

Procedural Pragmatism: Territorial and Cultural Diplomacy in Modi's Foreign Policy

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Introduction

‘Pragmatism’—and its promise as a medium of change—has a distinctive connotation in the context of India’s foreign policy. In the post-Cold War era, a number of scholars within and beyond India’s foreign policy establishment have both identified and urged for greater ‘pragmatism.’¹ A ‘pragmatic’ foreign policy implies a rejection of India’s earlier reliance on Nehruvian ‘idealism’ or ‘moral posturing,’ and instead, a focus on power and material interests. Many argue that ‘idealism,’ indelibly associated with the prime ministership of Jawaharlal Nehru, led to major foreign policy failures—such as India’s defeat in the 1962 border war with China—as well as the entrenchment of redundant policies—such as India’s policy of non-alignment. Thus, post-Cold War pragmatism is warmly welcomed by these scholars. Indeed pragmatism is what India must follow in order to become a ‘normal power that is no longer focused on transforming the world,’ and to emerge on the world stage as a materially powerful state in the twenty-first century.²

A resurgence in the discourse on pragmatism in Indian foreign policy—consistent with the post-Cold War scholarship and most evident in sections of India’s print media—has followed the election of Narendra Modi to power in May 2014. Modi’s election was heralded as a seminal moment for India’s foreign policy.³ As one commentator pronounced, ‘there is little question that Modi’s foreign policy constitutes a departure from India’s stances of the past.’⁴ These predictions of change have been based on hopes and alleged signs that Modi’s approach to foreign policy-making will be even more pragmatic than previous leaders. Not

¹ We discuss this literature extensively in a later section of this article.

² C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India’s New Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 268.

³ Brahma Chellaney, ‘Narendra Modi’s imprint on foreign policy’, *LiveMint*, 2 September 2014, <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/Rx9Waq6uNG6yHJaSJMurTL/Narendra-Modis-imprint-on-foreign-policy.html>; Christophe Jaffrelot, ‘A Modi Doctrine?’, *The Indian Express*, 20 November 2014; Amitabh Mattoo, ‘The Modi Foreign Policy Doctrine: India as a Smart Power’, *The Conversation*, 12 June 2014; Harsh Pant, ‘Out with Non-alignment, in with a ‘Modi Doctrine,’ *The Diplomat*, 13 November 2014.

⁴ Sumit Ganguly, ‘Hindu nationalism and the foreign policy of India’s Bharatiya Janata Party’, No. 2, June 2015, Transatlantic Academy Paper Series, Kindle Edition.

only, it is said, will he bypass the long-held idealistic notions of Nehruvianism, but, in addition, he will also set aside cultural and religious ideologies or entrenched principles,⁵ namely, his own party's Hindutva or Hindu nationalist ideology.

In this article, we critically engage with the scholarly work that identifies a shift to pragmatism in India's foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, and problematize the claims that Modi is a pragmatic leader who is able to dispense with earlier ideas and ideologies in foreign policy making. Not only have a set of commentators already sought to empirically counter claims that Modi can readily escape the constraints of India's foreign policy ideas, discourses and processes,⁶ but, as we show in this article, the characterisation of India's post-Cold War foreign policies as 'pragmatic,' stands in contrast to much of the theoretical scholarship on the role of ideas in transforming foreign policy, which emphasises the constraints posed by institutionalised discourse and praxis.

Our article proceeds as follows. First, we show how the term 'pragmatism', as applied to shifts in India's post-Cold War foreign policy, has generally been interpreted substantively. That is, it denotes a foreign policy that has expunged one form of 'content,' earlier ideational frameworks, and adopted a new 'content,' a set of realist assumptions that frame the national interest in terms of material power. We argue that the characterisation of the prime ministership of Narendra Modi as strongly pragmatic by the media and some academics similarly builds on substantive pragmatism. We call into question this substantive reading of pragmatism and show how it is analytically weak and unable to predict change in foreign policy. Moreover, it falsely signals to outside observers that India's foreign policy is driven

⁵ Ashutosh Varshney, 'The Pragmatic PM?' *Indian Express*, 22 August 2014.

⁶ Manjari Chatterjee Miller, 'Foreign policy à la Modi', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2014; Ankit Panda, 'Hindu nationalism and... foreign policy?', *The Diplomat*, 4 April 2014; Kanti Bajpai, 'Continuity – but with zeal', *Seminar* 688, April 2015, p.27; Ian Hall, 'Is a 'Modi doctrine' emerging in Indian foreign policy?', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 69:3, 2015, p.249.

entirely by power and interest whereas in actuality, it continues to draw on domestic sets of ideas.

