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REVIVAL OF TRADITION AS A POLITICAL STRATEGY: INDIA'S MODEL OF "GREAT CIVILIZATION"

*This article explores the role of traditional Indian culture in shaping the modern political discourse of India. **The relevance** of the topic stems from the increasing influence of religious and cultural factors on political identity in postcolonial states, particularly in the context of global civilizational shifts. Special attention is given to the reinterpretation of key elements of religious, philosophical, and social heritage – such as satyagraha, swaraj, narratives of "Hinduness", and the concept of the "Great Civilization". **The aim of the study** is to analyze how these elements were reimagined during India's political modernization and how they contributed to the formation of a new ideological paradigm in contemporary India. The article employs interdisciplinary **methods** – historical-analytical, discourse and content analysis, comparative and sociocultural approaches – to examine the transformation of traditional elements of Indian society within the context of contemporary politics. Special attention is given to the role of cultural symbols in shaping national identity and political rhetoric.*

***The findings.** In the search for effective ways to establish dialogue between tradition and modernity in postcolonial India, three main approaches have emerged, each supported by proponents within philosophical and political discourse. The first approach rejects tradition as outdated and incompatible with contemporary realities. The second, in contrast, dismisses all external and imposed influences, idealizing indigenous cultural heritage and often viewing ethnic Indian religions as the core of national identity. The third, reformist approach advocates for constructing a new postcolonial identity rooted in national culture while incorporating and adapting various elements from Western European philosophy, politics, and culture. It is within this reformist approach that the concept of "Great Civilization" is being formed, which integrates elements of tradition and modernity in response to the challenges of globalization and postcolonial self-determination. This model serves as a political tool that combines cultural diplomacy, soft power, and a civilizational narrative. It allows India to position itself as a world spiritual leader (vishwaguru), maintain geopolitical neutrality and form a new type of nationalism – a synthesis of traditional heritage and modern state-building.*

***Key words:** Great Civilization, vishwaguru, revival of tradition, Indian political discourse, Hindutva.*

Introduction. After gaining independence, India faced the need to form a new national identity that would not be defined or even designated by a hegemon country. The years of being part of the British Empire negatively affected the cultural, political, and economic development of the country since it was perceived as a raw-material appendage to the hegemon. Even the definition of India as the Jewel in the Crown did not grant it the freedom to develop various areas of life, in particular education, science, industry and political self-awareness. The British authorities purposefully hindered the development of Indian industry, instead actively developing infrastructure only to the extent that it was beneficial for the mother country. This was done primarily to export resources. Traditional crafts and production declined under the pressure of cheap British goods, which led to mass impoverishment of the local population. In addition, education under British control was not aimed at developing national identity or critical thinking but was focused on educating an elite loyal to the colonial administration. The political rights of Indians were severely restricted and any attempts to resist were subject to repression. A prime example of colonial violence was the Amritsar massacre of 1919, which symbolized the foulness of imperial politics [3].

Although the colonial period brought some elements of modernization, the overall balance was mostly negative – India lost a century of potential independent development, was robbed economically, and was culturally oppressed. Even those achievements that looked like modernization shifts, such as development of the railway network, spread of the English language, or introduction of new administrative structures, in fact served primarily the interests of the colonizer and not the indigenous population. For example, railways were built not to facilitate the movement of Indians, but to efficiently transport raw materials to ports and quickly move troops to suppress possible uprisings. The English language, presented as a "window on the world", was used to create a stratum of officials who would serve the British system of government. The administrative system, although it seemed orderly, was built on the principles of hierarchy, discrimination, and centralized control. Thus, even these "modernization elements" were not an indisputable benefit for India – rather they were tools of colonial rule masquerading as progress and civilization.

Beginning from the government of Jawaharlal Nehru to the present day, the sovereign India has pursued a policy of reviving traditional ideas and cultural narratives. Without doubt, this policy depends on the ideology of the party that had the majority during different historical periods. However, the revival of traditional ideas in the political and cultural life of India is an important process. It is closely connected to national identity, social change, and political processes.

