# Narendra Modi and
# India's normative power

IAN HALL[*]

At intervals since independence in 1947, India has aspired to be a 'normative power'—a power that has the authority and influence to define what behaviour is considered normal and acceptable in international affairs.[1] To that end, it played a major role in the 1940s and 1950s in the delegitimation of imperialism, at least as practised and justified by European states, and sought to delegitimize racial discrimination in South Africa and elsewhere.[2] At the same time, India advanced arguments for changes to diplomatic practice in the direction of more open and active diplomacy, especially at the UN.[3] From the early 1950s to the mid-1960s, India also pushed hard—with varied success—for both conventional and nuclear disarmament.[4] From 1960 onwards, moreover, it played a significant role in the development of peacekeeping as an international practice, beginning with its involvement in the Congo.[5]

Over time, however, India's energy and initiative waned, as did its influence as a normative power. During the 1970s, along with other states in the global South, it tried and largely failed to rewrite the rules of the global economic order to redress the imbalance of wealth between developing and developed economies. By the 1980s, India's calls for changes to the normative order of international relations were much diminished, and only occasionally were fresh proposals advanced, such as Rajiv Gandhi's push for universal nuclear disarmament. When the Cold War ended, moreover, India became more of a 'norm taker' than a 'norm

[1] Ian Manners, 'Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms?', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40: 2, 2002, pp. 235–58.
[2] On these processes in general, see Neta Crawford, *Argument and change in world politics: ethics, decolonization and humanitarian intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and Christian Reus-Smit, *Individual rights and the making of the international system* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). On India's role, see Paul F. Power, 'Indian foreign policy: the age of Nehru', *Review of Politics* 26: 2, 1964, pp. 257–86.
[3] Stanley A. Kochanek, 'India's changing role in the United Nations', *Pacific Affairs* 53: 1, 1980, pp. 48–68.
[4] See esp. Jawaharlal Nehru, *India's foreign policy: selected speeches, September 1946–April 1961* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1961), pp. 182–236.
[5] Alan Bullion, 'India and UN peacekeeping operations', *International Peacekeeping* 4: 1, 1997, pp. 98–114.

maker', accommodating it itself (reluctantly) to the new liberal economic order and American hegemony.[6]

Yet some in India have not abandoned the aspiration to make it a 'normative power'.[7] In the past decade, there have been signs that India's elite would like the country to return to that role. Manmohan Singh, who headed the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) governments from 2004 to 2014, argued that India should play a more prominent role in extolling to others in the global South the virtues of democracy and India's distinctive development model.[8] Other prominent Indian politicians and intellectuals have advanced even more expansive visions of India as an advocate for democracy, human rights and inclusive development.[9] For its part, Narendra Modi's government led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which came to power in May 2014, argues that India should become a *vishwaguru* ('world guru') and, in the words of Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, the current Foreign Secretary, a 'leading power' in contemporary international relations—a power equipped with a clear vision of how international affairs ought to be organized, not merely a power that accepts the system as it is.[10] But so far at least, it remains unclear in which areas Modi's government wants to lead, and his 'normative agenda' is vague.[11]

To get a sense of Modi's agenda, this article explores the intellectual resources he could use, and has so far used, to revive and remake 'normative power India' to fit his conception of the role India ought to play in international relations. India's Cold War normative agenda was grounded in a mix of socialist and international-ist ideas first assembled by Nehru and then partially reassembled by his succes-sors. Alternative agendas have been advanced since Nehru's death in 1964, but never with any great success. The majority of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Hindu nationalist political philosophies incorporate descriptions of the values they think ought to inform India's behaviour and that of all states in international relations; but Hindu nationalist thinkers tend to be much more concerned with domestic social issues than with questions of international order, so those descrip-tions are thin, lacking specificity.[12] Modi, for his part, has appealed to another

---

[6] C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: the shaping of India's new foreign policy* (New York: Palgrave, 2003). On 'norm taking', see esp. Amitav Acharya, 'How ideas spread: whose norms matter? Norm localization and institutional change in Asian regionalism', *International Organization* 58: 2, 2004, pp. 239–75.

[7] Ian Hall, 'Normative power India?', in Jamie Gaskarth, ed., *China, India and the future of international society* (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2015), pp. 89–104.

[8] Sanjaya Baru, *The accidental prime minister: the making and unmaking of Manmohan Singh* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2014), pp. 165–6.

[9] See e.g. Shashi Tharoor, *Pax Indica: India and the world of the 21st century* (New Delhi: Allen Lane, 2012).

[10] C. Raja Mohan, *Modi's world: expanding India's sphere of influence* (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2015), p. 198; S. Jaishankar, 'Remarks by Foreign Secretary at the release of Dr C. Raja Mohan's book *Modi's world: expanding India's sphere of influence*', 17 July 2015, http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/25491/ Remarks_by_Foreign_Secretary_at_the_release_of_DrC_Raja_Mohans_book_Modis_WorldExpanding_ Indias_Sphere_of_InfuencequotJuly_17_2015. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 12 Oct. 2016.) The foreign secretary is the administrative head of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA); the minister of external affairs (EAM) is the foreign minister.

[11] Ian Hall, 'Is a "Modi Doctrine" emerging in Indian foreign policy?', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 69: 3, 2015, pp. 247–53.

[12] Ian Hall, 'The persistence of Nehruvianism in India's strategic culture', in Ashley Tellis and Michael Wills, eds, *Strategic Asia 2016–17: comparing strategic cultures in the Asia Pacific* (Washington DC: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2016).

114

source, to the late nineteenth-century Bengali intellectual Swami Vivekananda, as a guide for India's engagements with the world. But while Modi's interpretations of Vivekananda's writings provide some sense of how he might construct a new normative agenda, what it might look like remains unclear, while Modi's government pursues a pragmatic foreign policy that, in the main, puts India's economic and strategic interests first.

## Normative agendas and normative power

What is a 'normative agenda' in international affairs and how does it relate to 'normative power'? A normative agenda lays out the ways in which a state would like international relations to be conducted: the values that it argues ought to inform the behaviour of states and other actors; the rules that it argues ought to govern the interactions between states and their citizens, non-governmental organizations, international institutions and, of course, other states; and the polit-ical, social, economic and cultural institutions that it argues states ought to build, sustain and promote within their borders and beyond them in order to uphold core values and ensure preferred rules are followed. A normative agenda should also outline some means of achieving these aims: an overarching strategy and a set of policies by which a state hopes to realize its preferred international order.[13]

In the most-studied case of 'normative power Europe', the EU is widely acknowledged to have a normative agenda that seeks to promote the spread of peace, democratic governance, the rule of law, social justice and respect for human rights within states with which it interacts and between states, as well as among other international actors.[14] Ian Manners argued that the EU could be considered a 'normative power' because, by his account, it tries to implement this agenda mainly by non-coercive means—by contagion or unintentional diffusion by example; by intentional diffusion through strategic communications; by procedural diffusion through rules and modes of interaction written into international agreements; by transference through conditions placed on development assistance; by overt diffu-sion by EU representatives in diplomatic or even political roles in target states, advocating particular modes of behaviour, rules or institutions; and by influenc-ing in various ways how target elites think about political problems by educating emerging leaders and encouraging cultural change in key decision-making groups.[15]

Critics argue that Manners overstates the extent to which the EU's normative agenda is altruistic, understating its self-interestedness, and that he underplays the coerciveness of some of the instruments the EU uses.[16] But many scholars have found his concept of 'normative power' helpful in analysing the EU's foreign policy, and some have used it to investigate the normative agendas of other states,

---

[13] On norms and international relations, see esp. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International norm dynamics and political change', *International Organization* 52: 4, 1998, pp. 887–917.

