



Indian Conception of 'Nation & State' in IR: The Janapada System

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Abstract

In contemporary times, International Relations (IR) as an academic discipline strives for inclusivity by incorporating intellectual traditions from regions like Latin America, Africa, and Asia. This shift contributes to the '*Global IR*' concept, as introduced by Amitav Acharya. In this context, this paper explores the 'Nation & State' concept within the Janapada system. It will analyse the four components of a 'Nation' under the Westphalian model—Population, Government, Territory, and Sovereignty—within the Janapada context. The Janapada system, regarded as the earliest organized political unit representing a closely indigenous 'state system' in ancient India, dates back to 1500-500 BCE. It reflects the political structure and also the societal conditions shaped by the locally rooted cultural beliefs and practices of its people.

By investigating the nuances of the 'Nation and State' in Janapada, this paper discusses a different perspective on 'nation' within traditional IR beyond the Westphalian model. Methodologically, this paper employs hermeneutic- textual interpretation, which is used to make a conceptual contribution to IR. Challenging the dominant Western paradigm, an understanding of how to fill the critical gap along the alternative perspectives is required to incorporate them into contemporary IR theory effectively. For this, Indian IR scholars like BK Sarkar and MN Chatterjee have been taken as inspiration, who have contributed to the evolution of Indian thought in IR theory. This helps develop an inclusive 'Global IR' within a Western-dominated IR framework. Revisiting indigenous perspectives on 'Nation & State,' this paper advocates the need to include a "*Bhartiya idea of Nation*" beyond the Westphalian-influenced idea of nation, which forms the structural unit of International relations.

Keywords: Janapada system, Nation & State, Indian IR scholars, Global IR.

Introduction

International relations, like any other academic discipline, is primarily shaped by Western perceptions, objectives, and needs, and is deeply rooted in the historical context of Europe. As John Stuart Hall says in *The West and the rest: Discourse and power*, "By western we mean: a society that is developed, industrialised, urbanised, capitalist, secular, and modern.... nowadays any society wherever it exists on a geographical map, which shares these characteristics, can be said to belong to the 'west'." Thus, the concept of the West has been the standard and historically, the East has been expected to meet the standards set by the West, with the West acting as the norm-setter and the East as the norm-receiver. However, this traditional dynamic is being challenged in international relations, with shifting global politics and the rise of new powers. This evolving landscape has sparked a demand for the inclusion of diverse perspectives in traditional international relations theory, particularly from regions that are driving these changes in power dynamics.

The call for this new approach to international relations incorporates the voices of the Global South beyond the developed, Western world. The term "Global IR," coined by Amitav Acharya, encapsulates this reimagined approach, one that advocates for the

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inclusion, space, and recognition of indigenous practices, theories, and viewpoints within the framework of traditional international relations. It's a re-evaluation of non-Western contributions, particularly by visiting the contribution being rooted in ancient Indian texts, philosophy, and political thought, but complacently ignored from academic platforms within IR. Scholars like Amitav Acharya and NC Behera have argued for integrating insights from India's Vedic and Upanishadic traditions, epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and modern nationalist thinkers such as Gandhi, Vivekananda, and Aurobindo.

However, a critical gap persists in understanding how these perspectives can be effectively incorporated into contemporary IR theory to challenge the dominant Western paradigm. A potential solution to this gap can be found in the exemplary work of Indian IR scholars like B.K. Sarkar and M.N. Chatterjee. Particularly noteworthy is B.K. Sarkar, who significantly contributed to integrating Indian thought into IR theory. In his work *Hindu Theory of International Relations*, Sarkar demonstrated how concepts such as the 'Theory of Mandala and Sovereignty,' the 'Doctrine of Sarvabhauma,' the 'Doctrine of Chakravarti,' and the 'Concept of Digvijya' could contribute to a broader understanding of international relations. This highlights the depth and strategic insight embedded within Indian political thought, which could be revisited to claim its rightful place in traditional IR theory. Inspired by Sarkar's integration of Indian political thought into traditional IR theory, this research paper critically analyses the Indian Janapada system to move towards an alternative in the realm of global political analysis beyond 'nation' & 'state', which are used strictly in the Western sense.