Second, we posit that pragmatism, treated seriously and theorised, can nonetheless offer a useful framework to understand change in India's foreign policy. We present the concept of *procedural pragmatism* and argue that foreign policy pragmatism is a *process* of engaging with all and any ideas that are contextually and politically expedient to achieving a given policy end. In doing so, we build on work on agency in ideational change, and specifically, the notion of pragmatism as 'bricolage'⁷, that is, the selection and fusion of different—and sometimes competing—ideas and ideological commitments in order to improvise new policy positions. Such a reading of pragmatism is therefore *procedural* in that it focuses on the process of bringing about policy innovation, rather than *substantive*, in that it denies or embraces a particular content. Thus, we argue that Modi is not unique or uniquely pragmatic, and like many Indian leaders before him, his pragmatism is of the procedural kind.

Finally, we demonstrate Modi's procedural pragmatism through two case studies that have been heralded in the Indian media as examples of his 'transformational' policy but are yet to receive scholarly attention—the 'high politics' security-centric, territorial diplomacy case of the swapping of enclaves with Bangladesh, and the 'low politics' cultural diplomacy case of the establishment of an International Day of Yoga (IDY). At first glance, these policy successes appear to showcase a change in policy direction as well as a disregard for ideology and/or entrenched ideas. In the first case, Modi set aside his Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) long-standing objections to the land deal with Bangladesh and actually ceded territory to settle the border dispute. In the second case, the Modi government appeared to disregard institutionalised ideas regarding the value and appeal of India's pluralist cultural heritage in

⁷ Martin B. Carstensen, 'Paradigm man vs. the bricoleur', *European Political Science Review* 3:1, 2011, p. 147-167; Martin B. Carstensen, 'Ideas are not as stable as political scientists want them to be: a theory of incremental ideational change', *Political Studies* 59, 2011, pp. 596-615.

order to promote a version of yoga that privileged a narrow, ‘Hinduised’ interpretation of India’s cultural traditions. However, in both cases, Modi was required to engage explicitly with both ideology and ideational frameworks, rather than to dismiss them. We illustrate this with reference both to Hindu nationalist ideas embodied in Hindutva, and to two sets of institutionalised ideational frameworks, post-imperial ideology (PII) and Indian exceptionalism, that have been shown to affect Indian foreign policy over time.

We conclude that Modi’s policies are indeed constrained by both ideology and institutionalised ideas, and, as a result, like most other leaders, his pragmatism entails bricolage, that is, improvising with influential and institutionalised ideas rather than without them. In the Indian context, this finding is significant since it suggests that Modi *cannot* always set aside the personal and domestic beliefs of Hindutva that are so closely aligned with his leadership, and, equally, that he is *not* entirely free to move away from India’s entrenched foreign policy positions of the past. Moreover, our characterisation and theorisation of foreign policy pragmatism as a *process* opens the way for a deeper understanding of policy shifts since the end of the Cold War. While realist assumptions about the desirability and necessity of acquiring material power have indeed gradually entered Indian foreign policy discourse and practice, they too need to be explicitly understood as *ideas* held by influential individuals or groups, and the concept of agency needs to be seriously treated. By seeking to understand pragmatism as a process, we open a way to capture the nuances of ideational change in Indian foreign policy, rather than the caricatured abandonment and adoption of blocks of content that substantive readings of pragmatism imply.

Pragmatism in India's Foreign Policy

The 'Substantive' Pragmatism of the Post-Cold War Era

In the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, with the decline of India's historically dominant party, the Indian National Congress (INC) and the concurrent rise of the 'Hindu nationalist' Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India made a significant break with its Nehruvian⁸ heritage. The advent of a post-Nehruvian phase of foreign-policy-making was most conspicuously signalled by India's 1998 nuclear tests, marking a break from its long and principled adherence to global nuclear disarmament. The scholarship that recounts India's foreign policy history describes this, as we will discuss, as a shift from Nehruvian 'idealism' to a new post-Cold War 'pragmatism'.

The Indian foreign policy literature generally concurs on what constitutes Nehruvian idealism and how it played out in Indian foreign policy. Scholars agree that the earlier framework emphasised a set of world-changing principles,⁹ including 'liberal internationalism,'¹⁰ 'eradicating colonialism and racism,'¹¹ 'organizing the uplift of the world's poor and dispossessed,'¹² 'a suspicion of superpowers,'¹³ and, of course, non-alignment. It has been pointed out that Nehruvianism, used interchangeably with idealism, was not monolithic.¹⁴ But even across its variations, the scholarly consensus is that, at its core, there existed notions of morality in international relations, and a strong belief in India's moral leadership.

