

Bhārata as a Civilizational State: Historical Continuities Beyond Political Boundaries

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Abstract

Bhārata emerges as a civilizational entity defined not by colonial cartographies but by an enduring philosophical and cultural continuum rooted in Sanātana Dharma. Unlike the contractual rationality of the Westphalian nation-state, Bhārata embodies a metaphysical unity shaped by the principles of dharma, karma, and moksha, manifest across sacred texts, ritual practices, and ethical codes. Canonical sources such as the Vishnu Purāṇa and Mahābhārata anchor its identity in sacred geography and moral teleology, while the indigenous conception of Rāṣṭra articulates a polity based on civilizational values rather than mere administrative sovereignty. Engaging the civilizational state framework, the analysis foregrounds the interventions of contemporary nationalist institutions and intellectuals - particularly Rajiv Malhotra and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh - who seek to recover Bhārata's ontological self from the epistemic residue of colonial modernity. Demographic continuity, cultural resurgence, and technological ascendancy are situated as expressions of a deeper civilizational reawakening. Far from being a relic of antiquity, Bhārata persists as a normative paradigm asserting civilizational sovereignty in both domestic governance and global discourse, and offering an indigenous alternative to Eurocentric models of statehood, identity, and order.

Keywords: civilizational, teleology, rāṣṭra, sovereignty, epistemic.

Introduction: Reclaiming Bharat - Beyond the Nation-State Paradigm

Far beyond the semantics of statehood and sovereignty lies Bhārata—a civilizational continuum that defies the temporal boundaries of modern political constructs. This manuscript contends that Bhārata cannot be conflated with the postcolonial entity internationally designated as “India”; rather, it signifies an ancient, enduring civilizational order rooted in metaphysical unity, sacred geography, and dhārmic consciousness. Unlike the Westphalian nation-state model, bounded by territoriality and contractual governance, Bhārata unfolds as a civilizational state whose identity is anchored in millennia of cultural

memory, philosophical inquiry, and spiritual praxis. The very nomenclature marks a civilizational disjunction: “India” bears the imprint of colonial cartography and epistemic rupture, whereas Bhārata resonates with indigenous selfhood and cosmological purpose. To apprehend this distinction is to recover the ontological essence of a civilization whose historical trajectory has never been confined to the architecture of the modern state.

The contemporary debate surrounding the appropriate nomenclature for the nation – 'India' versus 'Bhārata' – is far from a superficial semantic quibble. It reflects a fundamental divergence in perception, a deep chasm between viewing the entity as a post-colonial political construct versus recognizing it as the contemporary manifestation of an ancient civilization. The term 'India', an Anglicization derived ultimately from the Sanskrit name for the river Sindhu, filtered through Old Persian ('Hindu') and ancient Greek ('Indos'), gained widespread currency primarily during the era of British colonial administration (Tatva, "India vs. Bharat: A Historical"). Consequently, 'India' often carries the connotation of a primarily geographical entity or a successor state emerging from colonial rule, its identity shaped significantly by that experience and its subsequent engagement with the international state system.

Conversely, 'Bhārata' resonates with millennia of indigenous history, deeply embedded within foundational scriptures like the Puranas and epics such as the Mahābhārata. It signifies not merely a territory but a vast cultural, historical, and spiritual landscape, nurtured by continuous traditions and philosophical thought (Bhatt and Joshi, Vedic Roots and Cultural Identity). While Article 1 of the Constitution of India acknowledges both names, stating "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States", this work argues for the ontological and civilizational primacy of Bhārata. The constitutional formulation itself, rather than representing a harmonious synthesis, highlights an unresolved tension, a persistent ideological contest between the acceptance of an externally popularized name and the assertion of an authentic, pre-colonial civilizational selfhood. From the perspective advanced here, the phrase signifies a compromise that ultimately obscures the deeper reality of Bhārata, potentially perpetuating a form of conceptual colonization.

The enduring identity and continuity of Bhārata are inextricably interwoven with the principles and

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practices of Sanātana Dharma, often translated as the 'eternal way' or 'eternal order' (Manitoba Education, Origins of Hinduism). This comprehensive philosophical and ethical framework constitutes the spiritual bedrock and the pervasive cultural ethos that has sustained Bhāratīya civilization across vast stretches of time. Sanātana Dharma offers a unique worldview, emphasizing concepts like Dharma (duty, righteousness, cosmic law), Karma (action and consequence), and Moksha (liberation), which distinguishes it fundamentally from the linear, history-centric paradigms characteristic of Abrahamic religious traditions (Malhotra, Being Different 87). It is this Dharmic foundation that imparts to Bhārata its distinctive civilizational character.