This paper explores the Janapada system to uncover the nuances of the concepts of 'nation' and 'state' in ancient India. It examines whether these concepts existed in any form during that time and also how they may have been understood differently from contemporary notions of statehood and nationhood. By investigating these alternative understandings, the paper seeks to expand and enrich modern IR theory by incorporating indigenous perspectives, questioning the 'universalised' Western-centric approach and contributing towards an inclusive framework for global politics.

It is crucial to note that the objective is not to directly equate the Janapada system with modern concepts of the state or nation, as such a comparison would be anachronistic. Instead, this study will explore the characteristics and implications of the Janapada system, offering insights into the early forms of political organisation in India and their potential relevance for contemporary political theory and discussions on statehood and nationhood.

Methodology

This study uses a comparative hermeneutic methodology to explore the conceptual framework of Indian lens on 'nation'. Janapada system is thereby studied as a foundational structural unit. It brings together the insights from A.L. Basham's the wonder that was India with that of Diana Eck's India: A Sacred Geography. Further text of Radhakumud Banerjee, BK Sarkar and MJ Bayly have also been analysed for key themes to find the influence of Indian political in IRT. The works of BK Sarkar finds special mention here, which presents a way how non-western (here Indian) perspectives can be effectively incorporated into contemporary IR theory to challenge



the dominant Western paradigm. This research paper presents an analysis of 'Janapada system' thereby taking Basham's commentary in answer to Eck's search of an alternative on 'nation' from Indian landscape. The analysis is situated within contemporary international relations theory, where it has become important to explore how non-western perspectives can shape modern conceptions of the nation-state and governance.

The Nation & The State

With the introduction of theories such as the declaratory and constitutive theories of the state, efforts have been made to define the boundaries of what constitutes a state and what falls outside of this concept. The declarative theory of statehood, as outlined in the 1933 Montevideo Convention, defines a state as an entity in international law if it meets four criteria:

- 1) a defined territory;
- 2) a permanent population;
- 3) a government; and
- 4) the capacity to enter into relations with other states.

On the other hand, the constitutive theory of statehood asserts that a state is only recognized as a person under international law if it is acknowledged as sovereign by at least one other state. This theory of recognition emerged in the 19th century.

These theories of state recognition are often applied interchangeably to the concepts of nation or nation-state, which has led to the belief that a nation must meet the same criteria as a state. This interchangeable usage reinforces the consistent claim made by colonisers that "India is not a nation." As Diana L. Eck notes in *India: A Sacred Geography*, quoting Sir John Strachey, whose views were shared by many British administrators, "There is no such country, and this is the first and most essential fact about India that must be understood. India is a name we give to a vast region that encompasses a multitude of different countries. There is no single term in Indian languages that corresponds to it." Eck continues by stating that the common belief was that "India could be considered an integrated geographical area, but it was not a 'nation' because it lacked the unifying characteristics that define a modern nation-state." The lines between the concepts of nation and state are thus blurred, which leads to denying India both the status of a nation OR a state in the strict Western sense.

If we define a nation as a group of people with a strong sense of unity and shared consciousness, bound together by emotional, spiritual, and psychological ties, then the Janapada system certainly reflects these qualities. To support this argument, we must first shift our perspective on the concept of a nation, moving beyond the conventional understanding of a single culture, a unified people, and a defined territory governed by the four key characteristics of a state: population, government, territory, and sovereignty.

Why visit Janapada system ?