⁸ Stemming from Jawaharlal Nehru, India's chief foreign policy architect who dominated policy making for nearly two decades.

⁹ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, p. xxi.

¹⁰ Stephen P. Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2001), p. 38.

¹¹ James Chiriyankandath, 'Realigning India: Indian Foreign Policy After the Cold War,' *The Round Table* 93:374, April 2004, p. 200.

¹² Sumit Ganguly, 'India's Foreign Policy Grows Up,' *World Policy Journal*, Winter 2003/04, p. 42.

¹³ Cohen, *India: Emerging Power*, p. 40.

¹⁴ Stephen Cohen, for example, makes a distinction between Nehruvianism and militant Nehruvianism. See Cohen, *India: Emerging Power*, pp. 41-43.

When the shift in Indian foreign policy began in the 1990s, many Indian foreign policy scholars heralded this as a positive and radical break from the ‘idealist’ policies of the past. Nehruvianism as a whole was declared by such scholars to have been a failure. These scholars argued that there was now a new and welcome ‘pragmatism’ in Indian foreign policy.¹⁵ Pragmatism was defined through an *absence* of a particular content, but also through the introduction of a new content, synonymous with the assumptions of realism—‘the adoption of a ‘self-help’ (structural realist) approach to foreign policy.’¹⁶

Indeed, the new, so-called pragmatic approach to Indian foreign policy was defined as viewing the world ‘in terms of a clash of interests and the pursuit of power by individual states.’¹⁷ A pragmatic India would focus on material interests, grasp the significance of power as the most important dynamic in world politics,¹⁸ turn to the use of force as necessary in international politics, and pursue rapid economic growth and great power.¹⁹ Pragmatism meant India would emphasise the national interest, be less doctrinaire about alliances, expand influence through international regimes and treaties, and move away from moral claims in international relations.²⁰ ‘The centre of gravity of Indian foreign policy had shifted from idealism to realism.’ Pragmatism was seen, therefore, as liberated from prior beliefs and ideologies. India has become ‘less ideological’²¹ and realised that ‘grand ideological coalitions ill-serve[d] India’s material interests.’²² It was not simply that Nehruvianism

¹⁵ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*; Ganguly, ‘India’s Foreign Policy Grows Up;’ Deepa Ollapally and Rajesh Rajagopalan, ‘The pragmatic challenge to Indian foreign policy’, *Washington Quarterly* 34: 2, Spring 2011, pp. 145-62; Deepa M. Ollapally and Rajesh Rajagopalan (2012) ‘India: Foreign policy perspectives of an ambiguous power,’ in Henry R. Nau and Deepa M. Ollapally (ed.) *Worldviews of aspiring powers: Domestic foreign policy debates in China, India, Iran, Japan, and Russia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 73-113.

¹⁶ Sumit Ganguly and Manjeet S. Pardesi, ‘Explaining Sixty Years of India’s Foreign Policy’, *India Review* 8(1), 2009, p. 4.

¹⁷ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, p. xxi.

¹⁸ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, p. xxii.

¹⁹ Ganguly, ‘India’s Foreign Policy Grows Up,’ p. 47, 42.

²⁰ Ollapally and Rajgopalan, ‘The Pragmatic Challenge to Indian Foreign Policy,’ pp. 149-51.

²¹ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, p. 266, 268.

²² Ganguly, ‘India’s Foreign Policy Grows Up,’ p. 47.

failed. Rather, scholars blamed the moralist and liberal-internationalist ideas of Nehruvianism for India's 'strategic missteps' because it was ideological positions rather than the national interest that had hitherto dominated Indian foreign policy.²³ 'India was now able to devise a foreign policy free from the "mind-forged manacles"... of Cold War thinking... Indian policymakers have now ceased 'berat[ing] the United States and the Western alliance over a range of real and imagined grievances.'²⁴ In short, Indian foreign policy was now finally pragmatic, in that it was realist in orientation, and shorn of the morality and ideational constraints of Nehruvianism.²⁵

In recounting this narrative of foreign policy change, some scholars linked pragmatism particularly to periods of BJP leadership. This is partly because realist assumptions resonate with the Hindu nationalist drive to develop a materially and martially strong India²⁶, but also because of the BJP's politicised critique of Nehruvianism as a foreign policy staple of its rival, the Indian National Congress. Chaulia observes how, in the 1990s, the BJP was the only party to declare that non-alignment had become irrelevant with the fall of the Soviet Union.²⁷ Moreover, as one key party member during the leadership of BJP Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee recounted, Nehruvianism had failed to build up India's strength and India now faced unprecedented external threats.²⁸ The BJP leadership emphasized that India was weak, marginalized and lacked power. They pledged to recreate a 'strong India recognized as an autonomous power center in the world.'²⁹ With or without a reference to

²³ Ollapally and Rajgopalan, 'The Pragmatic Challenge to Indian Foreign Policy,' pp. 149-50.