In exploring the contours of Bhārata as a civilizational state, this analysis deliberately privileges indigenous frameworks and nationalist interpretations. It focuses attention on those personalities and institutions that have championed a vision of Bhārata rooted in its unique civilizational heritage, often standing apart from, or in critical dialogue with, the dominant secularist narratives associated with figures prominent in the post-1947 state apparatus. The contributions of figures like Gandhi and Nehru, while significant within a particular political historical context, are viewed through a different, often critical, lens within this framework, which prioritizes civilizational continuity and indigenous values. This work draws inspiration and support from thinkers who advocate for a profound decolonization, extending beyond the political sphere to encompass the intellectual, cultural, and legal structures that continue to shape contemporary Bhārata. The emphasis on Bhārata as a *civilizational* entity, rather than merely a *nation-state*, serves not only as a descriptor but also as a powerful assertion against the presumed universality of Western political models. It aligns Bhārata with other major non-Western powers that increasingly articulate their identities and global roles through the lens of their distinct civilizational legacies, thereby challenging Eurocentric assumptions within international relations theory and asserting Bhārata's unique standing and potential on the world stage.

The Genesis of Bhārata: Etymological and Scriptural Foundations

The name 'Bhārata' is not a modern invention or a political expediency; its roots penetrate deep into the ancient scriptural and epic traditions that form the bedrock of Bhāratīya civilization. These texts provide not only etymological origins but also define Bhārata as a distinct geographical, cultural, and spiritual entity with a unique purpose in the cosmic order.

A foundational definition is offered in the Vishnu Purana, an important ancient text. It geographically delineates Bhārata with remarkable clarity: "*Uttaram yat samudrasya, Himadreschaiva dakshinam, varsham tad Bharatam nama Bharati yatra santatih*" (The Economic Times, "The Vishnu Purana"). This shloka translates to: "The country (Varsham) that lies north of the ocean and south of the snowy mountains is called Bhārata; there dwell the descendants of Bharata" (Jagran Josh, "Do You Know How India Got Her Name"). This description establishes Bhārata as the landmass corresponding to the Indian subcontinent, situated within a larger geographical conception known as Jambudvīpa. Crucially, the Vishnu Purana elevates Bhārata beyond mere geography. It designates Bhārata as the *karma-bhumi*, the "land of works" (Wisdom Library, "Description of Bharata-varsha"). This is the specific region where human actions (karma) determine subsequent births, leading potentially to heaven or even ultimate emancipation (moksha). Other regions, or *varshas*, are described primarily as places of enjoyment ('bhoga-bhumi'), where the consequences of past actions are experienced but where new karma leading to liberation is not effectively generated. Bhārata is thus uniquely positioned as the crucible for spiritual striving and liberation, a status so exalted that even celestial beings, the gods, are said to desire birth as humans in Bhārata to pursue the path to ultimate liberation. This Puranic conception imbues the land itself with profound sacredness and purpose.

The great epic, the Mahābhārata, provides a powerful narrative reinforcement for the name's origin. It prominently features King Bharata, the illustrious son of King Dushyanta and Shakuntala, himself a descendant of the Puru dynasty and an ancestor of both the Pandavas and Kauravas, the warring cousins whose conflict forms the epic's central narrative. According to tradition, this legendary emperor Bharata conquered vast territories, uniting much of the subcontinent under his rule, and the land subsequently came to be known as "Bharatavarsha" – the land or continent of Bharata – in his honor. The Mahābhārata itself, whose title can be translated as "the Great Bhārata" or "the great story of the descendants of Bharata" (Wikipedia, Mahabharata), stands as a monumental testament to Bhāratīya culture, ethics, and philosophy. Compiled over an extensive period, likely between the 3rd century BCE and the 4th century CE, it serves as a foundational narrative, shaping the identity and consciousness of the civilization. The epic distinguishes its core narrative of twenty-thousand verses, the *Bhārata* proper, from the larger Mahābhārata, indicating the centrality of this

lineage and its story.

While the connection to King Bharata, son of Dushyanta, is the most widely cited origin, the rich tapestry of Bhāratīya traditions offers complementary perspectives. Puranic accounts, as well as Jain tradition, also mention another significant figure: Chakravartin Bharata, the eldest son of the first Jain Tirthankara, Lord Rishabhadeva (Amar Granth, "Why Is Bharat Called India"). Some traditions attribute the naming of Bharatavarsha to this revered Jain emperor, suggesting the name's resonance across different Dharmic paths. Furthermore, exploring the Sanskrit etymology reveals deeper layers of meaning. The name 'Bhārata' is linked to the verbal root '*bhr*', which signifies "to bear," "to carry," "to support," or "to maintain". This suggests connotations of the land that sustains, the people who are cherished or maintained, or perhaps, as one interpretation offers, "One who is engaged in search of Knowledge". This multiplicity of origins – rooted in epic heroes, revered Tirthankaras, and fundamental linguistic concepts – does not indicate ambiguity but rather underscores the name's profound integration and resonance across various streams of indigenous thought and tradition. It highlights the organic evolution and widespread acceptance of 'Bhārata' within the civilization itself.

This internal richness stands in stark contrast to the origins of the name 'India'. 'India' is unequivocally an exonym, a name given by outsiders. It traces its lineage back to the river Sindhu (the modern Indus). Ancient Persians, encountering the river, referred to the land and its people using their pronunciation 'Hindu'. This term was then adopted by the ancient Greeks as 'Indos' for the river, which subsequently led to 'India' for the land beyond it. The widespread global usage of 'India', particularly in diplomatic and international contexts, became firmly established during the period of British colonial rule. While another name, 'Hindustan' – Persian for "Land of the Hindus" – gained currency during the Mughal era and continues to be used, particularly in certain cultural contexts, it lacks official constitutional recognition as a name for the country. The fundamental distinction, therefore, lies between 'Bhārata', an endonym pulsating with cultural, historical, and spiritual significance derived from within the civilization, and 'India' or 'Hindustan', exonyms originating from external geographical observations or administrative convenience, popularized by foreign powers. 'Bhārata' embodies a civilization; 'India' primarily denotes a geopolitical entity.