India's unity resides at its consciousness plane and progresses towards a unified worldview. Its interconnectedness transcends political structures or the existence of large empires and kingdoms. In India, there were varied rulers and political



adventures, but there has been a lack of a strictly boundary-based, territorial conception of nation. Diana L. Eck in 'India : A sacred Geography' probes whether there have been alternative ways of imagining India's complex collectivity through a uniquely Indian perspective. Though the Janapada system may not directly correspond to the modern concept of a nation or state, studying this system is crucial to understanding the underlying consciousness that has historically formed the threads of unity in India, from a cultural and social perspective. The ancient Janapada system may help us understand what Eck wonders about: the mythic and ritual language through which the land, known to Hindus as "Bharata," has been conceptualised and communicated. Similarly, Rajant Kanta Ray argues that since emotions can be as powerful, if not more so, than ideas, the history of nationalism in India must be traced back to its 'prehistory.' This also necessitates revisiting the Janapada system. Here, we come across an underlying, unifying, and invisible thread of unity that constitutes Bharata, one that, paradoxically, lacks the political unity that the British imposed on India. While the British saw no political cohesion in India, an enduring unity is embedded in the term "Bharata," which refers to the land. How can two names for the same land, Bharata and India, represent such differing interpretations of the concept of a "nation"? To answer these questions, we must delve into its history and prehistory to trace the origins of this land and its unity. Eck points out, "It should be understood that Bharata was never the name of a political entity like a nation-state, at least not until 1947." This essence of Bharata is what we uncover while examining the Janapada system. In doing so, we come across the unique, local, and indigenous political concepts that existed in the subcontinent, which could be seen as the precursors to the modern idea of a nation in the region. It is fascinating to observe the "sense of unity" and connectedness that thrived for centuries without requiring an overarching political structure or representation.

The Janapada System

At the periphery it should be noted that, the modern notion of the nation-state is commonly characterized by key elements such as population, government, territory, and sovereignty. It is essential to recognize that Janapadas, which existed between approximately 1500 BCE and 1000 BCE, were among the earliest forms of political organization in the Indian subcontinent. However, it would be inaccurate to categorize these political units as "states" or "nations." The Janapada, as described by Kautilya in his *Arthashastra*, represented a collection of households within a small region and served as the basic unit of governance about 3,000 years ago.

Rashtra & Rajan: who's the 'sovereign'?

The Rashtra, or polity, was typically governed by a king or *rajan*, whose rule was often hereditary, based on the principle of primogeniture. However, elective monarchy might also have been practised. A.L. Basham notes that the tribes were led by chiefs called *rajas*, a term related to the Latin *rex*. The raja was not an absolute monarch but shared governance with tribal councils, such as the *sabha* and *samiti*. The Aryans viewed the king primarily as a military leader, tasked with defending the tribe, rather than as a divine figure. It was only in the later Vedic period, especially in the *Taittiriya Brahmana*, that the idea of kingship having a divine origin began to take shape. His religious duties were largely restricted to organizing sacrifices for the welfare of the tribe and supporting the priests who performed them. This period also



saw significant developments in sacrificial rituals, such as the Rajsuya (royal consecration), Vajpeya (a rejuvenation ceremony that elevated a king from the status of a simple raja to that of a samrat, a supreme ruler) and Ashvamedha (horse sacrifice).

The political system during the Vedic period was predominantly patriarchal, with monarchy being the norm, though non-monarchical polities existed as well. In Indian philosophical thought, the individual is seen as both the entity bound by worldly ties and the one capable of liberation from them. Therefore, all efforts were aimed at freeing individuals from these constraints. Thus, even when a king or government was in place, the role was more about facilitation or coordination than absolute rule. The king was seen as a guardian of moral laws and the social order, with a significant role in administering justice and sovereignty was rooted in 'dharma'. Though the ultimate 'sovereignty' was embedded in dharma, for a symbolic interpretation, its closest alignment could be seen through one of the most notable ceremonies performed during this time, i.e. the Ashvamedha (horse sacrifice), where a horse was allowed to roam freely for a year, followed by a group of warriors. Kings and chieftains whose territories the horse passed through were forced to either acknowledge the king's authority or resist him. If the horse was not captured, it was returned to the capital and sacrificed. Performing the horse sacrifice became a major ambition for significant kings, and its effects on interstate relations were felt immensely.