²⁴ Ganguly, 'India's Foreign Policy Grows Up,' p. 42.

²⁵ James Chiriyankandath and Andrew K. J. Wyatt, 'The NDA and Indian Foreign Policy', in: Katherine Adeney, Lawrence Sáez (eds.), *Coalition Politics and Hindu Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 193.

²⁶ Rahul Sagar, "'Jiski lathi, uski bhains": The Hindu nationalist view of international politics', in Kanti Bajpai, Saira Basit, V. Krishnappa (ed.), *India's grand strategy: History, theory, cases* (New Delhi/Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 234-57.

²⁷ Sreeram S. Chaulia, 'BJP, India's Foreign Policy and the 'Realist Alternative' to the Nehruvian Tradition,' *International Politics* 39, June 2002, p. 227.

²⁸ Jaswant Singh, *In Service of Emergent India: A Call to Honour* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007).

²⁹ Chaulia, 'BJP, India's Foreign Policy,' p. 220-21.

the role of the BJP, the accounts of Indian foreign policy's post-Cold War shift that centre on the advent of pragmatism almost uniformly present it substantively, that is, in terms of an expunged earlier content of 'idealism,' and a newly 'discovered' content that centres on realist assumptions about the behaviour of states—a focus on material interests, and maximising hard power.

The Pragmatism of Narendra Modi

The prime ministership of Narendra Modi has led a reinvigorated discussion of the merits of pragmatism in Indian foreign policy. While it is too early in his tenure to analyse scholarly content on Modi, a search of the Indian print media reveals that the term 'pragmatism' is more closely linked with Modi than with his predecessors³⁰ and that it broadly corresponds with the scholarship on substantive pragmatism. We searched articles in three influential national newspapers, the *Indian Express*, *Times of India*, and *The Economic Times*, from 1 January 2014 to 1 March 2016. These newspapers were selected for their wide circulation as well as quality of journalism. This particular time period was selected to capture both the emergence of Modi as a national figure and a viable candidate for prime minister, as well as the term of his office to date. Searching for the terms 'Modi,' 'pragmatism,' 'pragmatic,' and 'pragmatist' yielded a total of 135 articles. Out of these, 115 articles either directly asserted

³⁰ The media's articulation of Modi's pragmatism is different from its articulation of previous prime ministers, both BJP and Congress. To give us a basis for comparison of Modi with another BJP prime minister, we collected articles from the inaugural two years of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's prime ministership (1 January 1998 to 31 December 1999) from the *Times of India* and *The Economic Times*. And to give us a basis for comparison of Modi with a more recent, Congress prime minister, we collected articles from the inaugural three years of Manmohan Singh's prime ministership (1 January 2004 to 31 December 2006) from the *Times of India* and *The Economic Times*. We then searched them for the exact same terms, substituting only the names of the prime ministers. The most striking difference is in the number of articles. Even accounting for the absence of the *Indian Express* from the search, two years of Vajpayee and three years of Singh yield only a handful of relevant articles (30 for Vajpayee, and 20 for Singh) that link to pragmatism.

or anticipated that Modi or a Modi government is, or would be, pragmatic, both in domestic politics but mostly in foreign policy.

Readings of Modi's pragmatism in these newspapers as well as other sections of the Indian print media echoes the substantive understanding of pragmatism described in the scholarship above in that it implies a shift away from an earlier content and an embrace of the content of realist assumptions. However, in Modi's case, earlier content refers not just to 'idealism' but also to the religious and cultural ideas of Hindutva that he is most closely associated with. More than any other leader, including the previous BJP Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Narendra Modi is closely associated with Hindutva as both a personal belief system and a source of domestic political support.³¹

Media assessments broadly concur that Modi is pragmatic because he will be able to distance himself from India's past foreign policy frameworks ('Modi has articulated India's concerns and interests without falling into the familiar ideological traps that Delhi used to set for itself'),³² and there is a hope that he will continue the break with these ideas ('As far as the PM's challenge on the global stage is concerned, he has to signal a full reorientation of India's multilateralism away from its hitherto defensive approach to a confident pragmatism').³³ At the same time, he will be willing to abandon ideological and institutionalised ideational

³¹ Modi's political support base in India comprises not just the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) but also the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS, an organization that Modi reportedly joined at the age of eight, is a radical right wing Hindu nationalist organization and a key source of political support for the BJP. Modi is the only Indian prime minister to have faced allegations of human rights abuses in the Indian Supreme Court for the horrific violence against Muslims during his tenure as chief minister of the state of Gujarat, and to have consequently, been subjected to a de facto travel ban (now lifted) by the US, the UK and a number of European nations. t

³² 'Fortaleza Debut,' *Indian Express*, 17 July 2014.