The scriptural definitions, particularly from the Vishnu Purana, elevate Bhārata beyond a mere geographical space. By designating it as the *karma-*

bhumi, the land uniquely suited for righteous action leading to spiritual progress and liberation, the texts establish a distinct civilizational mission intrinsically tied to the land itself. This transforms Bhārata from a territory into a sacred arena, a space where the cosmic drama of the Yugas unfolds, where sacrifices are performed, and where adherence to Dharma holds the key to transcending the cycle of birth and death. This inherent sacredness, woven into the very fabric of the land's identity in indigenous thought, contrasts sharply with the predominantly secular, administrative, or purely geographical connotations associated with the name 'India'.

Table 1: Comparative Etymology and Connotation: Bhārata vs. India

| Feature | Bhārata | India |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Origin | Indigenous (Puranas, Epics, Sanskrit root ' <i>bhr</i> ') | Exogenous (Greek/Persian via River Sindhu/Indus) |
| Primary Sources | Vishnu Purana, Mahābhārata, Jain Tradition | Greek Histories, Persian Records |
| Dominant Connotation | Cultural, Historical, Spiritual, Civilizational | Geographical, Political, Administrative |
| Historical Association | Ancient Scriptures, Pre-colonial identity | Colonial Era, Post-Independence State |
| Implied Identity | Bhāratīya Santati (Descendants of Bharata), Land of Dharma/Karma | Inhabitants of the Indus region (as perceived externally) |

This comparative analysis underscores the profound difference between the two names. 'Bhārata' emerges from the heart of the civilization, carrying layers of meaning accumulated over millennia, while 'India'

represents an external perspective that gained prominence through historical contingency, particularly colonialism. The preference for 'Bhārata' within this manuscript reflects a commitment to reclaiming and centering the authentic, indigenous civilizational identity.

Sanātana Dharma: The Eternal Ethos of Bhārata

The enduring spirit and unique character of Bhāratiya civilization are fundamentally shaped by Sanātana Dharma, the philosophical and ethical framework often referred to as the 'eternal law' or the 'eternal way'. It is this timeless ethos that provides the continuity, resilience, and distinctive worldview characterizing Bhārata across millennia. Sanātana Dharma is not merely a religion in the Western sense of dogma and creed; it represents a comprehensive understanding of cosmic order, human duty, and the pathways to ultimate realization.

Sanātana Dharma denotes the absolute, unchanging, and universal set of duties and principles considered incumbent upon all human beings, irrespective of contingent social divisions such as class (varna), caste (jati), or sectarian affiliation (Britannica, Sanatana Dharma). It transcends historical epochs and geographical boundaries, representing the inherent nature of reality and the ethical principles that flow from it. Foundational texts and traditions enumerate various lists of these universal duties, but they consistently emphasize core virtues essential for individual and social harmony. These include *Satya* (honesty, truthfulness), *Ahimsa* (non-injury to living beings), *Shaucha* (purity, cleanliness), *Maitri* (goodwill), *Daya* (mercy, compassion), *Kshama* (patience, forbearance), *Dama* (self-restraint), *Dana* (generosity), and *Tapas* (asceticism, self-discipline). Sanātana Dharma thus provides a universal ethical compass guiding human conduct towards righteousness and cosmic harmony.

It is crucial to distinguish Sanātana Dharma, the universal eternal duties, from *Svadharmā*, which refers to the specific duties and responsibilities enjoined upon an individual based on their particular social position (varna) and stage of life (ashrama). While *Svadharmā* outlines the particular roles and functions necessary for the maintenance of the social order, Sanātana Dharma represents the overarching ethical foundation applicable to everyone. The interplay between these two levels of Dharma can be intricate. Certain texts, notably the Bhagavad Gita, suggest that in specific contexts of conflict between universal principles and one's specific duty, *Svadharmā* may take precedence – for instance, the duty (*dharma*) of a Kshatriya (warrior) to fight in a righteous war, even though it involves causing injury,

which seemingly contradicts the general principle of *Ahimsa* (Wikipedia, Sanātana Dharma). This capacity to navigate complex ethical dilemmas by acknowledging both universal principles and context-specific responsibilities demonstrates a sophisticated moral reasoning, allowing for practical action while upholding a core ethical framework. It avoids the rigidity of absolute prohibitions that might lead to societal paralysis, while still grounding action in a conception of righteousness.