Administration

The significance of the king's administration is emphasized by the role of the Purohita (the chief priest), who was the highest-ranking official and the king's advisor, along with other key officials such as the Senani (army chief) and the Gramani (village head).

In the later Vedic period, new civil roles emerged, including the Bhagadaudha (tax collector), Suta/Sarathi (royal herald or charioteer), Kshatri (chamberlain), and Akshavapa (courier). Janapadas such as Kuru (formed by the Purus and Bharatas), Panchala (formed by the Turvashas and Krivis), and Kashi emerged in the Doab region. This period also saw the beginning of a regular system of provincial governance. Officials like the Sthapati were responsible for administering areas inhabited by aboriginal people, while the Satapati oversaw groups of 100 villages. The Adhikarita was a village official, and the Ugra, mentioned in the Upanishads, likely functioned as a police officer. A.L. Basham notes that by this time, Aryan tribes had consolidated into small kingdoms, retaining some tribal characteristics, but with permanent capitals and basic administrative systems. Although old tribal assemblies continued to exist, their influence was rapidly waning. By the end of this period, royal autocracy was often moderated by the influence of Brahmanas, tradition, and public opinion. In some regions, old tribal organizations adapted to new conditions, and Ganas (tribal republics) survived for centuries in more remote areas. However, political divisions based on kinship gradually shifted to geographic ones, and many tribes began to disband.

Territory

It was only in the later Vedic period that India's land was divided into territorial regions, classified into three broad areas: Aryavarta (Northern India), Madhya Desa (Central India), and Dakshinapath (Southern India). This era also witnessed the rise of



large kingdoms and remarkable cities. Buddhist and Jain texts list 16 Mahajanapadas, which were of two types: monarchical and non-monarchical (republican). The monarchical states included Anga, Magadha, Kashi, Kosala, Vatsa, Chedi, Shursena, Matsya, Avanti, and Gandhara, while the republican states were Vajji, Malla, Kuru, Panchala, Kamboja, Shakya (Kapilvastu), Koliyas (Ramagrama), and Moriya (Pippalavana).

Before this period, a more nuanced understanding of the territory can be traced back to the *Rigveda*, which serves as the primary source for understanding this time. The *Rigveda* references rivers, mountains (such as Himavant or the Himalayas and Munjavant or the Hindukush), and the ocean, giving us a clear sense of the geographical area inhabited by the Rigvedic people. Initially, these people were confined to the Sapta Sindhu, the land of the seven rivers, which included the Sindhu (Indus) and its five tributaries: Vitasta, Asikani, Vipas, Parushani, Sutudri, along with the Saraswati River. Although many hymns describe conflicts between different Aryan tribes, there was a shared sense of solidarity against the Dasas and Dasyus, who are thought to represent the remnants of the Harappan civilization, as noted by A.L. Basham. By the later Vedic period, Aryan settlements expanded across much of northern India, shifting the cultural centre from the Saraswati region to the Ganges (Madhya Desh). The *Satapatha Brahmana* mentions the Vindhya Mountains, marking the eastern expansion of Aryan settlements. In the *Rigveda*, only three rivers are initially mentioned. Still, as the Aryans gradually moved deeper into the interior of the land, their sense of unity expanded to include more rivers within the realm of sacredness. Eventually, a total of seven rivers were regarded as sacred, including rivers from southern India.

Population

The Kula (family) formed the foundation of both the social and political structures. Above the Kula, there were the Grama (village), the Vis, the Jana, and the Rashtra, with a group of Kulas (families) forming a Grama (village), and so on. In *The Wonder That Was India*, A.L. Basham highlights that during the Rigvedic period, the people existed on the fringes of civilization. While their military techniques were more advanced than those of the Middle East, their priestly schools had refined tribal sacrifice into an art, and their poetry was elaborate and formalised, they had not yet developed a city-based civilisation.