³³ 'Going Bicoastal,' *Indian Express*, 25 September 2015.

stances of all kinds, where necessary³⁴ ('Modi will be more interested in development than pushing the Hindutva agenda').³⁵

Instead, reports suggest that Modi's pragmatism will lead him to follow realist assumptions ('Modi brings a rare pragmatism in dealing with the many differences with the US on trade, climate change and civil nuclear liability. Modi's eager pursuit of American investment in India is matched by his recognition of the unprecedented possibilities for geopolitical cooperation with the US.').³⁶ ('The nuclear deal between Iran and the US is a vindication of Delhi's diplomatic pragmatism that (has) unfolded since India conducted nuclear tests in May 1998').³⁷

The Problems of Substantive Pragmatism

Substantive pragmatism, both in the scholarship and as applied to Modi in the media, is analytically weak and offers an inadequate means of capturing change in Indian foreign policy. Much of the criticism we could level at a reading of pragmatism as synonymous with realism would echo the broader challenge to rationalist International Relations theories posed by critical theorists since the 1980s; a set of debates which, in the main, are yet to influence many scholars of Indian foreign policy.³⁸ Some critiques, however, are specific to the way that substantive pragmatism has been set up in relation to Indian foreign policy, and should be outlined here. To begin with, relating pragmatism to the 'adoption' of or a 'shift' to realism in world politics is problematic. The assumptions of realism as envisioned by

³⁴ Varshney, 'The pragmatic PM?'; 'How has the RSS culture produced a man like Narendra Modi?', *Scroll.in*, 6 November 2015, <http://scroll.in/article/767261/how-has-the-rss-culture-produced-a-pragmatic-man-like-narendra-modi>.

³⁵ Chidanand Rajghatta, 'Obama Signals US Ready to Put the Past Behind, Do Business with Modi,' *Times of India*, 14 May 2014.

³⁶ 'Re-Making India-US,' *Indian Express*, 2 October 2014.

³⁷ C. Raja Mohan, 'Look Again at the Middle East,' *Indian Express*, 2 April 2015.

³⁸ Christian Reus-Smit, 'Constructivism', in Scott Burchill *et al.* (eds.) *Theories of International Relations* (London: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 118–212.

classical theorists such as Morgenthau³⁹ or neo-realists such as Waltz⁴⁰ are a function of either the nature of states or the structural constraints of the international system. States do not suddenly adopt realist assumptions. Instead, those assumptions are simply and universally part of their nature and/or the structure of the international system. As Reus-Smit observes, the assumptions of neo-realism render ‘actors’ interests... exogenous to social interaction.’⁴¹ Second, since the scholarship on substantive pragmatism ignores key assumptions of realism by presenting its adoption in Indian foreign policy as a conscious choice, we might expect an accompanying discussion of agency or an unpacking of these assumptions as social ideas or individual beliefs, but this does not form part of the scholarship.

Third, since substantive pragmatism is presented as leading to radical shifts in foreign policy, the corollary is that once India’s leaders have fully embraced ‘realism’, India’s foreign policy will continue to radically change. Yet much of the scholarship on ideational change and foreign policy suggests that institutionalized ideas are ‘sticky’ and lead only to incremental changes in policy.⁴² In the case of India, it has been argued elsewhere that even such a radical ‘shift’ as India testing nuclear weapons in 1998 was not a drastic departure from previous governments.⁴³

Last, substantive pragmatism also implies that Indian foreign policy is reaching an ‘optimal’ content that presumably will extend indefinitely into the future. This implicit prognosis of ideational stasis represents a paradox: it suggests, on one hand, that ideas—such as those at the heart of Nehruvian idealism or Modi’s personal religious beliefs—can simply disappear.

³⁹ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1948).

⁴⁰ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York; London: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

⁴¹ Reus-Smit, ‘Constructivism’, p.192

⁴² Daniel Béland and Robert Henry Cox (eds.), *Ideas and politics in social science research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Carstensen, ‘Paradigm man vs. the bricoleur’; Iver B. Neumann, “‘A Speech that the Entire Ministry May Stand For’, or: Why Diplomats Never Produce Anything New’, *International Political Sociology* 1:2, June 2007, pp. 183–200; Christopher Hill, *Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.256.