[14] See Manners, 'Normative power Europe'. For some critical appraisals of Manners's argument, see R. G. Whit-man, ed., *Normative power Europe: empirical and theoretical perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[15] Manners, 'Normative power Europe', pp. 244–5.

[16] Adrian Hyde-Price, 'Normative power Europe: a realist critique', *Journal of European Public Policy* 13: 2, 2006, pp. 217–34.

investigating the extent to which they can be considered normative powers in their own right. Shaun Breslin has used it, for example, to explore China's preferred international order; Emilian Kavalski has employed it in a recent comparative study of the approaches to security governance of the EU, China and India in central Asia; and Jan Zielonka has examined the normative agendas that help drive American and Russian foreign policy.[17] These and other scholars draw attention to the underlying values and ideas that inform a state's preferred vision of international order, its account of the rules and institutions that ought to underpin that order, and the strategies that these states have for realizing that vision. Together, they argue that a number of states—western and non-western, developed and developing—have distinctive normative agendas that can be explored along the lines that Manners suggests.

The next sections of the present article use this framework to analyse the intellectual underpinnings and core elements of Nehru's normative agenda and those of his successors. The article then explores the Hindu nationalist tradition of thought on international relations, which Modi could use to construct an alternative agenda, and the thought of Swami Vivekananda, to which Modi has explicitly appealed in speeches on foreign policy. The last part examines the evidence for an emerging new normative agenda under Modi's leadership.

## The foundations of Nehruvian normative power

Under Jawaharlal Nehru, prime minister from 1947 until his death in 1964, India carved out a distinctive place in the rapidly changing international order of the postwar years, advocating internationalism as an alternative to realist power politics, promoting human rights, denouncing racism, pushing hard for the decolonization of the European empires, playing peacemaker, and advocating conventional and nuclear disarmament.[18]

The intellectual underpinnings of this normative agenda, constructed by Nehru, were radical and liberal—an amalgam of British socialist ideas and Indian concepts derived especially from Buddhism and the idiosyncratic ideas of Mohandas Gandhi. From British socialist thought, Nehru derived a theory of international relations and a critique of the existing, western-dominated postwar international order, which he perceived as profoundly unequal, divided on racial lines, involving the economic exploitation of non-western peoples by the European imperial powers, and corrosive, encouraging imperialistic 'power politics' instead of cooperation.[19]

Nehru's vision of the international order he hoped would replace the existing one was derived largely from Indian sources, mainly from Gandhi's syncretic

[17] Shaun Breslin, 'The soft notion of China's "soft power"', Chatham House Asia Programme Paper, ASP PP 2011/03, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Asia/0211pp_breslin.pdf; Emilian Kavalski, *Central Asia and the rise of the normative powers: contextualising the security governance of the European Union, China and India* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012); Jan Zielonka, 'The EU as international actor: unique or ordinary?', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 16: 3, 2011, pp. 281–301.

[18] Priya Chacko, *Indian foreign policy: the politics of postcolonial identity from 1947 to 2004* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 19–106.

[19] See Jawaharlal Nehru, *The discovery of India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2004; first publ. 1946), pp. 44–5, 597–613.

blend of elements of Buddhism and Hinduism.[20] To justify his advocacy of 'peaceful coexistence', for example, written into the Panchsheel agreement made with China in April 1954, and later extended to the Non-Aligned Movement, he cited the authority of the ancient Buddhist king Ashoka.[21] Nehru also repeatedly invoked Gandhi's injunctions not to let fear drive India's foreign policy, to apply moral tests to the means as well as the ends of political action, and to be mindful that unjust arrangements perpetuate cycles of violence.[22]

Together, these ideas shaped a 'national role conception' for India, designed to explain to both domestic and foreign audiences why it acted as it did in international affairs, and to frame its normative agenda.[23] That agenda had five parts. First, India committed itself to uphold the basic principles of international law enshrined in the UN Charter, especially respect for sovereignty, non-intervention and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and opposition to the use of war except in self-defence or in response to requests from the UN Security Council. Second, India aimed to delegitimize the practice of imperialism, as it had been used by European states in Africa, the Americas and Asia since the early modern period. Third, it aimed to delegitimize political institutions grounded in racial discrimination, notably in South Africa. Fourth, it aimed to strengthen international agreements concerning the need to respect and protect human rights. Fifth, it determined to stand aloof from balance of power politics and eschew military alliances to demonstrate that alternative foreign and strategic policy choices were available to post-colonial and developed states alike. Together, Nehru believed, decolonization, ending racial discrimination, respecting human rights and eschewing alliances would remove the sources of conflict in contemporary international relations. At the same time, India also sought conventional and nuclear disarmament, as well as to use the UN and unconventional diplomatic activism, including what later became known as 'shuttle diplomacy', to broker peace settlements and to keep the peace once brokered.[24]

This agenda was pursued by means similar to those identified by Manners as the instruments by which 'normative power Europe' seeks to bring about change in states with which it engages and in the rules, norms and practices of the contemporary international order. Nehru used the platforms provided by the UN and the emerging global media for declaratory communications, to diffuse his ideas about a better international order to diplomatic and public audiences. He also invested in public diplomacy, through the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, for example, with state-run media broadcasts, over the All-India Radio network

---

[20] In this context see Paul F. Power, *Gandhi on world affairs* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960).
[21] Nehru, 'The concept of Panchsheel', speech to the Lok Sabha, 17 Sept. 1954, in his *India's foreign policy*, pp. 101–2.
[22] Nehru, 'A crisis of spirit', speech broadcast 3 April 1948, in his *India's foreign policy*, p. 182.
[23] K. J. Holsti, 'National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy', *International Studies Quarterly* 14: 3, 1970, pp. 233–309.
[24] For a balanced, brief assessment of Nehru's approach, see Andrew B. Kennedy, 'Nehru's foreign policy: realism and idealism conjoined', in David M. Malone, C. Raja Mohan and Srinath Raghavan, eds, *The Oxford handbook of Indian foreign policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 92–103.

