

The Perspective of Deendayal Upadhyaya on International Relations: Relevance in Contemporary Indian Diplomacy

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Abstract: Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya was a prominent political thinker and nationalist leader who emphasised self-reliance, ethical governance, and the preservation of the civilizational values of India. His views on international relations were shaped by the principles of sovereignty, national interest, and global justice. He advocated for a reformed United Nations that would ensure equal representation for newly independent nations and resist dominance by powerful states. Upadhyaya was both a critic and a proponent of government policies, urging strong leadership, strategic diplomacy, and a pragmatic approach to foreign relations. His concept of *Dynamic Neutrality*, which calls for an independent, interest-driven foreign policy, and his emphasis on cultural diplomacy is reflected in contemporary global engagements of India.

The contemporary relevance of the vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya on foreign policy is evident in the strategic approach of India under the present government. Policies such as *Neighbourhood First*, *Atmanirbhar Bharat*, and increased cultural diplomacy align with his vision of self-reliance and India-centric international relations. This paper examines the thoughts of Deendayal Upadhyaya on international relation and their influence on modern Indian diplomacy, demonstrating how his vision aligns with the current geopolitical strategies and foreign policy objectives of the country.

Keywords: Dynamic Neutrality; Cultural Diplomacy; National Interest; Self-Reliance; National Security.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya was a visionary thinker, political philosopher, and advocate of integral humanism. His vision for India extended beyond domestic politics and deeply influenced his views on international relations. He had a distinct perspective on foreign affairs. During a time of global power struggles and political divisions, India adopted Non-Alignment as a key foreign policy principle. However, Upadhyaya opposed using ideological terms like 'Democratic World,' 'Free World,' and 'Third World' to shape foreign relations. He believed that the foreign policy of India should focus on national interest rather than global ideological movements. According to him, the diplomatic approach of India should be guided by its cultural heritage, civilizational values, and spiritual traditions. These elements, he argued, played an important role in building strong diplomatic, strategic, and economic ties with other nations.

He also supported the use of soft power in foreign relations. He was critical of the principle of sovereign equality of the United Nations and argued that powerful countries used the UN to serve their own interests. He called for reforms in global governance to give newly independent Asian, African, and Latin American countries a stronger voice. His ideas remain relevant today as India continues to seek a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and push for changes in global institutions.

In addition to global governance, Upadhyaya believed in economic independence. He warned against relying too much on foreign aid and investments, as they often came with political conditions. He feared that economic dependence on powerful countries could weaken the sovereignty of India. Instead, he emphasised self-reliance, which is reflected in India's current economic policies of India that balance global trade with domestic growth.

On security and strategic matters, Upadhyaya had a practical approach. While he supported Non-Alignment, he believed that India should never compromise its security for diplomatic neutrality. He was especially cautious about China and Pakistan and advised against trusting them blindly. He stressed the need for strong leadership to handle international pressures and ensure national security. His concerns remain relevant today as India continues to face challenges from its neighbours. He also saw cultural diplomacy as an important tool in foreign relations. He believed the spiritual and cultural heritage of India could strengthen its global influence. This idea is reflected in modern Indian foreign policy, which promotes cultural exchanges, yoga diplomacy, and historical ties with other regions, such as Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East.

This research paper explores the thoughts of Deendayal Upadhyaya on international relations and their relevance in contemporary Indian diplomacy. By analysing his views on global governance, economic self-reliance, strategic autonomy, and cultural diplomacy, this study aims to highlight the enduring impact of his ideas. His vision continues to shape the approach of India to global affairs, demonstrating the lasting relevance of his nationalist ideology in the 21st century.

2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

The present study is based on a qualitative methodology to examine historical documents, records, and texts related to the vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya on foreign policy. Primary sources, including his speeches, writings, and political commentaries, were analysed to understand his perspectives on nationalism, diplomacy, and global governance. Government documents, official policy statements, and records from international organisations were also studied to contextualise his ideas.

Secondary sources, such as books, research articles, and scholarly analyses of the philosophy of Deendayal Upadhyaya and Indian foreign policy, were used to provide additional insights. Comparative studies were conducted to evaluate the alignment between the foreign policy principles of Deendayal and contemporary Indian diplomatic strategies. By integrating primary and secondary sources, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary relevance of the vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya in shaping the foreign policy of India.