⁴³ Amrita Narlikar, ‘All that Glitters is not Gold: India’s Rise to Power’, *Third World Quarterly* 28:5, 2007, pp. 983–96.

And yet, on the other hand, by implying that a static set of ‘realist’ assumptions underpin Indian foreign policy’s new pragmatism, it suggests that ideas will remain the same.

In contrast to these substantive characterisations of Modi’s pragmatism as ‘empty’ of past foreign policy thinking and Hindutva, and ‘filled’ with Realist principles, we present an alternative, *procedural* characterisation of both Modi’s pragmatism and India’s foreign policy pragmatism more generally. As we argue in the next section, procedural pragmatism is a *process* of ideational innovation in foreign policy, rather than the content-rich blueprint for change that foreign policy revisionists envisage, namely a foreign policy built on realist assumptions. As a *process*, pragmatism means working creatively *with* ideas and ideology, but it does not prescribe *which* ideas and ideologies are relevant, since these are defined by the given political and historical context.

In Modi’s case, the intention to bring change to Indian foreign policy is necessarily interwoven with a conscious engagement with, and adaptation of, both his Hindutva ideology and pre-existing institutionalised sets of ideas in Indian foreign policy. While pragmatism would *appear* to be in tension with Hindutva—Modi would be expected to tamp down his political religious nationalism in pursuit of economic and other strategic goals⁴⁴—in fact, Modi must continue to appeal to his Hindu nationalist base, a key source of his political support. Modi has, in fact, himself stated that Hindutva is ‘an asset in foreign affairs.’⁴⁵ Moreover, just like his predecessors, he must also confront institutionalised foreign policy ideas that have enjoyed longevity and stability in their influence on Indian foreign policy. A procedural conception of pragmatism shows him as actively navigating between these forces.

⁴⁴ ‘Narendra Modi: Pragmatist or ideologue?’ *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 28 May 2014, <http://fpif.org/narendra-modi-continuity-change-foreign-policy/>.

⁴⁵ ‘My Hindutva face will be an asset in foreign affairs’, *The Indian Express*, 23 April 2014.

Reconceptualising Pragmatism in Indian Foreign Policy: ‘Procedural Pragmatism’

In contrast to the substantive framing of Indian foreign policy pragmatism outlined above, we present as an alternative, a procedural definition. Only a small number of scholars of India’s foreign policy implicitly allow for possibility of such a conceptualisation. Basrur, for example, observes how Indian leaders have always been pragmatic, but that the content of their pragmatism has undergone gradual change.⁴⁶ Basrur’s allowance for a shifting content of pragmatism fits with the procedural definition of pragmatism we present below. In another vein, Datta’s analysis of the BJP and its pragmatism centres on the idea of political opportunism.⁴⁷ According to her account, pragmatism is neither divorced from ideology, nor necessarily based on realist principles, nor equivalent to Hindutva. Rather the pragmatic shift in Indian foreign policy under BJP leaderships has resulted from the picking and choosing of ideas *within* Hindutva. Datta’s rendition of pragmatism hints at the creative deployment of ideas to serve distinctive political ends.

Our explicitly procedural definition of pragmatism in the context of India’s foreign policy draws on existing work on agency and ideational change.⁴⁸ We conceive of pragmatic action as a process of, as Carstensen states, ‘putting ideas together that may not be logically compatible but rather answer political and cultural logics’.⁴⁹ Politicians and officials can create innovative policy by introducing new ideas or questioning old ones, but they do (and usually must) refer to certain pre-existing, institutionalised ideas to make those proposed changes more palatable. Both entrenched ideas and ideologies are complex sets of ideas that

⁴⁶ Rajesh Basrur, ‘Paradigm Shift: India during and after the Cold War’, in Ian Hall (ed.), *The Engagement of India: Strategies and Responses* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2014), pp. 169–83.

⁴⁷ Rekha Datta, ‘Hindu Nationalism or Pragmatic Party Politics? A Study of India’s Hindu Party’, *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 12:4, Summer 1999, pp. 573–88

⁴⁸ Jeffrey W. Legro, ‘The transformation of policy ideas’, *American Journal of Political Science* 44: 3, July 2000, pp. 419–32; Sheri Berman, ‘Review: Ideas, norms, and culture in political analysis’, *Comparative Politics* 33: 2, January, 2001, pp. 231–50; Béland and Cox, *Ideas and politics*; Carstensen, ‘Paradigm man vs. the bricoleur’.