The purpose of the article is to explore those elements of traditional Indian culture, in particular religious, social, political and philosophical traditions, that have been reinterpreted and revived in the process of sociopolitical modernization of India.

Methods. To achieve the purpose, the article uses a set of interdisciplinary methods that combine the approaches of political science, cultural studies, and philosophy. Historical and analytical method is used to trace the evolution of traditional elements of Indian society and identify their transformations in modern history. Discourse analysis is applied to study political rhetoric, public speeches, program documents, and media content that features traditional symbols, concepts, and cultural narratives. Content analysis is used to analyze publications, speeches of political leaders (in particular, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi), party manifestos and cultural initiatives that demonstrate the revival of traditions. Comparative method is applied to compare traditional and modernized forms of cultural and social practices in different periods of Indian history. Sociocultural analysis is needed to consider how elements of traditional culture function within modern political and ideological structures, and what role they play in constructing national identity.

Results. Nowadays India is an important player in the geopolitical arena. Over the years of being a sovereign state, it has made a great economic and cultural leap in development. Therefore, it is important to explore how and what sociocultural transformations affected this process, the way how modernization and establishing relationships with countries around the world have combined with the revival of traditions and formation of the national identity of the Indians.

The clash of different cultures raised the question of how to combine, for example, Western ideals and values with the Indian ones. After all, in some respects they were significantly different. In contrast to the Western concept of social progress, which is based on the idea of linear and progressive development of society, the Indian worldview is formed under the influence of traditional religious and philosophical doctrines. It focuses primarily on individual moral improvement [13]. The highest goal here is not social transformation, but the achievement of a higher ontological status in the next incarnation, which is determined by personal behavior and compliance with the dharma. As Louis Dumont emphasizes, the hierarchical structure of Indian society and the ideology of the caste system are deeply rooted in the metaphysical understanding of order, where social mobility gives way to spiritual orientation [5].

The result of finding ways to establish such a dialogue is presented by three approaches. Each of them has its own apologists in the philosophical and political discourse of postcolonial India. The first one is to deny tradition as something outdated and unacceptable in current conditions. The second approach is opposite and lies in rejection of everything forced on and borrowed. Its representatives idealize their own cultural traditions and often see the core of national identity in ethnic

Indian religions. And the third, reformist approach is to build a new postcolonial identity on the foundation of national culture with the adaptation and addition of various elements from philosophy, politics, and culture, in particular of Western Europe.

We are primarily interested in how the revival of traditional religious symbols, rituals, narratives of the Indian national identity, the embodiment of the concepts of Satyagraha and Swaraj and the Indian model of "Great civilization" became a tool for shaping modern political discourse.

In the political sphere, the revival of traditional values is associated with several directions, which are growing influence of Hindu nationalism, the use of religious symbols in political discourse, and formation of a postcolonial national identity. In this context, India is increasingly represented not just as a modern state, but as the heir to a thousand-year cultural legacy – an imaginary community that draws legitimacy upon ancient civilizational traditions, philosophy, epic literature, and spiritual continuity. This approach contributes to creating an image of India as a spiritual center with a unique historical mission that resists external influences and carries an alternative model of development.

The growing influence of Hindu nationalism has been particularly noticeable in recent decades. This is due to the "Hindutva" ideology and the growing influence of the Bharatiya Janata Party. However, nationalism in one form or another was present in the political ideologies of both the leaders of the National Liberation Movement and the leaders of independent India. It was formed on a certain social and philosophical basis. The social component consisted in the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the Indian population, the peculiarities of social hierarchy, which depended on caste affiliation. Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy had a huge impact on Indian nationalism. His concept of nonviolence ("ahimsa") and the struggle for independence through nonviolent resistance is deeply rooted in Indian politics and society. Gandhi saw independence as a process of moral and spiritual renewal, where nationalism was supposed to serve to ensure justice, equality and self-sufficiency of the country. However, Satyagraha and Swaraj contain ideas of peaceful resistance. For this reason, Mahatma Gandhi criticizes fierce nationalism with propaganda of aggressive methods: "The aim of Hind Swaraj was to confront the anarchists and violence-prone Indian nationalists with an alternative to violence, derived from Gandhi's earliest experiments with satyagraha. Equally important is the book's concern with the concept from which it takes its title: this is Gandhi's first extensive statement on swaraj, his idea of freedom" [4].