Idea of 'Nation' : Insights from Janapada system

International Relations considers the 'state' as a unit of political analysis that derives its structure, legitimacy, & characteristics largely from the Treaty of Westphalia, 1648. It recognises the 'sovereign' state as the ultimate authority dealing with various aspects of an individual in his capacity as a part of the social contract. Social contract theory remains the most acceptable theoretical explanation of the rise of the modern state. The Janapada system presents a different lens as compared to the Westphalian idea of nation and 'state' governed by social contract theory. It is based on a spiritual-cultural consciousness, which is different to the territorial and strictly bounded demarcation of 'nation' into people of the same culture, religion, and belief. Diana L. Eck in 'India: A sacred geography' says, "The concept of India here is not defined in political terms as the British described it, where the nation was defined by territorial boundaries, land, language, and a shared political culture."



It is important to understand that the concept of nation in the West and India inherently differ from one another. The former is rooted in the material realisation of 'nation', which is exhibited by the 'state' with its strict boundaries. Another important feature of the Westphalian nation is that its sovereignty is embedded in the 'state'. This is in contrast to a spiritually unified 'nation', with its amorphous and shifting boundaries, where ultimate sovereignty is not situated in the state; rather, 'dharma' is presented as the sovereign of the 'nation'. To further analyse this distinction, it requires an in-depth understanding of different ontologies/'realities' on which these two differing worldviews may have been established. Though a deeper understanding of what causes perception of 'reality' in a distinct manner by the West and the East is a philosophical question and lies largely beyond the framework of this paper, this distinction remains foundational to understand why the Indian concept of 'nation' is not expressed in a politically unified state.

Ontology, i.e. the knowledge of being, for the West is tilted to a greater extent towards dualistic & materialistic interpretation of the world, with the body of flesh being the ultimate means of achieving pleasure and bliss. This idea is even corroborated by theories like liberalism and realism in IR as well. Liberalism upholds thoroughly the belief that 'man is a rational being' and thus supports the idea that authority to rule should ultimately lie within man himself. Realism, being fearful of man's aggressive nature, to be exhibited eventually materially by man in form of 'muscle & money', is compelled to make leviathan state a 'sovereign', where a clear distinction is made between the political and personal morality. On the other hand, Indian ontology differing fundamentally from western ontology, looks at the material world as a transition phase. It puts lesser emphasis on body, and considers achievement of the supreme bliss i.e. 'moksha', as the ultimate goal of human life. It is important to note that 'moksha' is attainable only when a human has lived his life according to the dharma.

The concept of India as a 'nation' being derived from the ancient Janapada system is reflected in the collective Indian consciousness and envisioned as the soul of the nation. It resides in its spiritual interconnectedness, which is internally embedded through its 'dharmic' lens and externally visible through the rituals and traditions followed across the land. This interconnectedness and unity are inherently rooted in Indian 'dharmic cosmological' perception of the world and are expressed through its similar cultural values and worldview, which perceives unity beyond matter¹. Some examples supporting this argument are given below:

India as a 'nation' being derived from the ancient Janapada system

1. The idea of Bharata encapsulates 'unity', being grounded in a sacred geographical realm, where people are bound together by a shared reverence for the sanctity of its rivers, mountains, forests, and the sacred spaces formed by these natural elements, which are venerated and worshipped. For example, the Rigveda and other ancient texts praise the Ganga and seven sacred rivers, including the Indus, Yamuna, Saraswati, Narmada, Godavari, and Kaveri, all

1 Unity beyond matter here refers to unity on a spiritual plane, beyond material manifestation in either form, be it body or land.



of which are considered holy. Devotees, while holding water in daily prayers, invoke these rivers, symbolizing a deep sense of interconnectedness across the subcontinent. In doing so, they mentally align themselves with these sacred places, which hold immense significance in their beliefs. It reflects how the locative consciousness of the people in ancient India evolved, integrating the land, rivers, and mountains—key physical features of today's state and nation boundaries—into their cultural and spiritual consciousness. This development underscores the deep connection between the physical and cultural realms in the formation of Indian identity.