⁴⁹ Carstensen, ‘Paradigm man vs. the bricoleur’, p. 147.

function ‘outside the minds of actors’, that is, as ‘a resource – a toolkit’. The essence of pragmatism is the manner in which politicians and officials introduce new policy ideas by choosing to ‘construct strategies of action based on pre-constructed ideational and political institutions’. In the language of Carstensen, they engage in ‘bricolage’. The need for bricolage explains why Modi cannot simply pursue a foreign policy guided only by, for example, his personal Hindutva beliefs. Rather than seeing the world through a Hindutva lens, Hindutva is simply one belief system or resource upon which Modi can—and to some extent must—draw to gain support for his policy choices. In practice, the procedural pragmatism implied by bricolage means leveraging institutionalised sets of ideas that ‘are often unquestionable.’⁵⁰ While, in principle, all ideas ‘are open to questioning [and] rearrangement’ since ‘their meanings are never settled’,⁵¹ some institutionalised sets of ideas are ‘fundamental’ to broadly accepted understandings of ‘politics, culture, and society’. They ‘form the normative and cognitive backbone of a polity’ and are very difficult to change.⁵² It is these sets of ideas or *ideational frameworks*, we argue, that Modi must take seriously if he is to successfully construct innovative policies. Ideational frameworks are robust sets of interrelated and collectively-held ideas that are ‘social and holistic’, that is, they ‘have an intersubjective existence that... is typically embodied in symbols, discourse, and institutions’.⁵³ Importantly, these sets of ideas are deeply embedded in tangible organisations as well as in ‘social norms, patterns of discourse, and collective identities’.⁵⁴ Any attempt by a leader such as Modi to succeed at policy innovation must navigate these ideational frameworks.

⁵⁰ Carstensen, ‘Paradigm man vs. the bricoleur’, pp. 147, 152-154.

⁵¹ Carstensen, ‘Ideas are not as stable’.

⁵² Carstensen, ‘Paradigm man vs. the bricoleur’, p.153.

⁵³ Jeffrey W. Legro, ‘The transformation of policy ideas’, p. 420.

⁵⁴ Sheri Berman, ‘Review: Ideas, norms, and culture in political analysis’, p. 238.

Modi's pragmatism, we argue, is of the procedural kind that Carstensen and others describe. We see both Hindutva and existing ideational frameworks as exerting distinctive pressures on Modi in his foreign policy decision-making. That is, he must refer to both, and he must find a way to balance between them when charting his foreign policy course.

Hindutva and Ideational Frameworks in Indian foreign policy

Despite its many expressions and interpretations, at root, Hindutva can be said to encompass the notion of a national identity that is predominantly based on being Hindu; that minimizes differences such as language or ethnicity; and that demands the integration and assimilation of the non-Hindu, in particular, Muslims, but also those belonging to other religions.⁵⁵ Examining how Hindutva can manifest in foreign policy outcomes is more complex. Drawing on the writings of Savarkar and Golwalkar, key thinkers in the Hindu nationalist canon, Sagar has made a notable effort to draw out some implications of Hindutva for foreign policy. In Hindutva, Sagar sees a Hindu nationalist drive for social cohesion on the basis of an essentialist brand of Hinduism. This drive stems from a conviction that disunity in Indian society has been a source of Indian weakness towards the outside world. The aim is to generate a monolithic Hindu nation in order to develop '[a] martial spirit and social cohesion' to defend India 'against external aggression'.⁵⁶ Equally, drawing on the thought of 'religious writers, political party propagandists, and the publicly propagated views of various Hindu organizations', Bajpai argues that the Hindutva view sees a Hindu India as a superior civilization that has made great cultural contributions to the world and, as a result, that Hindus are destined for global leadership.⁵⁷ From this we can extrapolate the following: if

⁵⁵ Christophe Jaffrelot, 'Introduction: The invention of an ethnic nationalism', in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *Hindu nationalism: A reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.4.

⁵⁶ Sagar, 'Jiski lathi, uski bhains', p.237.

⁵⁷ Kanti Bajpai, 'Indian conceptions of order and justice: Nehruvian, Gandhian, Hindutva, and Neo-Liberal', in Rosemary Foot, John Lewis Gaddis, and Andrew Hurrell, (ed.), *Order and justice in international relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 236-261; Sagar, 'Jiski lathi, uski bhains'.