The first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, had a non-radical tough attitude towards nationalism. He sought to create an inclusive society in which different ethnic and religious groups would have equal rights. Nehru was keen about creating a strong secular state where Indian identity would not be limited by religious or regional differences, but would be based on shared values of democracy, equality, and social justice. He believed that India should become a modern democratic state that supports scientific progress and social justice. Nehru argued that nationalism cannot be based solely on historical or religious traditions but should promote social and economic development for the benefit of all citizens: "Nationalism is not a mere political programme. It is a great human and spiritual concept. The essential unity of the Indian people is not something imposed from the outside, but something deeper and within" [8].

Over time, other forms of nationalism have emerged in India, including Hindu nationalism, which focuses on the cultural superiority of Hinduism as the basis of national identity. This form of nationalism, associated with movements such as Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), attempts to establish the cultural dominance of Hinduism and is less inclined to the inclusivity promoted by Nehru and Gandhi. The goal of RSS activity was to revive and strengthen Hindu identity in response to colonial rule and the influence of the Muslim minority [1]. Although RSS is not formally a political party, it is closely associated with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – the ruling party of India that espouses doctrines of Hindutva. The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, came from RSS.

Thus, nationalism in independent India is multi-layered and is based on different social and philosophical approaches – from Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence to Nehru's modernist ideas. Indian nationalism has constantly tried to combine traditional Indian values with the challenges of the modern world. At the same time, the diversity of ethnic and religious groups continues to influence the debate about what India's true national identity should be.

The revival of traditional religious symbols and rituals in political discourse has been an important aspect of building postcolonial identity since the beginning of the National Liberation Movement. This process is particularly noticeable in the activities of the BJP party, which promotes the ideology of Hindutva. Religious symbols such as images of gods, rituals, and holidays are used to mobilize electorate and strengthen political support.

Traditional religious rites, i.e., major festivals and rituals, are gaining political significance. They serve not only spiritual purposes but also become a means of demonstrating the unity and strength of the nation. For example, the participation of political leaders in religious ceremonies emphasizes their commitment to traditional values and strengthens their connection with voters. We should note that this is not an exceptional feature of Indian political elite, since congratulating the head of state, such as the president, on Christmas or Easter is a common practice in many European countries, including Ukraine.

One of the most striking examples of the use of religious symbols in the political sphere was construction of the Rama temple at the place of the demolished Babri mosque in Ayodhya, which was actively supported by the ruling BJP party. In January 2024, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi took part in the consecration of the Rama idol, emphasizing the fusion of religious and political identity [11].

If we learn history more fundamentally, even more examples of the use of religious context for political influence can be found. Back in the XIX century, Indian independence fighters such as Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak used religious festivals, e.g., Ganesh Puja, to unite the masses and promote nationalist ideas: "Tilak's promotion of the Ganesh Puja as a public festival was a masterstroke in political strategy. Traditionally, the festival was a private affair celebrated within households. However, Tilak transformed it into a public event, complete with processions, music, and speeches. The Ganesh Puja became a platform for spreading nationalist ideas and mobilizing the masses. It provided an opportunity for people from different backgrounds to come together and express their collective aspirations for freedom. The festival also helped to create a sense of unity and solidarity among Indians, transcending regional and caste difference" [9].

Christophe Jaffrelot analyzes the interaction between religion and politics in modern India. He pays special attention to how political forces use religious symbols, myths and rituals as a tool of political mobilization. In this light, religion transforms from something personal into a public spectacle. For example, march at a chariot festival or Ratha-yātrā turns into a political march. Thus, the rituals of Hinduism are "politicized", and religious practice becomes a way to participate in politics [6].