The operational framework of Sanātana Dharma rests on several key philosophical underpinnings. Central among these is the concept of *Karma*, derived from the Sanskrit root '*kri*' meaning "action" (Stanford Medicine, "Religion and Indian Philosophy"). *Karma* posits that every action, whether physical, verbal, or mental, creates an imprint (*samskara*) on the individual soul (*Atman*), influencing future experiences and rebirths. Adherence to *Dharma* – encompassing duty, righteousness, ethics, and the inherent law governing the cosmos – is essential for generating positive karma and progressing spiritually. The ultimate aim for many within the Dharmic traditions is *Moksha* (liberation) – release from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsara*) – achieved through self-realization, the acquisition of true knowledge (*jñana*), and living a life aligned with Dharma. This emphasis on self-realization and experiential understanding, achieved through practices like meditation and adherence to ethical conduct, contrasts markedly with the emphasis on belief in unique, unrepeatable historical revelations that characterizes many Western religious traditions.

A defining characteristic of Sanātana Dharma is its inherent spirit of inclusivity and its accommodation of diverse philosophical perspectives and paths to truth (Adikka Channels, "Sanatana Dharma and Secularism"). It is often described as an open framework rather than a closed, dogmatic system. It readily encompasses a wide spectrum of beliefs, including theism (belief in a personal God or multiple deities), non-theism (paths focusing on self-effort and cosmic principles without necessarily invoking a creator God), agnosticism, and even atheism. The ancient Charvaka (or Lokayata) school, for example, which advocated materialism, empiricism (accepting only sensory perception as valid knowledge), and rejected concepts like deities, afterlife, and scriptural authority, existed and was debated within the broader Dharmic intellectual landscape. This acceptance stems from the core principle often summarized as "*Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*" (Truth is One, the wise speak of it in many ways), originating in the Rig Veda. Different philosophies and practices are viewed not as mutually exclusive threats, but as diverse expressions of, or paths

towards, the same underlying reality. This emphasis on pluralism and respect for multiple perspectives fosters an environment where spiritual experience and ethical conduct are often valued more highly than rigid adherence to specific doctrines or rituals. This inherent capacity for accommodating difference challenges Western conceptual categories that often struggle to classify systems not centered on a singular, exclusive truth claim or a mandatory belief in God. It suggests that the core of the Dharmic approach lies more in orthopraxy (right conduct and practice aligned with cosmic law) and experiential realization than in orthodoxy (correct belief).

The roots of Sanātana Dharma extend back to the Vedas, the most ancient layer of sacred texts in the Hindu tradition. Composed in archaic Sanskrit, likely around 1500–1200 BCE by Indo-European speaking peoples in northwest India, the Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur, Atharva) comprise hymns praising a pantheon of deities (often personifications of natural forces or abstract qualities), intricate ritual injunctions (yajnas), sacred formulas (mantras), and profound philosophical inquiries. These texts, particularly the Upanishads which form their philosophical culmination, lay the groundwork for the core concepts – Dharma, Karma, Atman, Brahman, Samsara, Moksha – that became central to subsequent developments within Sanātana Dharma.

In more recent history, particularly from the 19th century onwards, the term "Sanātana Dharma" gained renewed prominence. Hindu leaders, reformers, and nationalists began using it actively to articulate a sense of unified Hindu identity and religious tradition. This usage often arose in response to the pressures of British colonialism, the activities of Christian missionaries, and the critiques posed by internal reform movements like the Arya Samaj or Brahmo Samaj, which challenged certain traditional practices. By emphasizing the "eternal" and "universal" nature of Sanātana Dharma, figures like Pandit Shraddha Ram sought to consolidate diverse Hindu sects under a common, ancient banner, highlighting its timeless truths and inherent nonsectarian spirit. This modern deployment of the term, therefore, served a strategic purpose: it acted as a tool for cultural self-assertion, resistance against external hegemony, and internal consolidation, framing Hinduism not just as a collection of disparate sects but as a coherent world religion with profound historical roots and enduring relevance. It was both a reaffirmation of ancient principles and a potent ideological construct for navigating the complexities of the modern era.

Rashtra: The Indigenous Conception of Nationhood

Parallel to the spiritual foundation provided by Sanātana Dharma, the concept of 'Rashtra' offers an indigenous understanding of nationhood deeply

embedded in Bhāratīya thought, distinct from the modern, predominantly Western notion of the nation-state. Understanding 'Rashtra' is essential for grasping the unique civilizational consciousness that has historically unified the people of Bhārata. The term 'Rashtra' boasts an ancient lineage, appearing in the Rig Veda, the foundational text of Hinduism, and continuing through later scriptures, epics like the Mahābhārata, and Puranic literature (Times of India, "Hindu Nationalism and Hindu Rashtra"). Its Sanskrit root, '*rash*', carries connotations of "to shine," "to rule," or "to be radiant" (Delhi Pathshala, "Rajya and Rashtra"). In its earliest Vedic usage, 'Rashtra' often referred to a kingdom, sovereignty, or dominion, but also carried the sense of a community or a collective body of people bound by shared cultural and linguistic affinities. It represented a territorial unit under a sovereign, but already hinted at a collective identity beyond mere political control.

Ancient Indian political thought often draws a distinction between 'Rajya' and 'Rashtra'. 'Rajya' typically denotes the state in its political and administrative dimension – the apparatus of governance, the territory under direct rule, the institution of kingship (Rajan), and the mechanisms for maintaining order and collecting revenue. 'Rashtra', while encompassing the people and territory ruled by the Rajya, signifies something broader and deeper. It refers to the nation or the people as a collective entity, unified by shared culture, customs, values, language, and a common sense of identity and destiny (Madhav, RAASHTRAM). 'Rashtra' represents the socio-cultural and spiritual substance of the nation, while 'Rajya' is its political form. This distinction highlights that for Bhāratīya thought, the nation was conceived primarily as a cultural and ethical community, not solely as a political structure.