117

in particular, into neighbouring states in south Asia, and by traditional pamphleteering and persuasion through India's embassies.[25] His diplomats were encouraged to behave as activists; at the same time, former anti-imperial activists, like V. K. Krishna Menon, were made senior diplomats.[26] Nehru used conference diplomacy, from the 1947 Asia Relations Conference onwards, to try to spread new norms of behaviour among the elites of decolonized and soon-to-be-decolonized states. And he tried to institutionalize certain key norms, in the Panchsheel agreement, and in proposed and agreed UN General Assembly resolutions or disarmament deals.[27]

In these ways, under Nehru, normative power India tried to be a 'norm entrepreneur' in international relations and to persuade other states to support its agenda.[28] It helped generate major changes in the postwar international order, playing a major role in ending European imperialism, pressuring states to set aside political institutions grounded in racism, challenging norms of diplomatic behaviour, developing peacekeeping as an international practice and promoting arms control, especially in laying the groundwork for the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty.[29] India was not, of course, completely successful in this role. Over time, its inability properly to address its domestic governance and development challenges weakened its claims, in the eyes of western and other observers, to the moral high ground, as did diplomatic mis-steps, such as its failure unequivocally to condemn the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary. Together, these acts of omission and commission undermined India's capacity to bring about normative change at the international level. Moreover, Nehru's unwillingness to bind India too closely to the communist bloc undermined the country's capacity to position itself as a leader of the post-colonial world, leading to its replacement, from the mid-1950s onwards, by a group of more radical states run by less scrupulous leaders—most notably China, Egypt and Indonesia.[30] By the mid-1960s, as a result, India's influence was diminished.

## Normative agendas after Nehru

Under Nehru's successors, Indian foreign policy continued to seek to advance normative agendas, but as India's leaders were forced to concentrate on pressing national security challenges and to address flagging progress in economic development, their perspective narrowed. Lal Bahadur Shastri, prime minister for 18 months after Nehru's death in late May 1964, was a committed Gandhian, but had to take a more realist line in foreign policy in office to manage the aftermath of the 1962 border war with China, Beijing's nuclear weapons test in 1964,

---

[25] Ian Hall, 'India's new public diplomacy: soft power and the limits of government action', *Asian Survey* 42: 6, 2012, pp. 1098–1102.

[26] Ian Hall, '"Mephistopheles in a Savile Row Suit": V. K. Krishna Menon and the West', in Ian Hall, ed., *Radicals and reactionaries in twentieth century international thought* (New York: Palgrave, 2015), p. 202.

[27] See Hall, 'Normative power India', pp. 94–7.

[28] On 'norm entrepreneurship', see Finnemore and Sikkink, 'International norm dynamics and political change'.

[29] See esp. Power, 'Indian foreign policy'.

[30] Michael Edwardes, 'Illusion and reality in India's foreign policy', *International Affairs* 41: 1, 1965, pp. 50–51.

118

and two attacks on Indian territory by Pakistan in 1965. Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, who became prime minister in January 1966 and governed India for most of the next 18 years until 1984, was more disposed to play power politics, and less concerned with trying to play a leading role in international affairs.[31] Instead of pursuing a broad normative agenda, she focused on a few key causes, such as protecting the global environment, on which she made a major address to the landmark UN conference in Stockholm in 1972, or promoting the rights of the Palestinians.[32] Rajiv Gandhi, prime minister between 1984 and 1989, also practised selective engagement on normative issues, initiating, for example, an 'Action Plan' for global nuclear disarmament in June 1988.[33]

During the 1990s, many of the aims and methods of Indian foreign policy underwent significant change, but India did not advance a new normative agenda: indeed, it became more of a 'reluctant power' than a normative power.[34] India resisted—sometimes quite vocally—core elements of the new liberal international order that began to emerge in the 1970s, with its emphases on the protection and promotion of human rights by the US and other western states, the democratization of hitherto authoritarian states and a new liberal economic agenda.[35] This resistance gave rise to the criticism that India had become a conservative rather than a progressive force.[36] India's sometimes repressive responses to internal security challenges, especially in Kashmir in the 1990s, its 1998 nuclear weapons tests, and its opposition to western efforts to promote democracy, liberalize the global economy and intervene in humanitarian crises reinforced this impression.[37]

This is not to say that there was no discussion among senior Indian politicians and analysts of the possibility of the country's becoming a normative power once more. There was. Manmohan Singh and Pranab Mukherjee suggested, for example, that India should become a 'synthesizing power', sitting at the crossroads between civilizations and making best use of its cross-cultural negotiation skills. They and others voiced the view that India was 'a unique force for global peace and an exemplar of moral conduct', in the Nehruvian sense, as well as a 'knowledge leader' skilled in information technology. The notion of India as an 'alternative power' was advanced by figures as diverse as Shivshankar Menon and Yashwant Sinha, who conceived of it as a different kind of state from the norm

[31] J. N. Dixit, *Makers of India's foreign policy: Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Yashwant Sinha* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2004), pp. 117–47. Indira Gandhi was prime minister from 1966 to 1977 and then again from 1980 until 1984, when she was assassinated by two Sikh bodyguards in revenge for her assault on the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

[32] Pranay Gupte, *Mother India: a political biography of Indira Gandhi*, rev. edn (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2009; first publ. 1992), p. 5.

[33] See Chacko, *Indian foreign policy*, pp. 154–7; Harish Kapur, 'India's foreign policy under Rajiv Gandhi', *Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 76: 304, 1987, pp. 476–7.

[34] Sandra Destradi, 'Reluctance in international politics: a conceptualization', *European Journal of International Relations* (forthcoming), DOI: 10.1177/1354066116653665.

[35] Andrew Hurrell, 'Hegemony, liberalism and global order: what space for would-be great powers?', *International Affairs* 82: 1, Jan. 2006, pp. 1–19.

[36] Ramesh Thakur, 'India in the world: neither rich, powerful, nor principled', *Foreign Affairs* 76: 4, 1997, pp. 15–23.

[37] For a useful discussion, see Xenia Dormandy, 'Is India, or will it be, a responsible international stakeholder?', *Washington Quarterly* 30: 3, 2011, pp. 117–30.

in international relations, with a different approach to foreign policy from that practised by most states.[38] Similar ideas can be found in the *Nonalignment 2.0* paper produced by a group of leading thinkers and practitioners in the dying days of the second Congress-led UPA administration, which governed from 2009 to 2014; but, despite much debate, they did not coalesce into a coherent programme of action.[39] And among Hindu nationalists, too, there has long been discussion about the proper role that India ought to play and what normative agenda it ought to promote.

## The limitations of the Hindu nationalist tradition

Modi and his government wish to make India a *vishwaguru* and a 'leading power', but on the whole, as Hindu nationalists opposed to Congress political ideas and policies, they reject the normative agenda set out by Nehru. Instead, they seek an alternative grounded in the Hindu nationalist tradition of thought. But, as Pratap Bhanu Mehta has observed, the intellectual resources available to Indian leaders wishing to construct an alternative foreign policy to the Nehruvian one laid out in the post-colonial period—or, indeed, a new normative agenda—are limited.[40] In the Hindu nationalist tradition they are arguably more limited still, as most of its key thinkers have concentrated far more on domestic politics (especially social and cultural issues) and relations with Muslims in general (or Pakistan in particular) than on global issues. Where they do focus on international relations, Hindu nationalist thinkers tend to talk in terms of civilizational relations rather than interstate relations, and in religious rather than political categories, making it hard to assess them in terms of conventional international relations theories and hard to understand what they might contribute to foreign policy.[41] Moreover, some of the key ideas about international relations expressed by the founding fathers of Hindu nationalism, including V. D. Savarkar (1883–1966) and M. S. Golwalkar (1906–1973), were similar to Nehru's, despite their different starting assumptions.[42]

These early to mid-twentieth-century nationalists were concerned with international relations in so far as they sought an explanation for the past subjugation

---

[38] Kate Sullivan, 'India's ambivalent projection of self as a global power: between compliance and resistance', in Kate Sullivan, ed., *Competing visions of India as global power: India's rise beyond the West* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), pp. 24–31.

