
Foreign policy of India towards Latin America in the field of cultural diplomacy: Interpretations and political approaches in the emerging world order

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Abstract

The ongoing transformations in the contemporary international system reflects a structural change related to the values and principles that have shaped the interstates interactions over the first two decades of the 21st century. Scholars and analysts, both sceptical and optimistic in the study of the world order, emphasise the decline of Global North's unipolar dominance in favour of an emerging multipolarity led by the Global South. This transition unfolds within a complex transitional geopolitical scenario marked by a multidimensional crisis.

In this context, culture emerges as a pivotal aspect in redefining narratives about power, politics, and society under the approach of cultural diplomacy. For emerging nations, cultural diplomacy serves as a strategic instrument to foster dialogue, enhance legitimacy, and exert influence on a global decision-making process that configures multipolarity. India's foreign policy towards Latin America through cultural diplomacy exemplifies this dynamic, illustrating how an emerging power leverages its cultural potential to consolidate global leadership and adopt new narratives that help in the diversification of key partnerships to advance an alternative model of sustainable development.

Keywords: India, Latin America, cultural diplomacy, new world order, multipolarity, foreign policy, emerging countries.

Introduction

The contemporary interpretation of international phenomena and the behaviour of states must take into account the current scenario of systemic transformations within international relations. These shifts are marked by a transition from a unipolar order dominated by the West – comprised the

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United States, Europe, and their allies), commonly referred to as the Atlanticist bloc or the liberal world order, towards a Eurasian multipolarity represented by emerging powers such as India, China, and Russia, alongside other relevant actors from the Global South.

This dialectical process, characterised by divergent values, concepts and perceptions of the “other”, is taking place in an increasingly fragmented and conflict-prone global society, where traditional governance structures are proving inadequate to respond to the demands of a more diverse and complex collective, whose tensions significantly influence the political and economic configuration on a planetary scale.

The above has intensified scenarios of high conflict and rivalry in the race for global leadership in commercial, economic, and political terms, where control over zones of influence, resources, and technological dominance have impacted the architecture of a new geopolitical map modelled after decentralised globalisation that redefines the dynamics of global power in a complex scenario.

In this regard, Oikonomou (2024) argues that the emergence of new powers poses a broader distribution of power, especially in countries that promote a "modernisation without Westernisation" characterised by nationalist positions. At the same time, defenders of globalism, sceptical about the viability of multipolarity, point out that this behaviour could be considered an adaptive strategy of the new emerging poles to protect themselves from the uncertainty that characterizes this period of transformation (Axford, 2024).

The same author emphasises that the current scenario has intensified key debates, including the dichotomy between multipolarity and multilateralism, the tension between liberal democracy and emerging authoritarianism, and the contestation between a Western rule – based order and the international legal framework centred on respect for sovereignty. Within this context, culture, identity, and multiculturalism have become increasingly salient in global discourse. These elements are not only underlying factors in current conflicts but also serve as mechanisms of resistance against universalisation of social systems and as a means of preserving a traditional collective consciousness oriented towards coexistence.

Therefore, it is a crucial to recognise that the main emerging powers advocating a multipolar order are civilisation-states characterise by a vast cultural diversity, whose historical foundations extend back more than 3,000 years. These civilisations possess both tangible and intangible legacies that continue to influence their own societies and which they actively seek to reaffirm in the present (Pacini, 2024).



India and China exemplify the most prominent cases of re-emerging powers seeking to reclaim their historical positions in the world order (Gonzalo, 2023). Both nations occupy a central place in the global collective imagination, drawing legitimacy and recognition in the international arena from their philosophies, religious and spiritual traditions, as well as their historical-technological contributions.

In this regard, Gómez (2024) asserts that cultural diplomacy serves as a crucial instrument for emerging nations in their efforts of to construct a new narrative that reflects their unique experiences and perspectives. It also provides a platform for promoting their historical legacies, which encompasses a diverse set of values. Despite their multiplicity, these values converge in the imperative to foster mutual understanding, social cohesion, and cooperation based on solidarity and dialogue, in response to an increasingly dynamic and turbulent world.

This article specifically examines India's approach to advancing a more comprehensive behaviour and effective cultural diplomacy in the context of the emerging world order. It focuses on India's engagement with Latin America, highlighting the strategic advantages of cultural projection in diversify alliances and enhancing influence in a region of growing interest, one with which India shares common values in terms of multiculturalism and political systems.