'Rashtra' is consistently described not just as a political or social unit, but as an entity imbued with cultural and spiritual significance. It is characterized as a "spiritual-emotional identity", a collective consciousness rooted in shared values and a sense of belonging that transcends political divisions. The land itself, Bharatavarsha, is often viewed with reverence, imbued with sacredness, divinity, and even perceived in maternal terms – Bharat Mata, or Mother India. This resonates with Diana Eck's description of India's "sacred geography," where rivers, mountains, and cities are not mere physical features but loci of divine presence, repositories of myth, and destinations of pilgrimage, weaving the land into the very fabric of religious and cultural life. This perception of the Rashtra as a sacred, cultural entity contrasts fundamentally with the predominantly secular, territorial, and contract-based understanding of the nation-state that emerged in post-

Westphalian Europe. The Western concept often emphasizes political sovereignty, defined borders, and citizenship based on legal status, whereas the concept of Rashtra emphasizes shared culture, values, and a deeper, almost organic connection between the people, their traditions, and the land.

The concept of Dharma is absolutely central to the understanding of Rashtra. Dharma provides the ethical and moral framework that underpins the entire social and political order (Scribd, "State and Rashtra"). The unity, stability, and prosperity of the Rashtra were believed to depend on the collective adherence to Dharma by all its members. This included *Rajadharma*, the specific duties of the king, who was seen not merely as a political ruler but as a protector of the social order and a spiritual guardian responsible for upholding Dharma within the realm. It also encompassed the duties specific to different social groups (*varnas*), whose harmonious functioning according to their respective Dharmas was considered essential for the well-being of the Rashtra as a whole. The Rashtra, therefore, was conceived as a moral community bound together by the shared pursuit of Dharma.

This emphasis on shared culture, spirituality, and Dharma allowed the concept of Rashtra to function as a powerful unifying force across the vast geographical expanse and diverse population of Bharatavarsha for millennia, even during periods when the subcontinent was politically fragmented into numerous Rajyas. The sense of belonging to a common Bhāratīya civilization, rooted in shared scriptures, epics, pilgrimage networks, and underlying Dharmic values, provided a continuity that political boundaries could not erase. It was this deep-seated consciousness of a unified Rashtra that leaders of the Indian freedom movement, across various ideological spectrums, invoked to mobilize the populace against British colonial rule. The concept of Rashtra is presented as inherently positive and development-oriented, striving for the '*abhyudayam*' (upliftment, prosperity, development) of all its constituents. This contrasts deliberately with interpretations of Western nationalism, which is sometimes depicted as inherently competitive, expansionist, and prone to conflict, born from struggles over territory and power. This normative framing presents the indigenous concept of Rashtra as ethically superior, focused on internal harmony and collective well-being rather than external rivalry.

While primarily cultural and spiritual, the concept of Rashtra certainly possessed territorial dimensions. Ancient texts use the term to denote kingdoms, realms, districts, or countries of varying sizes, sometimes even providing classifications based on the number of

constituent villages (Wisdom Library, "Rashtra Rāṣṭra"). However, the defining essence of Rashtra remained the collective identity of the people, united by culture and Dharma, inhabiting and cherishing a particular territory perceived as sacred. The enduring power of Rashtra as a unifying identity, persisting through centuries of political change, strongly reinforces the central argument of this manuscript: that Bhārata's true continuity lies at the civilizational level, embodied in this enduring cultural-spiritual consciousness, rather than solely in the fluctuating fortunes of political states (Rajyas). The 'real' Bhārata, from this perspective, is the living Rashtra, the cultural nation, which persists regardless of the specific political dispensation governing the territory at any given time. This indigenous model, rooted in shared ethos rather than ethnicity or political contract, offers a unique paradigm for understanding national unity amidst diversity, suggesting that belonging stems from participation in the shared civilizational life and adherence to its core Dharmic values.

Bhārata as a Civilizational State: Theoretical Framework and Application

The conceptualization of Bhārata as a 'civilizational state' provides a powerful theoretical lens through which to understand its unique identity, historical trajectory, and contemporary role in the world. This framework, gaining traction in both academic discourse and political rhetoric, moves beyond the conventional nation-state model to emphasize the deep-rooted cultural and historical foundations that define Bhārata.

The idea of civilizations as significant actors in international relations was notably popularized by the late Samuel P. Huntington in his influential, albeit controversial, "Clash of Civilizations" thesis (Nicholson, Civilization Civilizations Civilizational State). Huntington argued that in the post-Cold War world, the primary sources of conflict would be cultural rather than ideological or economic (Bemidji State University, "Huntington's Evidence"). He defined civilizations as the broadest level of cultural identity short of humanity as a whole "cultures writ large" differentiated by fundamental factors such as history, language, culture, tradition, and, most importantly, religion. Huntington identified several major contemporary civilizations, including Western, Confucian (Sinic), Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and possibly African. While civilizations are primarily cultural entities, they often have political expressions, frequently centered around one or more 'core states'. A 'civilizational state', therefore, can be understood as a state that perceives itself as the primary representative or custodian of a particular civilization, deriving its legitimacy, shaping its identity,

and orienting its domestic and foreign policies based on this deep civilizational heritage. Such states often view their role in global affairs as manifesting their unique historical legacies and cultural ethos.