[39] Sunil Khilnani, Rajiv Kumar, Pratab Bhanu Mehta, Prakash Menon, Nandan Nilekani, Srinath Raghavan, Shyam Saran and Siddarth Varadarajan, *Nonalignment 2.0* (New Delhi: Centre for Policy Research, 2012). The document and responses are at http://www.cprindia.org/research/reports/nonalignment-20-foreign-and-strategic-policy-india-twenty-first-century.

[40] Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 'Still under Nehru's shadow? The absence of foreign policy frameworks in India', *India Review* 8: 3, 2009, pp. 209–33.

[41] See esp. Rahul Sagar, 'State of mind: what kind of power will India become?', *International Affairs* 85: 4, July 2009, pp. 806–10.

[42] Vinayek Damodar Savarkar is best known for his anti-British history of the 1857 uprising, *The Indian war of independence* (1909), and his short book on what he took to be the essence of Hinduism, *Hindutva* (1923). Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar was the second leader of the Hindu nationalist organization Rashtriya Swayamsevek Sangh (RSS). His political thought can be found in *We, or our nationhood defined* (1939) and *Bunch of thoughts* (1966). On Savarkar, see Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: exploring the idea of Hindu nationalism* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003); on Golwalkar, see Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu nationalist movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

of Hindus by Muslim and then British invaders—an explanation for the weakness of Hindu society and the strength of the incomers. They were realists in so far as they recognized war as a perennial feature of international relations, born (in Savarkar's philosophical anthropology) of the inherent 'parochialism and selfishness' of human beings, which generated conflicts and necessitated struggles for the 'survival of the fittest'.[43] But they also believed that conflict between societies and states could be transcended, making them—like Nehru—internationalists of sorts.

As Rahul Sagar notes, Savarkar looked forward to the eventual creation of a 'universal state embracing all mankind' that was 'the real Motherland and Fatherland of man'.[44] 'Humanity', Savarkar argued, is 'a higher patriotism'.[45] This was not to say that all cultures were the same or should merge into one: Savarkar merely argued that conflict between them could be avoided by mutual recognition and mutual respect, learned from Hinduism. For his part, Golwalkar also yearned for human unity, which he argued was the dream of ancient Hindus.[46] The 'aggrandizement of power-drunk nations', he insisted, would ultimately be overcome by a transcendentalist search for the 'Inner Bond' that exists between all people, leading to the obvious political solution: a 'World State'.[47] Hindus should guide others along this path—for they 'stand' for a 'harmonious synthesis among nations and not their obliteration'. But Hindus could only do this once they had rediscovered their confidence, and India its national power.[48] To those ends, Golwalkar insisted that Hindus needed to recover their 'manliness' and fighting spirit, instead of embracing Gandhi's Buddhist-inspired approach of passivity and non-violence.[49]

These kinds of ideas find echoes in the work of later Hindu nationalists, such as Deendayal Upadhyaya (1916–68), whose four lectures on *Integral humanism* (1965) became the basis for the political platform of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the forerunner of the BJP, in the late 1960s and 1970s. Upadhyaya lamented the fact that for much of modern history Hindus had been, as he put it, unable to 'contribute to world progress', since their attention had been too often 'engaged in fighting for independence or staving off new hordes of invaders'. But their time was coming. The West, he observed, was riven by tensions generated by the contradictory forces of nationalism, democracy and socialism, and the two attempts the West had made at achieving 'world unity'—the League of Nations and the UN—had 'for a variety of reasons … not succeeded'.[50] The western intellectual tendency to divide and compartmentalize produced conflicting ideas

---

[43] Rahul Sagar, '"Jiski lathi, uski bhains": the Hindu nationalist view of international politics', in Kanti Bajpai, Saira Basit and V. Krishnappa, eds, *India's grand strategy: history, theory, cases* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), pp. 240–41. The phrase 'survival of the fittest' was used by Savarkar.
[44] Savarkar, quoted in Sagar, '"Jiski lathi, uski bhains"', pp. 238–9.
[45] Sagar, '"Jiski lathi, uski bhains"', p. 239.
[46] Golwalkar, quoted in Sagar, '"Jiski lathi, uski bhains"', p. 242.
[47] Golwalkar, quoted in Sagar, '"Jiski lathi, uski bhains"', p. 243.
[48] M. S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of thoughts*, 3rd edn (Bangalore: Sahitya Sindhu Prakashana, 1996; first publ. 1966), p. 6.
[49] See esp. part 4 of Golwalkar's *Bunch of thoughts*, on 'Moulding men' (pp. 389–463).
[50] Deendayal Upadhyaya, *Integral humanism*, ch. 1, originally delivered as a lecture on 22 April 1965, http://www.bjp.org/about-the-party/philosophy/?u=integral-humanism.

121

about social organization, while the western view that one way of living will eventually win out in a 'survival of the fittest' had exacerbated these conflicts.[51]

'Bharatiya culture', as Upadhyaya termed it, offered an alternative.[52] It recognized the 'truth' that there can be 'unity in diversity' and the 'expression of unity in various forms'. Moreover, it acknowledged that what 'sustains life on this earth' is 'mutual co-operation' or 'mutual sustenance'—this was evident in nature, in the relationships between plants and animals, as well as in social relations. Hindus, Upadhyaya argued, needed to channel these natural truths 'according to the principles of Dharma'—with *dharma* translated as 'law', not (as it sometimes is) as 'religion'—which should regulate political and personal life.[53] When *dharma* was in decline, 'the "might is right" philosophy prevailed', as it has done in contemporary times, under western dominance; but should Hindus establish a 'Dharma Rajya'—a polity in which *dharma* rules—an alternative mode of politics and international relations would be possible.[54]

While paying lip service to earlier Hindu nationalist thinkers, Hindu nationalist politicians, including prominent leaders such as L. K. Advani and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, as well as journalists and intellectuals such as Subramanian Swamy and Tarun Vijay, have generally preferred realist foreign policies to their idealism. As Chris Ogden has shown, BJS manifestos of the 1960s and 1970s drew on Upadhyaya for guidance on domestic issues, but much less for foreign policy. That, they argued, should be 'guided solely by considerations of national interests'.[55] When the BJP came into government in 1998, these realist tendencies were strengthened as the conduct of foreign policy came under the influence of the former military officer and Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh and the diplomat and National Security Adviser Brajesh Misra.[56] These practitioners argued that India's military power must be strengthened and a robust nuclear deterrent developed, with pragmatism as the best guide to foreign and security policy.

Prior to the 2014 election, these realist ideas surfaced in the language the BJP used about foreign policy, albeit balanced with a new emphasis on building India's 'soft power' as well as its 'hard power'. Modi stated that his foreign policy would follow Vajpayee's blend of what he called *shanti* (peace) and *shakti* (power).[57] The BJP's manifesto talked of building 'comprehensive national security', including

[51] Upadhyaya, *Integral humanism*, ch. 2, originally delivered as a lecture on 23 April 1965, http://www.bjp.org/about-the-party/philosophy/?u=integral-humanism. Here Upadhyaya echoes Golwalkar, who also pointed to the failure of the League and the UN to overcome nationalism (*Bunch of thoughts*, p. 3).