2. During the Janapada period, we see the emergence of great literature like the Rigveda, and the development of a cosmic consciousness expressed through pilgrimages and the circumambulation of sacred sites (tirthas) across Bharatvarsha. These practices united the people of India, despite political divisions or language barriers between the north and south. This underlying sense of unity is evident in phenomena like northern Indians visiting Rameshwaram or the prominent significance of Kashi for southern Indians.
3. Beyond the political framework, the unity of the land gradually became ingrained in the souls of the people living on the subcontinent, through the integration of the land in daily prayers, hymns, and rituals. These practices are still prevalent today, in moments of both joy and sorrow. The land is considered sacred and a place of salvation, and it is believed to be auspicious to be born here. This belief is reflected in the reverence people have for visiting the numerous shrines scattered across the country—such as those in Badrinath (north), Dwarka (west), Puri (east), and Shringverpur (south)—along with the sacred ritual of bathing in pure rivers, which is associated with purification and blessings. For example, it is believed that even the sight of the Ganges can liberate a devotee, cleansing them of all sins. This consciousness is not material but rather a deeply ingrained belief system, as seen in the vast numbers of devotees who gathered from around the world on the banks of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati during the Mahakumbh 2025 at Prayagraj.

These are the few examples which emphasize the cultural and spiritual connectedness of a nation. It is evident in various social practices and religious traditions that shape the identity of the nation. This is strikingly different from the Western concept of a nation, which is rooted in territoriality, population, government, and sovereignty; the Janapada system in ancient India laid the foundation for the spiritual and cultural connectedness of this land, which we call India or Bharata.

Obstacles : To transform Janapada system knowledge for modern IR

The basic differences between Western and Indian ontology form the fundamental differentiation for a very different conceptualisation of 'nation' and 'state' in the West and India. It's difficult to translate this ontological perception of the Indian landmass through existing Western epistemology, which forms the core of International Relations Theory.

Secondly, Eck points out how the dormant and superficial scratching in the name of critical scholarly work is insufficient for presenting an alternative to the



Westphalian 'nation'. She says, "Political interpreters of India's more recent past are primarily concerned with the modern rise of nationalism and the idea of civil society, both of which have their origins in the histories of Europe." This underscores the importance of examining the complexities present in systems like the Janapada.

Thirdly, scholars must take up the challenge of building methodological approaches and overcoming obstacles created by weak institutional mechanisms to address Eck's question: why don't we explore how India has perceived itself and expressed its regional and pan-regional identities? However, this inquiry is rarely pursued due to practical constraints, such as academic settings, lack of funding, or a general reluctance to acknowledge diverse viewpoints on nationhood beyond the Western framework. As a result, research often focuses on more recent histories.

The 'Gap' in Indian political theory on 'Nation': Relevance of Janapada system

Rajat Kanta Ray argues that Indian nationalism originated from the concept of civil society, which was introduced from Europe. In Europe and other parts of the world, the sentiments behind nationalism were deeply rooted in a long history, shaped by a rich and ancient culture; beyond the debate whether the nation came first or the state, the idea of nation or state in its modern form is largely owed to a deepened local history of Western Europe. Its trajectory to the logical conclusion of the modern-day state may be traced from Plato's ideal state to Aristotle's practical approach towards the state. It further traversed through the Hobbesian idea of a leviathan state, which was largely influenced by the anarchical conditions owing to the English Civil War. Thus, it emphasised the need for a state in the form of a 'leviathan' to establish law and order in society to escape the 'nasty, poor, brutish life'. This idea further accommodated changes as it passed through the Lockean times, wherein changed times led to the belief in 'man being a rational creature'. This belief was institutionally accompanied by historic decisions of giving rights to man within the state, bringing it out from the clutches of a 'Leviathan' state.