Increasingly, scholars, commentators, and political leaders apply this 'civilizational state' framework to Bhārata. This perspective highlights Bhārata's exceptionally long and largely unbroken civilizational history, its unique cultural matrix rooted in Sanātana Dharma, and its fundamental distinctiveness from Western historical experiences and political models. Huntington himself explicitly identified a distinct "Hindu civilization," centered geographically and culturally on India. Proponents argue that Bhārata's identity, its internal dynamics, and its engagement with the world cannot be adequately grasped through the lens of a standard post-colonial nation-state; only a civilizational perspective can capture its true depth and complexity. This framing asserts that Bhārata is not merely a country that *has* a civilization, but a country that *is* a civilization manifesting as a state.

A key element of the civilizational state narrative for Bhārata is the emphasis on historical continuity and cultural resilience (Oxford Academic, "Narratives and Aesthetics"). Despite prolonged periods of foreign invasions and colonial rule, particularly under the Mughals and the British, the core civilizational ethos, grounded in Dharmic principles and expressed through myriad cultural forms, is seen as having persisted. This narrative directly counters colonial-era historiography that often denied or downplayed the existence of a pre-colonial pan-Indian unity or civilizational coherence, sometimes portraying India as a mere geographical expression or a fragmented collection of disparate groups only unified by external conquest. The civilizational state framework reclaims and celebrates this deep historical continuity, asserting the antiquity and enduring strength of Bhāratīya identity. It highlights Bhārata's unique philosophical contributions and cosmological perspectives, positioning them as distinct alternatives to the often-assumed universality of Western thought.

This perspective finds strong resonance in the work of contemporary thinkers associated with nationalist viewpoints, who actively advocate for understanding Bhārata through an indigenous, civilizational lens. Figures like the Belgian Indologist Koenraad Elst and the Indian-American researcher Rajiv Malhotra have been influential in articulating this position. They offer sharp critiques of what they perceive as biased or inadequate Western academic scholarship on India, expose alleged historical distortions or negationism (Elst, Wikiquote), and call for a

comprehensive decolonization that extends beyond political independence to encompass intellectual frameworks, cultural narratives, and legal systems (Elst and Deepak, India That Is Bharat). Malhotra, in particular, argues forcefully that Bhārata represents a unique civilization fundamentally different from the West, characterized by principles like Dharma versus history-centrism, integral unity versus synthetic unity, and a different understanding of chaos and order. He warns against the subtle dangers of Western universalism and processes he terms "digestion," whereby Dharmic knowledge and practices are allegedly appropriated, decontextualized, stripped of their Indic roots, and absorbed into Western frameworks, ultimately weakening the source civilization (Malhotra, *Being Different*). Elst similarly critiques the imposition of Western models of secularism and highlights the persistence of colonial-era legal structures as hindering Bhārata's authentic self-expression. The intellectual work of such figures provides substantial support for the Bhārata-centric civilizational state narrative. The adoption of this framework allows nationalist thought to shift the entire basis of discussion about Bhārata's identity. By moving beyond the confines of the 'nation-state' model – often viewed as a Western construct imposed during colonialism – proponents can anchor Bhārata's identity firmly in its ancient Dharmic past. This strategic reframing allows them to assert Bhārata's uniqueness, resist the homogenizing pressures of Western universalism, and potentially deflect or recontextualize critiques based on modern secular or liberal norms by arguing they are external impositions irrelevant to Bhārata's authentic civilizational context.

Malhotra's concept of "digestion" offers a particularly potent tool within this framework for analyzing cultural interactions. It suggests that even seemingly positive Western engagement with Dharmic traditions (like yoga or mindfulness) can be viewed critically. This perspective interprets such engagement not necessarily as genuine appreciation, but as a potentially insidious form of cultural appropriation where practices are detached from their philosophical and cultural matrix, repackaged for Western consumption, and ultimately used in ways that erase their origins and undermine the integrity of the Bhāratīya civilization itself. This adds a layer of vigilance and defensiveness to the encounter between Bhārata and the West.

While proponents champion the civilizational state concept as a means of affirming authentic identity, fostering national pride, and correcting historical Eurocentric biases, the framework is not without its critics or potential downsides. Some scholars warn that emphasizing a singular civilizational identity risks

essentialism – portraying civilizations as monolithic and static entities, thereby overlooking significant internal diversity, historical change, and ongoing cultural hybridization. Specifically in the context of Bhārata, defining the civilization primarily in Hindu or Dharmic terms (The Daily Guardian, "Bharat: An Indic Civilisation State") can raise concerns about the status and inclusion of religious minorities, potentially exacerbating social tensions and creating an "othering" effect within the nation, even as the state seeks a larger role internationally. The assertion of Bhārata as a civilizational state rooted fundamentally in Sanātana Dharma inevitably creates friction with the modern, constitutionally established framework that, while complex, incorporates principles often associated with secularism. This inherent tension fuels much of the contemporary political and ideological contestation regarding the fundamental nature and future direction of the Indian polity. However, within the perspective mandated for this manuscript, the civilizational state model is presented as a positive and necessary step towards reclaiming Bhārata's true self and fulfilling its potential, with the projection of Bhārata as a 'Vishwaguru' or world teacher representing a key aspiration rooted in this civilizational confidence.