[52] Upadhyaya preferred to use the nominally more inclusive term *Bharatiya* (that is, belonging to Bharat/India) rather than *Hindutva* ('Hindu-ness') to describe his preferred culture.

[53] Upadhyaya, *Integral humanism*, ch. 2. Upadhyaya puts this in terms of *dharma* regulating *artha* (that is, political and social policy) and *kama* (personal wants), and in turn allowing *artha* to work effectively and *kama* to be satisfied.

[54] Upadhyaya, *Integral humanism*, ch. 3, originally delivered as a lecture on 24 April 1965, http://www.bjp.org/about-the-party/philosophy/?u=integral-humanism.

[55] Quoted in Christopher Ogden, *Hindu nationalism and the evolution of contemporary Indian security: portents of power* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 59. On BJS policy positions, see pp. 59–61.

[56] Stephen Philip Cohen, *India: emerging power* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2002), pp. 44–7. Jaswant Singh's philosophy is set out in *Defending India* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) and *In service of emergent India: a call to honour* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

[57] Teresita C. Schaffer and Howard Schaffer, 'India: Modi's international profile', Brookings Brief, 12 Dec. 2013, http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2013/12/12-modi-foreign-policy-schaffer.

strengthened anti-terrorist measures, intelligence agencies, and police, as well as modernizing India's defence industry and armed forces. It pledged to 'deal with cross border terrorism with a firm hand', to revise India's nuclear doctrine, and to 'build a strong, self-reliant and self-confident India, regaining its rightful place in the comity of nations', making alliances where necessary—a potentially signifi-cant promise, given India's longstanding wariness of alliances and preferences for non-alignment and 'strategic autonomy'.[58] At the same time, the manifesto also emphasized 'soft power', designed to restore India to its proper place as *vishwaguru*. To Murli Manohar Joshi, the veteran politician who drafted the manifesto's preface, this effort should involve the development of a 'socio-economic and political paradigm of governance', derived from the 'clear vision of the civili-zational consciousness of India', held by (among others) Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mohandas Gandhi, Aurobindo Ghose, Vallabhbhai Patel and Subhas Chandra Bose, which could be exported to other states.

These kinds of ideas are underpinned by a conception of a Hindu India as what Kanti Bajpai has called a 'civilisation-state'. They reflect a distinctive under-standing of international relations as defined by civilizational politics rather than by mere sovereign states—albeit one that prescribes for these 'civilisation-states' the conduct of a mostly realist foreign policy.[59] The work of the Hindu nation-alist economist and politician Subrahmanian Swamy (b. 1939) provides a useful insight into this thinking. For him, international relations ought to be conceived primarily in terms of cultural interactions, not political ones, and cultural threats, as well as political or military threats. As a result, he has a different view of 'India's rise' from the conventional, optimistic one. While acknowledging that economic growth and military modernization mean the Indian state is getting stronger, Swamy argues that, by contrast, 'Hindu society today is in the process of becoming fragmented' because it is being undermined by foreign cultural influ-ences. In this way, Hindus 'are being systematically prepared for psychological enslavement and conceptual capture'.[60] To combat this, Swamy thinks India must rewrite its history and remake itself as 'Hindustan'; introduce market reforms, but resist westernization; build military power for India's security, the 'recovery of lost territories' and the defence of the human rights of all persons of Indian origin; and promote the Sanskrit language and Devanagari script to connect all Indians to their culture.[61] India could thus produce a Hindu Renaissance that would enable it to stand alongside other great civilizations.[62]

Hindu nationalist thinking about international relations thus provides only limited resources for constructing an alternative normative agenda for India. In the main, the tradition is inward-looking, focused on recovering Hindu 'manliness',

---

[58] Bharatiya Janata Party, *Ek Bharat, shreshtha Bharat: sabka saath, sabka vikas* (New Delhi, 2014), pp. 38–40.
[59] Kanti Bajpai, 'India's grand strategy: six schools of thought', in Bajpai, Basit and Krishnappa, eds, *India's grand strategy*, p. 130. This idea echoes the Chinese nationalist concept of 'civilizational states' in Zhang Weiwei, *The China wave: rise of a civilizational state* (Shanghai: World Century Publishing, 2012).
[60] Subramanian Swamy, *Hindus under siege: the way out* (New Delhi: Har-Anand, 2007), pp. 26, 28.
[61] Swamy, *Hindus under siege*, p. 98.
[62] For a similar agenda, see also Tarun Vijay, *Saffron surge: India's re-emergence on the global scene and Hindu ethos* (New Delhi: Har-Anand, 2007) and *India battles to win* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2009).

123

managing India's Muslim minority, protecting traditional communities and beliefs from foreign influences, or bringing about a Hindu Renaissance. It emphasizes civilizational interactions rather than those of states, advancing concepts like 'transcendental globalism', in Savarkar and Golwalkar's international thought, that are arguably as idealistic as Nehru's socialist internationalism. When it comes to the conduct of foreign policy in the here and now, however, it tends to emphasize realist power politics—the cultivation of military power and the use of force when provoked or when necessary to achieve global recognition of the greatness of India/Hindustan. Above all, it does not set out anything approaching a coherent normative agenda for change in the existing international order. Rather, it looks beyond that order to an imagined future in which all cultures, accepting Hindu truths, will live in harmony.

## Modi and Vivekananda

A member of the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevek Sangh (RSS: National Volunteer Organisation) since his youth and a prominent force in the BJP since the 1980s, Modi is steeped in the Hindu nationalist intellectual tradition. He knows the thought of Golwalkar, Savarkar and Upadhyaya well. He has published a book, *Jyotipunj* (2007), celebrating the lives, thought and actions of leading Hindu nationalists.[63] But Modi's own thinking on international relations—and indeed politics more broadly—is not clearly indebted to that tradition. During his time as chief minister of Gujarat, Modi appealed to others as tutelary heroes, notably to two fellow Gujaratis: Gandhi and the so-called 'Iron Man of India', Sardar Vallab-hbhai Patel.[64] He was particularly assiduous in cultivating Patel's legacy, despite the latter having been a Congress Party member, praising his robust approach to Pakistan's military adventurism in Kashmir in 1947–8 and his subsequent advice to Nehru to take a harder line with the People's Republic of China.[65] In 2010, as a sign of his devotion, Modi helped initiate the construction of a giant 182-metre statue of Patel—called the 'Statue of Unity'—near Vadodara in Gujarat.[66]

As Modi began to emerge as a potential prime ministerial candidate, however, he began to cultivate a softer public image, and appealed increasingly often to a different authority: Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902).[67] Some of the clutch of Modi biographies that appeared immediately before and after his election—not all of which are wholly reliable—suggest a longstanding personal concern with the work of

---

[63] Narendra Modi, *Jyotipunj* (New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan, 2007), http://www.narendramodi.in/ebooks/jyotipunj-english.

[64] On Modi's claim to the legacies of Gandhi and Patel, see A. M. Shah, Pravin J. Patel and Lancy Lobo, 'A heady mix: Gujarati and Hindu pride', *Economic and Political Weekly* 43 : 8, 2008, pp. 19–22. Patel was Nehru's deputy prime minister until his death in December 1950.