It's this deeply rooted, long history shaped by a rich and ancient culture, tracing back to Plato and Aristotle and traversing through brilliant articulations by great Western scholars like Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, etc., that has ultimately resulted in the modern conception of state and nation in the West. However, the third world countries like India have not been provided the freedom to build their state or nation based on their own intellectual churning and social deliberations. As Partha Chatterjee puts it, a 'modular' nation is imposed on India, without giving the space to imagine or carve its community. Thus, the intellectual insights of Buddha, Kautilya, Ashoka, Akbar, or modern Indian nationalist thinkers like Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, or Vivekananda remain at the fringes. At the same time, we are introduced to the concept of Indian 'nation' in a foreign language and lens articulated by Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, etc.

We need to look into ideas of our nationalist thinkers as well. For example, Vivekananda stated in his speech, "In Europe, political ideas create national unity; in Asia, religious ideas form national unity." Similarly, Tagore conveys this idea in his 1917 essay *Nationalism*, where he argues that India must find "a basis of unity that is



not political." Tagore believed that by addressing this, India could make a profound contribution to the world's broader challenges. The idea of interconnectedness is also reflected in *Vande Mataram* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, which became a unifying slogan for the people of India, whether they were Bengali, Punjabi, Tamil, or Rajasthani. The slogan of *Vande Mataram* became a rallying cry for unity among people who revered this land as sacred—viewing it both as the land of salvation and suffering. It represented a place where being born was considered a great blessing, a land that bestowed joy and blessings. Thus, we see that Indian nationalist thinkers view 'nation' quite differently from their Western counterparts.

The ideas of these Indian nationalist thinkers, along with insights provided by the Janapada system, are the terrain that needs to be traversed to truly discover an alternative to the Western concept of 'Nation' and 'state'.

Conclusion

In rethinking the idea of "nation" in the Indian context, this paper has explored the ancient political structures and cultural consciousness that have long defined India, offering a critique of Western frameworks of nationhood that overlook the locative consciousness of the land. The Janapada system, as articulated in texts like the *Arthashastra* and the Vedic hymns, reveals a society where political authority was intertwined with communal life, ethics, and spirituality which stands in stark contrast to the centralized, territorial notion of the modern nation-state. India as a nation cannot be understood strictly in the sense of a modern nation-state system; its idea of nation is based in its own locative consciousness, as explicated by its underlying traditions in the form of tirthas, hymns, and daily rituals. India, as a complex, diverse, and interconnected entity, provides a living example of how a nation can be more than just a territory, more than just a political state. It is a manifestation of a deep cultural and spiritual unity that has survived millennia—one that invites us to expand our definitions of what it means to be a nation, to be united, and to be interconnected with the land and each other.

Janapada system forms the very foundation of the start of such visualisation of this land, which we call Bharata. Janapada system has been analysed into four categories of Population, Territory, Government, and Sovereignty in this paper. But this framework is merely a way to structure our understanding. It also serves as a starting point for exploring how these intricacies might inform future studies on constructing a diverse idea of the nation in Bharata. By embracing this richer, more holistic understanding of Indian nationhood, we not only uncover the true depth of South Asian political thought but also contribute to a broader, more inclusive global discourse on international relations, where diverse knowledge systems are recognized and celebrated for their unique contributions. In this way, the Janapada system and its legacy offer both a valuable lens for studying the past and a guide for shaping a more inclusive and interconnected future.

As we continue to evolve the field of International Relations, it is essential to incorporate these diverse, non-Western perspectives. South Asian intellectual traditions, especially those that emphasize the spiritual and collective dimensions of nationhood, offer valuable lessons for rethinking the boundaries and possibilities of political organization in the globalized world. Colonialism imposed a Western-centric



vision of statecraft upon South Asia, one that disregarded the region's indigenous systems of governance, community, and collective identity. By revisiting these early systems, particularly the Janapada and its subsequent developments, we can begin to understand the foundations of a distinctly Indian conception of governance and nationhood that is both ancient and progressive.

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