3. THE PERSPECTIVE OF DEENDAYAL UPADHYAYA ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Critique of Western Domination and Call for Sovereign Equality: Deendayal Upadhyaya was critical of the dominance of Western powers in global politics. He believed that many nations, especially newly liberated ones in Africa and Asia, were not treated equally despite their sovereignty. According to him, true international cooperation could only be achieved when all countries were given an equal voice. He argued that Western nations, particularly former colonial powers, continued to influence the political and economic affairs of weaker nations. This, he believed, was a major obstacle to achieving global peace and justice.

Deendayal Upadhyaya viewed international politics as being shaped by power dynamics rather than fairness. He stressed that peace could not be sustained as long as political subjugation, economic exploitation, and social discrimination persisted. He urged powerful nations to use their influence to eliminate these injustices rather than perpetuate them. For him, the true test of leadership for Western powers lay in their willingness to support global equality rather than protect their own interests.

Views on United Nations Reforms and Global Governance: Upadhyaya saw the United Nations as an important institution for maintaining world peace, but he was also aware of its limitations. He believed that the UN, in its existing form, did not fully represent all nations fairly. Newly independent countries, especially those in Africa and Asia, were often sidelined despite their sovereignty. He argued that unless the UN recognised the principle of sovereign equality, it would fail to serve its true purpose.

He called for a revision of the UN Charter to make the organisation more democratic and inclusive. He feared that if reforms were not implemented, the UN might meet the same fate as the League of Nations, which had collapsed due to its inability

to address global conflicts effectively. Upadhyaya questioned those who doubted the success of UN reforms, asserting that strong leadership could make meaningful changes possible. His vision for a reformed UN was one where all nations, regardless of their economic or military strength, had equal rights in global affairs. He believed that if world leaders such as the US President and the British Prime Minister truly embraced the ideals of justice and equality, they could lead efforts to reform the UN in a way that would prevent future conflicts and reduce the need for nuclear or military interventions.

Stance on Non-Alignment and Foreign Influence: Upadhyaya was a firm believer in national sovereignty and independence in foreign policy. He supported the idea of non-alignment but also cautioned against its misuse. He felt that the policy of India of non-alignment should be based on pragmatism rather than emotionalism or ideological leanings.

He criticised the Nehru government for being too idealistic in its approach to China and other global powers. He warned that the diplomatic overtures of India towards China were misplaced and that trusting China blindly could prove costly. His concerns proved to be valid when China later adopted an aggressive stance towards India, leading to the 1962 war. He also argued that Pakistan remained a persistent threat and that India should adopt a strong and strategic approach rather than relying on diplomatic goodwill alone. At the same time, Upadhyaya was critical of excessive dependence on any single foreign power. He viewed foreign aid and investment with caution, as they often came with hidden political and economic strings. He was particularly critical of the US decision to reduce aid to India when India chose to buy military equipment from the Soviet Union. He saw this as a clear example of how foreign countries used financial assistance as a tool to influence the policies of India.

He believed that true self-reliance was essential for the growth and sovereignty of India. While he was not opposed to foreign trade and investment, he argued that such engagements should be on the terms of India and not dictated by external powers. He emphasised that the economic policies of India should focus on reducing dependence on foreign technology and capital while maximising the use of domestic resources.

The Concept of Dynamic Neutrality in Diplomacy: One of the most significant contributions of Deendayal Upadhyaya to foreign policy thought was his idea of Dynamic Neutrality. Unlike traditional non-alignment, which often meant staying neutral in global conflicts, Dynamic Neutrality emphasised active engagement based on national interest. He believed that India should not merely remain passive in international affairs but should take strong, independent decisions that align with its national goals. This approach allowed India to build strategic partnerships without becoming dependent on any single power bloc.

He appreciated the ability of India to maintain good relations with both rival nations, such as the USA and the USSR or Saudi Arabia and Israel, based on mutual interests rather than ideological alignment. The idea of Dynamic Neutrality Upadhyaya is still relevant in the modern foreign policy of India. The Indian government today maintains close ties with both Western nations and non-Western allies, balancing its relationships based on practical considerations rather than ideological loyalty.

4. THE VISION OF DEENDAYAL UPADHYAYA ON INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Deendayal Upadhyaya believed that nationalism should be the foundation of the foreign policy of India. He emphasised that India must act in its national interest while maintaining global harmony. His vision was based on the principles of sovereignty, self-reliance, and cultural diplomacy. He was critical of excessive dependence on foreign aid and warned against external influences shaping India's policies. He also stressed the importance of a strong defence policy to safeguard national security and territorial integrity.