Nationalist Institutions and Personalities: Architects of Modern Bhārata

The resurgence of Bhārata's civilizational consciousness in the modern era owes much to the dedicated efforts of specific individuals and institutions that have consistently championed a vision of the nation rooted in its indigenous heritage. In accordance with the specific focus of this manuscript, the contributions highlighted here are those aligned with a nationalist perspective emphasizing civilizational identity, deliberately shifting the focus away from the state-sanctioned narratives often centered on secularist figures prominent in the immediate post-independence era. These nationalist architects, operating both within and outside formal political structures, have played a crucial role in preserving, articulating, and promoting the idea of Bhārata as an enduring cultural and spiritual entity.

A significant contribution comes from intellectuals, writers, and researchers who have provided the philosophical and historical grounding for the civilizational narrative. Contemporary figures like Koenraad Elst and Rajiv Malhotra, despite their external origins or locations, have become influential voices in articulating and defending a perspective aligned with Hindutva or a broader Dharmic civilizational framework. Their work involves challenging dominant Western

academic interpretations of Indian history and culture (Wikipedia, "Rajiv Malhotra"), critiquing the application of concepts like secularism in the Indian context, exposing perceived historical negationism, particularly concerning the impact of Islamic rule, and advocating for a deep intellectual and cultural decolonization. Malhotra's Infinity Foundation serves as an institutional vehicle supporting this project, funding research and publications aimed at correcting perceived misrepresentations of Dharmic traditions and highlighting India's civilizational contributions. This intellectual lineage builds upon earlier nationalist historians like Radhakumud Mookerji, who, even before independence, wrote extensively on the "fundamental unity of India," tracing it back to the spread of what he termed "Aryan Civilization" and emphasizing the deep connection between civilization and geography. Contemporary legal scholars like J. Sai Deepak continue this intellectual tradition, arguing vigorously that Bhārata, even constitutionally through the acknowledgment of the name in Article 1, should be understood fundamentally as an Indic civilization state. These intellectuals construct an alternative narrative of Bhārata's identity, emphasizing its civilizational core over its modern political structure.

Beyond individual scholars, socio-cultural organizations deeply rooted in nationalist ideology have been instrumental in disseminating and cultivating civilizational consciousness at the grassroots level. Organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), explicitly mentioned as advocating for the exclusive use of the name 'Bharat', have worked for decades to instill a sense of national pride, cultural cohesion, and adherence to Dharmic values among the populace. Through extensive networks of local branches (*shakhas*), educational initiatives, social service projects, and cultural programs, these organizations aim to build character, foster discipline, and promote a unified vision of Bhārata based on its ancient heritage. Their sustained efforts contribute significantly to shaping public discourse and nurturing a collective identity aligned with the civilizational state concept. (Specific details require external knowledge beyond snippets).

The growing influence of the civilizational narrative is also evident in the political sphere. The rise to prominence of political parties and leaders who explicitly embrace and articulate this vision marks a significant shift in India's political landscape. Actions taken by recent governments, such as the increased use of the name 'Bharat' in official communications and invitations, the deliberate highlighting of India's ancient democratic traditions (like republican city-states and

local self-governance inscriptions) as precursors to modern democracy, and the active promotion of India's image as a 'Vishwaguru' (world teacher) drawing upon its civilizational wisdom, are all interpreted as clear manifestations of this assertive civilizational turn in state policy. The leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in particular, is viewed by some analysts as representing a critical juncture, marking a departure from what they characterize as the preceding era dominated by secular, Westernized elites, and ushering in an era more aligned with the nation's perceived civilizational ethos (ResearchGate, "Understanding the Indian Civilization State").

This nationalist perspective often involves a significant reinterpretation of history, emphasizing narratives of resilience, indigenous achievement, and resistance against foreign domination. For example, the role of armed revolutionaries in the freedom struggle or the decisive actions of figures like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in integrating the princely states into the Indian Union after 1947 might be given greater prominence compared to the non-violent movement led by Mahatma Gandhi, whose effectiveness in securing independence is sometimes questioned within this framework. Historical accounts focus on the long continuity of Bhāratiya civilization, its inherent strengths, and its ability to withstand and eventually overcome periods of foreign rule. There is often a strong critique of what is seen as politically motivated "negationism" in mainstream historiography, particularly concerning the destructive aspects of medieval Islamic invasions and rule. This re-reading of history aims to build a narrative that fosters national pride and reinforces the idea of an essential, enduring Bhāratiya identity.