The resurgence of traditional religious symbols and rituals in Indian political discourse is a testament to the deep connection between religion and politics. This process reflects the desire to preserve cultural heritage and use its elements to form national identity and legitimize political power.

Nationalism in various forms, providing religious symbols or rituals with a political context are parts, though not the only ones, that are included in the model of "Great civilization". Swami Vivekananda was one of the first to formulate the idea of India as a spiritual civilization with a special mission in the world [12].

This model has been used to describe the historical, cultural, and spiritual influence of India over thousands of years. It focuses on the continuity and deep tradition of Indian civilization. Therefore, the resort to the Vedic tradition or National Indian religions (Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, although the later has become a universal religion afterwards) plays an important role. India's cultural heritage includes thousand-year literary, philosophical, artistic, musical and architectural traditions. The central place is occupied by the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as Vedic literature, which laid the foundations of the spiritual and ethical system. Sanskrit, the language of sacred texts, has become a source for many Indian languages and is considered a symbol of cultural unity. This heritage is not only a historical legacy, but also an element of India's national identity and soft power in the world.

The political use of the "Great civilization" model in modern India is expressed by the following ideas: India as a world guru, the soft power of cultural diplomacy, the civilizational narrative, and the preservation of geopolitical neutrality.

Sullivan de Estrada considers the India's intention to become vishwaguru – the world teacher – in the context of its foreign policy and civilizational identity: "Modi's audacious declaration that India can offer democratic instruction to the world does not stem solely from his and his fellow ideologues' desire to bring glory to India's ancient civilization on the world stage. It is of a piece with wider ambitions, under his leadership and among his ideological base, for India to emerge as a vishwaguru or «world teacher»" [10]. She explores how this aspiration is rooted in historical narratives and seeks to transform global hierarchies through civilizational pedagogy. The article also discusses the role of international recognition in legitimizing India's self-awareness as a civilizational state.

This position is an appeal to the past, when India was a center of knowledge, philosophy and spirituality. The political leadership promotes the idea that India has a special mission – to offer the world an alternative to Western rationalism through spiritual values, yoga, Ayurveda and "Sanatana Dharma" (Eternal Truth).

The next component is the soft power of cultural diplomacy, expressed in popularization and distribution of cultural centers, films, festivals, in opening of monuments to Indian famous figures, etc. In particular, the VEDALIFE festival of Indian culture and yoga is held annually in Ukraine. Another example of an international level is the official introduction of the International Yoga Day on June 21 at the initiative of India.

Moreover, educational initiatives can be added here. These activities include creating programs for international students (Study in India, ICCR scholarships), providing scholarships for studying the Indian language, culture, philosophy, and promoting Indian universities as centers of humanities knowledge (activities in 88 countries of the world by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)).

Civilizational narrative in the "Great civilization" model is aimed at creating an image of revival of a great state after years of being in the status of a colony. This will include the initiatives and political reforms, ideas, slogans that we have already discussed above when the political use of religious symbols and rituals as well as various forms of Indian nationalism were mentioned.

And finally – geopolitical positioning of the country as a civilizational alternative. In foreign policy, India sometimes presents itself as a third path between the West and China. Ravi Bajpay analyzes how India and China, as civilizational states, shape their foreign policy based on historical heritage. He examines how India uses its civilizational identity to achieve autonomy in domestic and foreign affairs, particularly through non – alignment policies [2].

The External Affairs Minister of India since 2019, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, has advanced a thesis of "non-alignment policy 2.0" – a strategic autonomy that allows India to maintain flexibility in global politics without falling into the orbit of any political wing. He argues that India should think in terms of civilizational longevity, not just the political cycle or economic growth [7]. India is represented in this system as a soft but autonomous power, capable of both self-defense and diplomatic mediation.