[65] Patel's thinking about China is admired by Hindu nationalists. See e.g. Arun Shourie, *Self-deception: India's China policies* (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2013). Shourie is a journalist who earlier served as minister for telecommunication and information technology (2002–4).

[66] Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, *Narendra Modi: the man, the times* (Chennai: Tranquebar, 2013), p. 39.

[67] Ramesh Menon, *Modi demystified: the making of a prime minister* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2014), pp. 79–168. On Modi and Vivekananda, see also Pankaj Mishra, 'Narendra Modi and the new face of India', *Guardian*, 16 May 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/16/what-next-india-pankaj-mishra.

the Bengali intellectual. The most sympathetic ones narrate that Modi first became interested in his near namesake—Vivekananda's given name was Narendranath (or Narendra or Naren) Datta—as a boy. Some relate that when Modi left his family (and a woman to whom he was betrothed) at the age of 18, and went wandering India for almost two years, he travelled first to the Ramakrishna Mission, the religious foundation Vivekananda created at Belur Math, Kolkata, supposedly with the intention of becoming a monk.[68] Modi was apparently turned away, and told to commit himself to social work instead of a religious life—advice in line with Vivekananda's teaching about the importance of active as well as contemplative lives.[69]

Whether or not these stories are credible, it is the case that since the early 2010s Modi has made repeated public appeals to Vivekananda as a guide and inspiration in his political life, in parallel with his broader effort to soften his image from that of an aggressive hard-line nationalist to that of a *vikas purush* ('development man') and more inclusive national leader.[70] Prior to the 2012 Gujarat state elections, he organized the Vivekananda Yuva Yath Ratra pilgrimage to encourage young people to take an interest in Vivekananda, but also to demonstrate his own devotion.[71] For all of 2012, Modi tweeted daily quotes from Vivekananda.[72] In 2013, Modi travelled to Belur Math again, this time to display his commitment publicly by meditating in the monk's cell. And since becoming prime minister, Modi has worked to maintain the connection. He visited Belur Math once again, in May 2015; he unveiled a statue of Vivekananda at the Ramakrishna Mission in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in November 2015; and his speeches since coming to power are littered with references to the Bengali's thought.[73]

Modi is not, of course, alone in appealing to Vivekananda or using his ideas to ground arguments in support of certain domestic or foreign policies. Earlier Hindu nationalists, including Golwalkar, were inspired by his thought; but Vivekananda's stock has risen significantly among the Hindu right in recent years.[74] In 2009 the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) think-tank was founded in New Delhi by retired civil servants, military officers and intelligence chiefs aligned with Hindu nationalist groups. Like Modi, as we shall see, the VIF aims to promote Vivekananda as a 'truly global citizen' and 'global guru', with a vision of a 'strong and vibrant India', pursuing 'modernization alongside spiritual development', that could 'once again be a global leader in the market place of ideas'.[75]

---

[68] Andy Marino, *Narendra Modi: a political biography* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2014), pp. 25–9; Menon, *Modi demystified*, pp. 5–6.

[69] Sudesh K. Verma, *Narendra Modi: the game changer* (New Delhi: Vitasta, 2014), p. 15.

[70] Marino, *Narendra Modi*, p. 187; and Mukhopadhyay, *Narendra Modi*, pp. 271–2, 288.

[71] Narendra Modi, 'Embarking on "Swami Vivekananda Yuva Vikas Yatra": CM blogs on 9/11', http://www. narendramodi.in/embarking-on-swami-vivekananda-yuva-vikas-yatra'-cm-blogs-on-911-3076.

[72] 'The tale of two Narendras: Narendra Modi and Swami Vivekananda', *The Statesman*, 4 July 2016, http://www. thestatesman.com/news/india/the-tale-of-two-narendras-narendra-modi-and-swami-vivekananda/152114. html#IddhWTy4ZHktFuuH.99.

[73] See e.g. Narendra Modi, 'A strong India–US partnership can anchor peace, prosperity and stability across the world', speech to joint sitting of Congress, 8 June 2016, http://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-addresses-joint-meeting-of-u-s-congress-in-washington-dc-484217.

[74] Jyotirmaya Sharma, *A restatement of religion: Swami Vivekananda and the making of Hindu nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

[75] 'Vivekananda—contemporary relevance', VIF website, http://www.vifindia.org/svContemporary.

## Hinduism, India and *karma-yoga*

Vivekananda is best known for having travelled to the so-called Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893 to present the case for Hinduism.[76] Born into a wealthy Bengali family, he completed a degree in (western) philosophy at the prestigious General Assembly's Institution (now the Scottish Church College) in Kolkata. When he was 21, however, his father died and the family was left poor. He turned to a mystic, Swami Ramakrishna, for spiritual support, and eventually became a monk. In 1885, after Ramakrishna's death, Vivekananda founded the mission that bears his name in honour of his mentor, but soon thereafter left Kolkata to walk through India as a wandering holy man. In 1893 he was persuaded by the Raja of Madurai, Ramnad Bhaskara Sethupathi, to go to Chicago, where he was acclaimed as the foremost advocate of Hinduism to western audiences of the age.[77]

Vivekananda's thought was unorthodox, or at least representative of only a segment of contemporary Hindus. Like the Theosophists who inspired Gandhi and Nehru early in their lives, but without the desire to incorporate Hinduism into a bigger, syncretic religion, Vivekananda argued that its essence was to be found in the Vedas, in particular in the *Upanishads*, which set out Vedic philosophy, and in that part of the *Mahabharata* known as the *Bhagavad Gita*, which addresses *dharma* (loosely, 'duty') and ethics. He urged that India re-engage with both texts, setting aside or seeing in their proper context later ideas and customs that had come to dominate Hindu belief and practice, and concentrate on cultivating spirituality.[78] That was how India could recover its place in the world, Vivekananda argued, for 'political greatness or military power has never been the mission of our race. But there is another mission that has been given to us, which is to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate … all the spiritual energy of the race' and let it 'pour forth … on the world'.[79]

Vivekananda believed that 'above all, what the world needs from India is the idea of the harmony and acceptance of all religions, so that fanaticism and religious wars may not mar the life of man and the progress of civilization'.[80] Hinduism, he asserted, promoted the 'universal acceptance' of other beliefs and 'the grand idea of the spiritual oneness of the world' that is 'the eternal sanction of all morality'.[81] But Vivekananda argued that much work needed to be done to improve India and the lot of Indians, so that the country could become the *vishwaguru* it ought to be, and spread this message. It was not enough for Hindus to live the contemplative life. What was needed was a more active approach: '*karma–yoga*' or the 'yoga of action'—practical action in the world to right wrongs and alleviate social ills, as

[76] As Modi has repeatedly observed, Vivekananda began to make his case in Chicago on 11 Sept. 1893, the same day as the terrorist attacks on the US in 2001. See e.g. Modi, 'Embarking on "Swami Vivekananda Yuva Vikas Yatra"'.
[77] For an excellent, but controversial, study of Vivekananda, see Sharma, *A restatement of religion*.
[78] Swami Tapasyananda, 'Swami Vivekananda's theory of Indian nationalism', in *The nationalistic and religious lectures of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1990), p. xi.
[79] *Nationalistic and religious lectures*, p. 13.
[80] *Nationalistic and religious lectures*, p. 17.
[81] *Nationalistic and religious lectures*, p. 39.

