

INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF
POSTCOLONIAL MODERNITY

Priya Chacko

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ABSTRACT

India's foreign policy behaviour often challenges conventional theories of international relations (IR). Why for instance, did India wait 24 years after its first nuclear test to conduct another test? In the wake of its nuclear tests, why did the political leadership highlight the scientific achievements more than the military implications and why did it characterise India's nuclear program as being unique in terms of its restraint and its commitment to total disarmament? Why did India engage in a discourse of friendship with China rather than adopt the anti-communist stance of other democratic states? These are just some of the questions that cannot be adequately explained by the positivist and ahistorical traditions of IR that down-play the connection between state identity and foreign policy or analyse foreign policy as the product of pre-existing realities, subjectivities and interpretive dispositions. An approach that takes into account the historical and cultural context of the construction of state identity however, offers a fuller understanding of India's foreign policy behaviour. Using genealogy and the idea of identity performativity, this thesis analyses India's foreign policy discourse as a representational practice which, through various codings of sex, gender and race, enacts India's postcolonial identity.

The thesis uses the findings of five case studies – India's relationship with China, its nuclear politics, its relations with its South Asian neighbours and its interventions in Pakistan and Sri Lanka – to suggest that a deep ambivalence toward Western modernity lies at the heart of India's postcolonial identity and, therefore, the foreign policy discourse that enacts it. This ambivalence arises because, on the one hand, Indian nationalists accepted colonial narratives in which the backwardness of 'Indian civilisation' led to its degeneration, but on the other hand, they recognised the need to advance a critique of

Western modernity and its deep imbrication with colonialism. The result is a striving for a postcolonial modernity that is not only imitative but strives to be distinctly different and superior to Western modernity by being culturally and morally grounded. Thus, India is fashioned as a postcolonial civilisational-state that brings to international affairs a tradition of morality and ethical conduct which it derives from its civilisational heritage. This thesis argues that in order to comprehend the apparently inexplicable aspects of Indian foreign policy it is crucial to understand this self-fashioning.

DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available in all forms of media, now or hereafter known.

SIGNED: _____ DATE: _____

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