Conclusions. The revival of traditional ideas in India is a powerful process that encompasses politics, culture, education, and lifestyle. This is not only the preservation of the past, but also its adaptation to modern conditions, which forms the unique national identity of India in the XXI century.

The study has revealed that the processes of sociopolitical modernization of India were accompanied by active reinterpretation of the traditional cultural heritage rather than by its rejection. Traditional religious and philosophical concepts such as Satyagraha, Swaraj, and the symbolism of Vedic culture have been adapted to the modern political context, becoming a means of forming a new national identity. The civilizational model is taking on increasing importance, in which India is represented as a "Great civilization" – a continuous cultural and spiritual tradition, opposed to Western modernism. The novelty of this approach lies in combining elements of cultural heritage with tools of political mobilization and strategic positioning of the state in the global arena. In modern discourse, religion is becoming a political resource, and Hindu nationalism, especially in the form of Hindutva ideology, seeks to unite the nation around ideas of a common spiritual heritage. At the same time, along with exclusive forms of nationalism, there is a universalist line that positions India as a world spiritual leader (vishwaguru), offering an alternative model of global development. The political use of the "Great civilization" model is evident in the rhetoric of cultural diplomacy, soft power, maintaining geopolitical

neutrality, and focusing on the civilizational continuum. Thus, modern India is not only rethinking its own past, but also actively forming new narratives at the intersection of religion, politics and identity, which together creates the ideological basis for its international positioning.

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ВІДРОДЖЕННЯ ТРАДИЦІЇ ЯК ПОЛІТИЧНА СТРАТЕГІЯ: ІНДІЙСЬКА МОДЕЛЬ «ВЕЛИКОЇ ЦИВІЛІЗАЦІЇ»

*У статті досліджується роль традиційної індійської культури в процесі формування сучасного політичного дискурсу Індії. **Актуальність** теми зумовлена зростанням впливу релігійних і культурних чинників на політичну ідентичність у постколоніальних державах, зокрема в контексті глобальних цивілізаційних зрушень. Особливу увагу приділено переосмисленню ключових елементів релігійної, філософської та соціальної спадщини – таких як сатьяграха, сварадж, наративи «індуськості» та концепт «Великої цивілізації». **Метою статті** є аналіз того, як ці елементи були адаптовані в умовах політичної модернізації та як вони сприяли формуванню нової ідеологічної парадигми сучасної Індії. У статті застосовано міждисциплінарні **методи** – історико-аналітичний, дискурс – та контент-аналіз, порівняльний і соціокультурний – для дослідження трансформацій традиційних елементів індійського суспільства в контексті сучасної політики. Особливу увагу приділено ролі культурних символів у конструюванні національної ідентичності та політичній риториці. **Результати дослідження.** У процесі пошуку ефективних способів встановлення діалогу між традицією та модерністю в постколоніальній Індії сформувалися три основні підходи, кожен з яких має своїх прихильників у філософському й політичному дискурсі. Перший підхід заперечує традицію як застарілий і несумісний із сучасністю спадок. Другий, навпаки, відкидає все зовнішнє та запозичене, ідеалізуючи власну культурну спадщину, з особливим акцентом на етнічних індійських релігіях як осерді національної ідентичності. Третій, реформаторський підхід, пропонує синтез: формування нової постколоніальної ідентичності на основі національної культури з урахуванням і творчим засвоєнням західноєвропейських філософських, політичних та культурних елементів. Саме в межах цього реформаторського підходу формується і концепція «Великої цивілізації», яка інтегрує елементи традиції та модерності у відповідь на виклики глобалізації та постколоніального самовизначення. Ця модель виконує роль політичного інструменту, що поєднує культурну дипломатію, м'яку силу та цивілізаційний наратив. Вона дозволяє Індії позиціонувати себе як світового духовного лідера (vishwaguru), зберігати геополітичний нейтралітет та формувати націоналізм нового типу – синтез традиційної спадщини і модерного державотворення*

Ключові слова: *Велика цивілізація, вішвагуру, відродження традиції, індійський політичний дискурс, гіндутва.*