Literature review

To examine India's cultural diplomacy towards Latin America in the present landscape, it is important to consider the conceptual frameworks that shape the dynamics of the subject under study. In particular, this analysis will explore perspectives on the world order, the positioning of India and Latin America in this context, and the evolving role of cultural diplomacy in contemporary global affairs.

The New World Order

The world order is undergoing a process of structural transformation, evidenced by the decline of the United States hegemony - or the end of unipolarity- and the rise of the Asian century, making the emergence of a multipolar world. In this sense, Acharya (2017) defines the multipolar world order as “multiplex”, characterised by diversity and complexity, with a decentralised architecture for managing global order.

Within this framework, both traditional and emerging powers play a significant role in the regionalisation of governance, fostering broader interdependence that remains sustainable within the global system.

In this regard, Serbin (2019) observes that the shift of the global economic centre from the Atlantic bloc to the Asia-Pacific bloc has exacerbated fractures within the liberal world order, intensifying systemic imbalance expressed in three key crises: 1) the crisis of liberal democracy, leading to the weakening, and delegitimisation of global governance institutions; 2) the crisis of globalisation and the liberal economic system; and 3) social, humanitarian, and environmental crises.

These developments have generated a “process of reconfiguration and diffusion of power”, wherein former recipients of Western policies (rule-takers) are emerging as independent poles, capable of making their own decisions (rule-makers and rule-shakers) thereby contributing to the formation of a new global governance model guided by polycentrism (Serbin, 2019).

Ikemberry (2013) acknowledges the existence of a crisis whiting the liberal order but does not interpret as its decline. The author argues that the current order is evolving towards greater inclusivity and adaptability, coexisting in a multipolar scenario characterise by diminishing Western dominance. In this context, global multilateral institutions and their normative foundations must be complemented by the regional organisations of emerging powers, acting as essential instruments in an increasingly interconnected world.

India, Latin America and the New World Order

For India, the conditions associated with the configuration of a new world order, combined with its expanding economic, technological, and cultural potential, has positioned it as one of the most prominent emerging centres of power, marking a pivotal moment in the deployment of its foreign policy.

Instruments such as cultural diplomacy have been aligned with the vision of a democratic, flexible, transparent, and representative global order, as well as with the call for a “reformed multilateralism” and more equitable global governance. In this context, cultural diplomacy serves as a mechanism for fostering conciliation, responsible dialogue and influence in global decision-making, aiming to prevent disorder and contribute to the rebalancing of the international system (Happymon, 2024).

Latin America has acquired geostrategic significance whiting India's foreign policy, with cultural diplomacy positioning as a formal instrument of power to consolidate India's status as a respected, recognised, and influential actor representing the Global South. This extends beyond the traditional



promotion of Indian culture assets such as yoga and Bollywood, which continue to be emblematic elements of the nation's soft power.

Furthermore, India's engagement with Latin America has gained momentum in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, largely driven by its economic expansion. India has positioned itself as the world's third-largest economy, and a key partner committed to fostering South-South cooperation whiting a sustainable, inclusive, and collaborative framework (Saran, 2018).

According to B  liz et. al. (2023), Latin America represents a strategic opportunity due to the region's relative stability, which facilitates the deepening of a more dynamic and comprehensive partnership with India. This is particularly relevant given Latin America's role as an emerging consumer market for Indian manufacturers, while also serving as a supplier of essential raw materials that contributed to strengthening Indian's economic, military, and technological capabilities.

At the same time, for Latin America, the consolidation of a multipolar world order with India's active participation offers opportunities not only to diversify its economic partnership but also to secure a more effective insertion within new global economic formations. This shift enables the region to move beyond its traditional role as a raw materials supplier towards enhancing competitiveness, integrating into the new value chains, and advancing its own development initiatives in alignment with Indian's great strategy objectives (El Aynaou & Woertz, 2016).

This process paves the way for expanded cooperation aimed at shaping a global governance framework that is more responsive to the contemporary challenges through institutional reforms. Additionally, in underscores the potential for collaboration in strategic sectors such as technological innovation, the digital economy, and renewable energy, under criteria of complementarity and interconnectivity between both regions (Gomez, 2025).

India's cultural diplomacy in Latin America in an era of multipolarity

In this scenario, India's cultural diplomacy reasserts its importance as a mechanism to promote dialogue and engagement between both actors, with the objective of cultivating new bonds of trust and enhancing international recognition, extended beyond the mere "construction of bridges for mutual exchange" (Sahai, 2019). That is, cultural diplomacy seeks to stablsh frameworks of rapprochement grounded in the recognition of "otherness", respect for diversity and non-differentiation as essential elements for shaping a more equitable relationship that contributes to the construction of a common future.