Nationalism as the Core of Foreign Policy: Upadhyaya viewed foreign policy as an extension of national identity and sovereignty. He believed that India should not align blindly with any major power but should assert its independent stance in global affairs. His nationalist perspective rejected the idea of India being a passive player in international politics. Instead, he advocated for India to take an active role in shaping global discourse based on its civilizational values. He criticised policies that, in his view, weakened the global standing of India, such as appeasement toward China and Pakistan. He saw strong leadership as essential for securing the interests of India and ensuring that external pressures did not dictate diplomacy.

Self-Reliance and Cautious Foreign Aid Acceptance: Upadhyaya strongly opposed the dependence of India on foreign aid, particularly from Western countries and the Soviet Union. He argued that foreign assistance often came with political strings attached, leading to interference in domestic policies. He cited instances where foreign countries used aid to influence the economic and political decisions of India, such as the U.S. reducing financial assistance when India sought military equipment from the Soviet Union.

He believed that true sovereignty could only be achieved through self-reliance. He called for strengthening domestic industries, reducing dependence on foreign technology, and promoting indigenous innovation. His concerns remain relevant today as India continues to focus on reducing economic vulnerabilities through policies like 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat.'

The Role of India as a Cultural and Spiritual Leader: Deendayal Upadhyaya emphasised the civilizational strength of India and its potential to lead the world through cultural and spiritual influence. He believed that the foreign policy of India should not be limited to economic and strategic concerns but should also promote its heritage and values. He argued that the soft power of India, its traditions, philosophy, and spiritual wisdom, could help build strong diplomatic relations. He saw cultural diplomacy as a means to counter Western ideological dominance and to project the identity of India on the world stage.

Today, the global outreach of India through yoga, Ayurveda, and historical heritage aligns with the vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya. His call for showcasing the cultural richness of India finds expression in initiatives such as the International Day of Yoga and the global promotion of Indian philosophy.

Defence Policy and Strategic Autonomy: Upadhyaya viewed defence policy as a fundamental aspect of the national security and foreign policy of India. He argued that the strength of a nation is measured not just by its economic power but also by its military preparedness. He emphasised that a strong defence system ensures sovereignty and protects national interests. He was highly critical of the weak response of India to external threats, particularly from China and Pakistan, and called for vigilance against hostile activities along India's borders.

He believed that military modernisation was essential for the defence strategy of India. Unlike his reservations about Western influences in social, economic, and political spheres, Upadhyaya supported adopting advanced military technologies from the West. He advocated for a self-sufficient defence industry that would reduce dependence on foreign arms imports. His emphasis on Indigenous defence production resonates with present-day initiatives to build a robust military-industrial complex under the 'Make in India' program.

Upadhyaya also promoted compulsory military training for the youth, arguing that national security should not be left to professional soldiers alone but should be a collective responsibility of the nation. He saw such training as a way to instil discipline, patriotism, and readiness among citizens. His stance was that every able-bodied youth should receive military training, ensuring that the country was always prepared to defend itself in times of need.

Regarding nuclear weapons, Upadhyaya believed that global power dynamics were dictated by military strength rather than ideological principles. He pointed out that nations possessing nuclear weapons commanded significant influence in world affairs. While India traditionally positioned itself as a proponent of peace, he argued that possessing nuclear weapons would enhance its global standing and deter aggression from adversarial nations. He dismissed concerns about nuclear weapons being a threat to civilization, stating that major global powers had large nuclear arsenals, yet no large-scale war had occurred due to deterrence. Therefore, he urged India to develop nuclear capabilities to ensure national security and strategic autonomy.

Upadhyaya was also sceptical of ceasefires and peace pacts, which he believed often worked against the interests of India. He argued that premature negotiations without achieving clear military objectives emboldened adversaries. He believed in pursuing victory decisively rather than relying on temporary settlements that could be exploited by hostile nations.

His vision for an undivided and secure India was closely linked to his defence and foreign policy outlook. He believed that India should always be prepared for war, not as an aggressor, but as a nation that could defend itself with strength and resolve. His ideas on defence preparedness remain relevant today as India continues to strengthen its armed forces and pursue strategic autonomy in global politics.

5. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF THE VISION OF DEENDAYAL UPADHYAYA ON FOREIGN POLICY

The ideas of Deendayal Upadhyaya on foreign policy continue to influence the global approach of India, especially under the Narendra Modi government. His vision emphasised self-reliance, strong national security, and cultural diplomacy. These principles are reflected in the foreign policy of India today through initiatives such as economic self-sufficiency, strategic diplomacy, and soft power engagement.

