity’. (Democracy, diversity, and disavowal: Tracing colonial lineages in India’s long wars, 2023)

For India to harness its full potential as a responsible global power, Bhāratīya consciousness, a synthesis of civilizational identity and constitutional commitment, is crucial. Such an awareness prompts the citizenry to look to the common good and not to personal claims. (Vaidya, 2020) This has been seen in the philosophical school of thought termed dharma, where there has been a focus on one’s duties to the community and not one’s interests. (The Concept of Dharma: Understanding Indian Ethical Traditions, 2023) The Bhāratīya philosophical tradition, such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, has placed emphasis upon ethical action (karma) and common good (societal dharma). (Rajendran, 2017) This provides a philosophical basis for a citizen culture in which the question of what one can do for the nation becomes the core of the national identity. (Nationalism and Politics in India, 2021)

Conclusion

This is ongoing research, and as the process of work is still ongoing in the realm of Indian Knowledge Systems, the paper here still feels incomplete, but the process will go on, and the findings till now can be discussed in the conclusion here. The future of India lies not merely in economic growth or military strength



but in the revival of Bhāratīya consciousness. Unity in diversity is maintained not by suppressing differences, but by transcending them through the prism of our civilisation's identity. The age of blaming others for our failures must end. We, as Bhāratīyans, must take responsibility to build the country – brick by brick, action by action. India does not belong to someone else; it belongs to us. We are responsible for its successes and failures alike. To stand as a united, strong, and ethical nation, being Bhāratīya is not an option; it is the only way forward. India's unity is not merely based on political and administrative integration but on a strong civilizational identity, "Bhāratīya", that believes in the importance of identity, pluralism, and collective responsibility. India's Constitution, based on its "Bhāratīya" legacy, is based on principles that respect diversity and at the same time promote unity. In its journey to becoming a global power, reiterating "Bhāratīya" identity can help in promoting collective responsibility, bridging social divides, and converting India's diversity into a strength rather than a weakness. Collective responsibility for promoting Indian identity and its Constitution would be the hallmark of India's success as a cohesive global power.

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