This process entails not only a redistribution of political and economic power, reflected in the composition of new representative regionalism such as the BRICS (BRICS+) and the promotion of reforms to the existing multilateral system, which advocates for a greater representation for the Global South through emerging economies such as India in forums like United Nations Security Council. It also signifies the emergence of a new South-South dialogue, underpinned by the intensification of academic and scientific cooperation, which introduce new issues into the bilateral agenda, including sustainability, climate change mitigation, and technological development. This approach reinforces India's presence in the region as a reliable and non-hegemonic actor.

Methodology

This article adopts a post-positivism approach to international relations, employing interpretative methods and elements of the constructivist approach to examine the complexities underlying the transition towards multipolarity. It moves beyond traditional analyses that prioritise the material dimensions of military or economic power by integrating symbolic, cultural, and normative factors. This approach facilitates a flexible, holistic, and integrative study that must be addressed through a transdisciplinary vision.

Accordingly, the discursive analysis of India's foreign policy towards Latin America, viewed through the lens of cultural diplomacy, explores how cultural values, historical narratives, and diplomatic strategies are constructed and articulated in a global context characterised by the multidimensionality and interdependence of emerging nations. This analysis reinterprets foreign policy definitions and behaviours in response to evolving international dynamics.

Results and discussion

Uncertainty persists regarding the significance of cultural diplomacy in building a multipolar alternative within a world characterised by violence, war, and unilateralism, where mechanisms for dialogue often appear ineffective. In this context, a critical question arises: can India's foreign policy, through the adoption of a more pragmatic approach to cultural diplomacy towards non-traditional regions such as Latin America, signal a paradigmatic shift in the country's international engagement.

As an emerging power in a multipolar scenario, India appears to be redefining the parameters of its behaviour as a global actor. Consequently, it is necessary to reassess the characteristics and

effectiveness of this strategy within the broader landscape of its foreign policy principles in order to consolidate its international position.

The scope of inquiry India's role in cultural diplomacy remains extensive, prompting reflection on its traditional cultural assets, such as yoga, Ayurveda, gastronomy, which have been widely studied. A key consideration is how India can integrate these elements into a more structured foreign policy aimed at strengthening alliances beyond its immediate neighbourhood.

In this sense, the potential of India's cultural diplomacy as a means of fostering trust and legitimacy on the international stage has yet to be fully realised. Structural constraints including inadequate infrastructure, limited financial resources, and counter-narratives that challenge India's global image and reputation, continue to hinder the effective projection of its influence, despite its considerable advantages (Jagodzinski, 2024).

It is essential to recognise that culture, in the form of cultural diplomacy, has become a pivotal factor in power relations in the contemporary international arena. The early 21st century marked a turning point in the interpretation of cultural diplomacy, particularly in the context of the war on terror, which exacerbated tensions between the West and the East in what was framed as “clash of civilizations.” The excesses of this period underscored the urgent need for a “dialogue of civilizations” as a mechanism for restoring harmony within a fragmented international landscape (Jaramillo, 2023).

In this regard, cultural diplomacy has been increasingly recognised as a vital instrument for peacebuilding and governance, fostering mutual understanding and respect for plurality and diversity (Jaramillo, 2023). This is particularly relevant in the context of the Global South, where a broader theoretical framework is required—one that moves beyond its conventional associations of soft power or nation branding strategies.

Conclusion

The emerging multipolar world order is characterized by multiplicity of interrelated factors that interact in a complex and uncertain context. This evolving scenario profoundly impacts the nature of India-Latin America relations in the field of cultural diplomacy, fundamentally due to the growing importance of categories such as the spiritual, cultural identity and historical consciousness of emerging actors have acquired.



India is distinguished by its status as a state civilisation founded on the principle of unity in diversity, while the countries of Latin America, representing the expanded Global South, are characterised by their rich plurality. These shared attributes provide a foundation for identity-based reflection, fostering deeper interactions to address common global challenges and strengthen the economic and geopolitical complementarity of the two regions.

In this context, India's evolving approach to cultural diplomacy towards Latin America reflects a multifaceted strategy that integrates the continued promotion of its traditional cultural assets a reconfigured framework of South-South cooperation, and adaptation to the dynamics of the multipolar world. The formulation of new narratives between both blocks is particularly relevant in redefining historical perceptions and dismantling entrenched stereotypes. By revitalising cultural dialogue, this process reinforces the values of coexistence and mutual respect, which are essential for cultivating high-level strategic relationship.

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