One of the key beliefs of Deendayal Upadhyaya was that India should reduce external dependence and strengthen its internal capabilities. The current government has adopted this approach through programs like 'Make in India,' 'Atmanirbhar Bharat,' and the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme. These policies promote domestic manufacturing, technological innovation, and economic self-sufficiency. The success of missions like Chandrayaan-3 also reflects this vision, positioning India as a global leader in space technology.

He also stressed the importance of the cultural identity of India in global diplomacy. This idea is evident in the efforts of India to promote yoga, Ayurveda, and spiritual traditions worldwide. The United Nations recognition of June 21 as International Yoga Day, an initiative led by India in 2014, demonstrates the success of cultural diplomacy. Similarly, the theme of India for the G20 summit- 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (One Earth, One Family, One Future)-aligns with the belief of Deendayal in showcasing the civilizational values of India on the global stage.

In regional diplomacy, India follows a 'Neighbourhood First' policy, which echoes the vision of Deendayal of strong ties with neighbouring countries. India has actively invested in infrastructure projects, humanitarian assistance, and trade partnerships with countries like Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Bhutan. Examples include connectivity projects in the Maldives, financial support for the Five-Year plan of Bhutan, and the extension of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) of India to Sri Lanka. These steps align with the vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya of regional cooperation and self-reliance.

National security was a major concern for Upadhyaya, particularly regarding China and Pakistan. His warnings about threats from these countries remain relevant today. The Modi government has taken a firm stance on border security, as seen in the 2016 surgical strikes and the Balakot airstrike in 2019. The defence capabilities of India have also strengthened with projects like the Brahmos missile, Agni-V missile, and the commissioning of INS Arihant, the first nuclear-powered submarine of India. Additionally, the demand for reforms in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) aligns with his call for a more just and balanced global order.

Deendayal Upadhyaya also advocated for a foreign policy based on national interest rather than ideological appeasement. This principle is evident in the stance of India on global conflicts. For instance, the balanced position of India on the Russia-Ukraine war reflects a commitment to neutrality without compromising national interests. Similarly, India has strengthened diplomatic ties with opposing nations, such as Saudi Arabia and Israel, while maintaining relations with Iran and Palestine. This demonstrates a pragmatic approach to international diplomacy.

Under the BJP government, India has actively projected its cultural and spiritual heritage to the world, making it a global centre for cultural tourism. The vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya integrating civilizational values into diplomacy is now a core aspect of the foreign policy of India. His ideas on self-reliance, strategic autonomy, and cultural diplomacy continue to shape the global engagement of India, ensuring that national interest remains the guiding force in international affairs.

6. CONCLUSION

The foreign policy of any nation is a reflection of its historical experiences, cultural values, and strategic objectives. The vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya rooted in nationalism, self-reliance, and cultural identity, continues to hold relevance in shaping the global engagements of India. His emphasis on pragmatism in diplomacy, national interest, and balanced international relations remains central to the approach of India to world affairs.

The foreign policy of the Narendra Modi government direction aligns with several key principles that Upadhyaya advocated. The push for self-reliance, strategic autonomy, and non-alignment without appeasement has become a defining feature of contemporary Indian diplomacy. The assertive stance of India on national security, emphasis on regional cooperation, and commitment to United Nations reforms reflect an evolved yet consistent application of the ideas of Upadhyaya in the modern geopolitical landscape.

Furthermore, cultural diplomacy and the use of the soft power of India, exemplified by the global recognition of Yoga and initiatives like 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'-demonstrate a broader effort to integrate the civilizational ethos of India into its foreign engagements. The strategic partnerships India has cultivated with diverse nations also echo the belief of Deendayal Upadhyaya in pragmatic diplomacy, ensuring that India maintains beneficial ties without compromising its sovereignty and national interest.

As India continues to navigate a complex international environment, the guiding principles laid down by Upadhyaya serve as a foundation for policy decisions. His ideas have not only shaped historical discourse but also continue to influence the strategic choices of the country in the 21st century. The evolving nature of global politics demands a dynamic yet principled approach, and his philosophy offers a framework that balances national interests with international cooperation.

In conclusion, the vision of Deendayal Upadhyaya remains deeply embedded in the foreign policy outlook of India. His emphasis on self-reliance, national security, and cultural diplomacy has found renewed relevance in contemporary governance. The principles he championed continue to guide the diplomatic engagements of India and ensure that the country asserts itself on the global stage while staying true to its core values and interests.

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