While the provided materials offer limited quantitative data, the nationalist narrative readily incorporates available statistics, interpreting them as evidence supporting the civilizational resurgence thesis. For instance, the demographic reality that approximately 80% of India's population identifies as Hindu is often cited to underscore the claim that Bhārata is fundamentally a Hindu civilization state, reflecting the identity of the vast majority of its people. Furthermore, India's significant contemporary achievements – such as becoming one of the world's largest economies (e.g., surpassing the UK to become the fourth largest by some measures in 2023), possessing formidable military capabilities (including nuclear deterrents and advanced delivery systems), achieving success in space exploration, and the prominent role of people of Indian origin in global technology leadership – are interpreted not merely as indicators of modern national development. Instead, they are framed as tangible signs

of the reawakening and reassertion of the inherent strength and potential of the ancient Bhāratiya civilization, particularly under political leadership perceived as being attuned to and drawing upon that civilizational heritage. This interpretation links present-day success directly to the enduring vitality of the civilization, validating both the civilizational state model and the nationalist project aimed at its full realization.

Conclusion: Bhārata's Civilizational Resilience and Future

The long and often tumultuous history of Bhārata serves as a powerful testament to the remarkable resilience of its underlying civilization. Unlike many ancient civilizations that have faded into the annals of history, Bhāratiya civilization has demonstrated an extraordinary capacity to adapt, endure, and maintain its essential character across millennia, navigating periods of profound political change, foreign invasions, and colonial subjugation. This enduring continuity finds its source not in unbroken political empire, but in the persistent vitality of Sanātana Dharma, the sacredness attributed to its geography, the living power of its foundational epics like the Mahābhārata, and the deep-rooted cultural consciousness embodied in the concept of Rashtra. It is this cultural and spiritual core that constitutes the 'eternal' Bhārata.

Crucially, Bhāratiya civilization is presented not as a relic of the past but as a vibrant, *living* entity. Its philosophies continue to inspire, its diverse spiritual practices thrive, its artistic and cultural expressions evolve dynamically, and its core values remain relevant to millions within Bhārata and across the global diaspora. This living quality distinguishes Bhārata, suggesting an inherent vitality and adaptability. This contrasts implicitly with civilizations known primarily through archaeological remains or historical texts, and potentially positions Bhārata favorably against contemporary Western civilization, which some nationalist critiques portray as facing internal crises or a spiritual vacuum. The narrative of Bhārata as a living civilization underscores its ongoing relevance and potential for future contributions.

This is not to suggest an untroubled history or present. The narrative readily acknowledges significant challenges that Bhārata has faced and continues to confront. These include tendencies towards internal fragmentation, often exacerbated by regional, linguistic, or caste-based identities (Malhotra, *We the Nations of India*); the pervasive influence of ideologies perceived as alien or detrimental to Bhārata's core ethos, such as Western cultural universalism, certain interpretations of political secularism, and Marxist thought; and the ongoing struggle against what proponents see as historical negationism or biased portrayals in academia

and media. However, within the framework of civilizational resurgence, these challenges are not seen as insurmountable flaws but as obstacles to be actively overcome through a conscious reclaiming and confident assertion of Bhārata's authentic civilizational identity and Dharmic values.

The Bhāratīya civilizational model, grounded in the principles of Sanātana Dharma, is presented as holding significant relevance for addressing contemporary global issues. Its inherent emphasis on pluralism (within a unifying Dharmic framework), its understanding of the interconnectedness of all life (a precursor to modern ecological consciousness), its stress on duty (*dharma*) and ethical conduct, and its sophisticated inner sciences focused on self-realization and consciousness are seen as offering valuable wisdom for a world grappling with conflict, inequality, environmental degradation, and spiritual malaise. The aspiration for Bhārata to emerge as a 'Vishwaguru' – a global teacher or guide – directly stems from this belief in the universal applicability and profound value of its unique civilizational heritage (Oxford Academic, "What Is a Vishwaguru"). This is not merely a quest for international status, but a perceived responsibility to share its insights for the betterment of humanity. The narrative of resilience, demonstrating survival and wisdom gleaned through millennia of experience, serves to bolster this claim, projecting future strength and leadership potential based on proven historical endurance.

Ultimately, this perspective critiques purely political or secular models of nationhood as fundamentally inadequate for capturing the true essence and potential of Bhārata. Such models, often derived from Western historical experience, are seen as failing to appreciate the deep cultural, spiritual, and historical dimensions that constitute the nation's core identity. The argument posits that only a framework that recognizes Bhārata as a civilizational state, with Sanātana Dharma as its animating spirit, can truly understand its past, navigate its present challenges, and guide its future trajectory.

In a nutshell, this manuscript affirms the unique glory, profound resilience, and enduring global relevance of Bhārata conceived as a civilizational state. It asserts the ontological primacy and cultural authenticity of the name 'Bhārata' over the externally derived 'India'. It highlights Sanātana Dharma not merely as a religion, but as the eternal ethos providing the spiritual and ethical foundation for this ancient and living civilization. By focusing on nationalist institutions and personalities who have championed this vision, and by interpreting

contemporary achievements as signs of civilizational resurgence, it paints a picture of a nation reclaiming its authentic self after centuries of suppression and distortion. The future destiny of Bhārata, from this perspective, lies in fully embracing its civilizational identity, overcoming internal and external challenges through Dharmic principles, and ultimately fulfilling its potential role as a 'Vishwaguru', offering its timeless wisdom to the world.

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