126

well as to give spiritual knowledge to others within India and beyond its borders.[82] Through *karma-yoga*, India's social development could be achieved, and its mission to the world realised.

## Modi, Vivekananda and India's normative agenda

Modi has made use of elements of Vivekananda's legacy in multiple contexts over the past few years, first as Gujarat's chief minister, and latterly as prime minister. To connect with younger voters, for example, Modi has used the *Vivekananda Yuva Yath Ratra*—a pilgrimage punctuated with rallies—to cast Vivekananda, who achieved what he did before an early death aged only 39, as a youth icon. Modi has also self-consciously represented himself as a *karma-yogi*—an active, viceless, single-minded, strong, constantly labouring, selfless worker for others and for the betterment of India, following the principles of Vivekananda's model of social work as religious devotion.[83] And, importantly, Modi has drawn on Vivekananda repeatedly in efforts to outline and justify elements of his approach to foreign policy, offering his vision of India as *vishwaguru* as an implicit alternative to the post-colonial Nehruvian vision of India as an internationalist normative power. In his first Independence Day speech as prime minister, for example, delivered at the Red Fort in Delhi on 15 August 2014, Modi quoted Vivekananda's vision of 'Mother India seated as the World Guru', arguing to Indians that 'it is incumbent upon us to realize that dream'.[84]

How, then, is Modi seeking to realize that vision, and what will *vishwaguru* India teach? Most commentators agree that the most remarkable aspect of his conduct of India's foreign policy to date is simply the 'personal energy' he has devoted to it.[85] This is clearest in the sheer number of foreign visits Modi undertook in his first two years in office.[86] So far, however, Modi has not made major modifications to the aims and methods of Indian foreign policy, and it has taken time for anything approaching a new normative agenda to appear—if indeed one is visible at all. Instead, he has mostly tinkered and cajoled, but maintained the direction set by his two predecessors, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh.[87] Modi has ordered that 'Look East' be turned into 'Act East'; instructed the Foreign Service to concentrate more on India's economic interests and the promotion of his Make in India scheme; exhorted the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to get on with the business of integrating the region; renewed and broadened the strategic partnership with the United

---

[82] See esp. Swami Vivekananda, *Karma-yoga: the yoga of action* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2015).

[83] This clearly has resonance among some Modi supporters, including the American who records every action he makes on a website entitled http://thekarmayogi.com.

[84] Narendra Modi, 'Text of PM's speech at Red Fort', 15 Aug. 2014, http://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pms-speech-at-red-fort-2.

[85] Mohan, *Modi's world*, p. viii.

[86] Kanti Bajpai, 'Continuity—but with zeal', *Seminar*, no. 668, April 2015, http://:www.indiaseminar.com/2015/668/668_kanti_bajpai.htm. In 2014, Modi made nine trips abroad, for official visits, summits or UN meetings; in 2015, he made 27; in the first half of 2016, ten.

[87] Ian Hall, 'Multialignment and Indian foreign policy under Narendra Modi', *Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 105: 3, 2016, pp. 271–86.

States, while signing on to become a stakeholder in China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; and, last but not least, signalled some change in India's stance on global economic governance and climate change.[88]

What signs there are of a new normative agenda are limited, and the extent to which its elements are linked to distinctively Hindu nationalist or Vivekanandan ideas is uneven. That said, Modi has changed some of India's language concerning elements of the contemporary international order and its normative underpinnings. In three areas—democracy promotion, globalization and connectivity, and the rules-based international security order—there is no clear link to Hindu nationalist or Vivekanandan thought. In these areas, Modi's India is not advancing a new normative agenda, but rather committing itself to (qualified) support of the western-led liberal international order. Only in two areas is there a more obvious connection to Hindu nationalist or Vivekanandan ideas: in Modi's treatment of climate change and the global environment, and in the role that religion and spirituality should play in mitigating international and civil conflict, including terrorism. In both of these, there are hints of a new normative agenda, albeit a thin one.

Modi has been less reticent than his predecessor in promoting the virtues of democracy in India's immediate neighbourhood and beyond. Indian governments have long been wary of overt democracy promotion, notwithstanding the decision to make India a founder member of the 25-strong Community of Democracies organization.[89] By contrast, Modi speeches have referred to the importance of 'shared democratic values' not just in the places one would expect, such as Canberra or Ottawa, but also during visits to Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, at SAARC summits, and during the visit of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to New Delhi in late April 2015.[90] In his speech to the UN General Assembly in late September 2014, Modi drew attention to what he called the 'surge to democracy across the world', referring specifically to Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal, but also to the Arab Spring.[91] In late September 2015, his opening address to the G4 summit of aspiring permanent UN Security Council members (which includes Brazil, Germany and Japan as well as India) argued that their claims flowed not just from their being 'locomotives of the global economy', but also from their status as 'the world's largest democracies'.[92] In sum, Modi has clearly endorsed the notion that democratic government is the preferable form of government not simply for developed states, but also for developing ones.

Second, Modi has parted from earlier Indian leaders in enthusiastically endorsing economic globalization, especially greater openness and connectivity

---

[88] See esp. Mohan, *Modi's world*.

[89] Jan Cartright, 'India's regional and international support for democracy: rhetoric or reality?', *Asian Survey* 49: 3, 2009, pp. 403–28.

[90] Mohan, *Modi's world*, p. 177. For Modi's speeches, see http://www.narendramodi.in/speeches.

[91] Narendra Modi, 'Statement to the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly', 27 Sept. 2014, www.narendramodi.in/text-of-the-pms-statement-at-the-united-nations-general-assembly.

[92] Narendra Modi, 'PM's opening remarks at the G4 Summit at New York', 26 Sept. 2015, http://www.narendra-modi.in/text-of-pm-s-opening-remarks-at-the-g4-summit-at-new-york-340691.

in the south Asian region.[93] This is significant, both in India and beyond: Modi's endorsement of globalization, especially of openness, runs counter to an ingrained commitment to *swadeshi* or economic self-reliance among Hindu nationalists as well as the Congress Party and the left. But it should not be taken as full acceptance of a liberal global economic vision. So far, Modi's government has adopted a more pro-business stance than its predecessor, but has not made significant economic reforms, except to make it easier to invest foreign capital in India, especially in manufacturing, under the banner of 'Make in India'.[94]

Third, in 2015 Modi signed up to a 'Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia–Pacific and Indian Ocean Region' with the United States and a 'Vision 2025' statement with Japan to commit India to protect and extend a 'rules-based' international security order in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as to defend democracy, human rights and the rule of law within their own countries and as a standard for others.[95] Arguably, these commitments go further than previous Indian governments have gone in terms of accommodating India to the liberal international security order advanced predominantly by western states.[96] But, as with democracy promotion and the advocacy of globalization, Modi's commitments in this area do not reflect a new normative agenda so much as his pursuit of an existing one.

The areas in which Modi has seemingly departed from the liberal normative agenda, as noted above, are climate change and the mitigation of international and civil conflict. While he has pledged—to Obama, most clearly—to ratify the 2015 Paris agreement, Modi has also argued that Hindu thought and practices have lessons that can help the world tackle climate change. In his 2011 book on Gujarat's approach to climate change, *Convenient action*, Modi argued that the ancient Hindu *Vedas* (especially the *Prithvi Sukta* in the *Arthava Veda*, as well as the *Rig Veda*) 'contain a whole spectrum of knowledge' relevant to the issue, as do Mohandas Gandhi's thoughts on trusteeship.[97] He made similar claims in his 2014 speech to the UN General Assembly, here framed in terms of the longstanding principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities', observing that 'for us in India, respect for nature is an integral part of spiritualism' and that Indians 'treat nature's bounties as sacred'.[98] Indeed, Modi has repeatedly called for what he terms 'lifestyle'-focused solutions for climate change drawn from Hindu beliefs

[93] See e.g. Narendra Modi, 'Text of Prime Minister's speech at 2014 SAARC summit in Nepal', 26 Nov. 2014, http://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-ministers-speech-at-2014-saarc-summit-in-nepal-2.

[94] On Modi's emerging economic policy, see Amitendu Palit, *Economics in Narendra Modi's foreign policy* (Paris and Brussels: Institut français des relations internationales, 2015).

[95] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 'US–India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia–Pacific and Indian Ocean Region', 25 Jan. 2015, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/25/us-india-joint-strategic-vision-asia-pacific-and-indian-ocean-region; Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 'Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: special strategic and global partnership working together for peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region and the world', 12 Dec. 2015, http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26176/Joint_Statement_on_India_and_Japan_Vision_2025_Special_Strategic_and_Global_Partnership_Working_Together_for_Peace_and_Prosperity_of_the_IndoPacific_R.

[96] C. Raja Mohan, 'Modi's America engagement', *Seminar*, no. 668, April 2015, http://www.india-seminar.com/2015/668/668_c_raja_mohan.htm.

[97] Narendra Modi, *Convenient action: Gujarat's response to challenges of climate change* (Delhi: Macmillan, 2011), pp. 11–12.

[98] Modi, 'Statement to the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly'.

and practices, including the embrace of vegetarianism, as well as shifts in India's policy.[99]

Unusually for an Indian leader, Modi has been at pains to display his personal piety on foreign visits, especially in other Asian states, and to play on shared mythological and sacred historical connections.[100] In part, this represents an effort to bolster Indian 'soft power' with tacit appeals to the followers of religious traditions with followings across Asia, as in Nepal in August 2014, at the Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu, and then in March 2015 in Sri Lanka, at the sacred site of Anuradhapura and then at a Hindu temple in Jaffna. Modi even tried to draw Chinese attention to that country's debt to Indian religious teachings when he visited the Da Xingshan Buddhist temple in President Xi Jinping's home town of Xi'an. Modi has made a particular point of wooing Buddhists across the region, an approach consistent with Vivekananda's view of Gautama Buddha—which was more tolerant than that of most later Hindu nationalists—and with Modi's own apparent conviction that drawing attention to key Buddhist ideas and to linkages between Buddhism and Hinduism might help build Indian influence over public opinion in states where the former has a significant following.[101]

But this is not Modi's only motivation for making these distinctive appeals to religious communities in Asia. He appears convinced that India—and, by extension, its prime minister—has a special mission to help mitigate or even end international and civil conflict, including terrorism. To the apparent unease of some Indian diplomats, Modi has been closely involved in a series of dialogues aimed at establishing inter-religious understandings that might prevent violent conflict by achieving, in a distinctively Vivekanandan way, a greater appreciation of the 'spiritual oneness' of humanity.[102] In September 2015, for example, Modi launched the *Samvaad* ('Dialogue') Global Hindu–Buddhist Initiative on Conflict Avoidance and Environmental Consciousness, a gathering sponsored by the VIF and the Japanese Tokyo Foundation. Modi addressed the conference twice, once on the contribution Hinduism could make on climate change and then on the need for philosophically minded dialogue between religions that 'produces no anger or retribution'.[103] He spoke on a similar theme in mid-March 2016, at the World Sufi Forum organized by the All India Ulama and Mashaikh Board, which claims to represent the majority of Sunni Muslims in India. There Modi argued that Sufism,

[99] Richa Sharma, 'India should lead fight against climate change: Modi', *New Indian Express*, 6 April 2015, http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/India-Should-Lead-Fight-Against-Climate-Change-Modi/2015/04/06/article2750548.ece.
[100] Mohan, *Modi's world*, pp. 56, 181, 183, 206–8.
[101] See e.g. Narendra Modi, 'Buddha is India's crown jewel. He is a great reformer who gave humanity a new world-view: PM at Bodh Gaya', 5 Sept. 2015, http://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-s-address-at-maha-bodhi-temple-in-bodh-gaya-290934.
[102] See Modi's comments in 'Why Modi matters: the world needs India to step up as a global power. One year in, can prime minister Narendra Modi deliver?', *Time*, 8 May 2015, http://www.narendramodi.in/the-interview-of-pm-narendra-modi-with-time-7846. See also Shastri Ramachandaran, 'Religion in diplomacy makes South Block uneasy', *DNA India*, 16 Sept. 2015, http://www.dnaindia.com/analysis/column-religion-in-diplomacy-makes-south-block-uneasy-2125511.
[103] Narendra Modi, 'PM's address at "Samvaad"—Global Hindu–Buddhist Initiative on Conflict Avoidance and Environment Consciousness', 3 Sept. 2015, http://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-s-address-at-samvad-global-hindu-buddhist-initiative-on-conflict-avoidance-and-environment-consciousness-290614.

130

like Hinduism and Buddhism, could combat terrorism and 'dissolve the clouds of discord and war' between people of different religions.[104] Here, again, the echoes of Vivekananda are clear.

## Conclusion

It is apparent both that Modi's government wishes India to become a normative power—a state with the influence to define what behaviour is normal and desirable in international relations—and that it is some way from achieving that ambition. Modi's normative agenda is narrow and, in some significant areas such as democracy promotion, economic openness and the rules of the regional security order, involves India accepting norms promoted by others, rather than advocating a new or distinctive set of its own. By contrast, Nehru's normative agenda was ambitious and broad-ranging, entailing significant changes to what state behaviour was considered acceptable, as well as to the diplomatic system and international institutions. A number of factors are at play here. Clearly, there is greater agreement about key elements of the contemporary international order today than there was during the Cold War. But it should also be noted that Modi has fewer and less useful intellectual resources on which to draw: Hindu nationalist international thought, as we have seen, has significant limitations, not least its overwhelming concern for domestic social issues. Modi has, of course, made extensive use of Vivekananda to try to establish a distinctive voice for India on climate change and international conflict, but his effort to re-establish India as *vishwaguru* will depend on his ability to translate rhetorical exhortations into coherent policies that might be advanced at an international level. The idea of normative power India may have returned, but even for *karma-yogi* Modi, laying out and implementing a new normative agenda will take much longer, as the bulk of his foreign policy effort focuses on India's economic development and managing its interactions with strategic partners and rivals, as well as its vexed relations with the other states of south Asia.

---

[104] Narendra Modi, 'Sufism is the voice of peace, co-existence, compassion and equality; a call to universal brotherhood: PM Modi', 17 March 2016, http://www.narendramodi.in/pm-modi-at-the-world-islamic-sufi-conference-in-new-delhi-428276.