Modi's pragmatism is to take Hindutva seriously, it may include resistance to external interference or the making of concessions to outsiders, especially where they leave India appearing weak. It may also include attempts to emphasise and generate international recognition for India's 'Hindu' identity, or to celebrate a 'Hindu' way of life or 'Hindu' achievements on the world stage.

While Modi's, or any leader's, efforts at innovation in foreign policy must take a range of institutionalised foreign policy ideas seriously, here we limit our focus to two ideational frameworks that have been shown to affect Indian foreign policy across time, and that conform with our understanding of ideational frameworks as sets of interrelated and collectively-held ideas that are 'social and holistic' and embedded in symbols, discourses and institutions.⁵⁸

The first ideational framework we refer to is post-imperial ideology or PII. PII arises from the historical legacy of colonialism and India's response to it as colonial trauma. Miller postulates that countries like India and China that have undergone the 'transformative historical event' of extractive colonialism have, even today, a sense of victimhood and a corresponding sense of entitlement. Consequently, within these countries a PII is prevalent, manifesting as a desire to be recognised and sympathised with as a victim in the international system. PII matters when there is a threat to sovereignty, when 'traditional' borders are contested, or when a country's national prestige is impugned. These states then adopt the position of victim and cast others as victimisers, justify action by invoking a discourse of oppression and discrimination, adhere to a strict concept of the inviolability of borders, and are acutely sensitive to loss of face. Miller shows that both immediately after independence

⁵⁸ We do not consider 'idealism' as an ideational framework suitable for our purposes because of its uncertain status since the end of the Cold War; its far-reaching scope and diffuse definition; and a lack of clarity about whether it is a set of ideas or policy behaviours.

as well as in the contemporary era, PII affects foreign policy decisions. and, Even today, India often adopts the position of victim, casting the opposing state(s) as victimiser(s).⁵⁹

The second ideational framework we use comprises a connected set of ideas about India's exceptionalism. Such ideas have their roots in politicised attempts to differentiate India from other nations and civilisations, whereby India is positioned as a unique civilization-state. Sullivan identifies two substantive dimensions of Indian exceptionalism: a belief that the Indian approach to international affairs is morally and spiritually distinctive (and superior) because it prioritises peaceful coexistence between nations over coercive, aggressive or violent interactions; and a related belief that India itself is an emulable model of a plural society living in peaceful coexistence.⁶⁰ Sullivan argues that, even as India's international power and influence have increased, Indian foreign policy elites have continued to emphasise these key internal and external modalities of Indian exceptionalism. These convictions of exceptionalism have provided the basis for Indian leaders to project claims to greatness in India's foreign policy discourse and behaviour, and to emphasise that what they seek for India is a distinctive global leadership role compared to the great powers of the twentieth century—a role that is morally and spiritually superior.

In the following section, we demonstrate how Modi's 'procedural pragmatism' includes, rather than excludes ideology, and interacts with the two ideational frameworks we have briefly introduced. While the first case, the boundary agreement with Bangladesh, allows us to examine Modi's engagement with Hindutva and PII, the second case, the establishment of

⁵⁹Manjari Chatterjee Miller, *Wronged by Empire: Post-imperial Ideology and Foreign Policy in India and China* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2013). PII has also been examined as an ideational framework in the work of other academics. See, for example, Jarrod Hayes, 'Making sense of India and China: Psychology and materiality in the modern era', *Asian Security* 11: 3, 2015, pp. 261-67.

⁶⁰ Kate Sullivan, 'Exceptionalism in Indian diplomacy: The origins of India's moral leadership aspirations', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 37: 4, Dec. 2014, pp. 640-55; Kate Sullivan, 'India's ambivalent projection of self as a global power: Between compliance and resistance', in Kate Sullivan, (ed.) *Competing visions of India in world politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 15-33.

an International Day of Yoga, allows us to examine his engagement with Hindutva and Indian exceptionalism. We justify the selection of each case study, below.

Procedural pragmatism at work in Modi's foreign policy: Two case studies

The India-Bangladesh Territorial Dispute

On 1 August 2015, a little over a year after Modi took office, India and Bangladesh ended one of the world's most complex post-colonial border disputes by agreeing to an exchange of territorial enclaves. The settlement of the dispute is now set to change the lives of thousands of people on both sides of the border who have effectively been stateless for nearly seven decades. We focus on this case for three reasons. First, after decades of Indian governments failing to resolve the issue, the resolution of the dispute has been touted as a successful and historic foreign policy outcome for Modi's government⁶¹ and, therefore, would seem to point to a major shift in Indian foreign policy. Second, concerned about illegal Muslim migrants and a land swap with a predominantly Muslim country, the BJP had hitherto been strongly opposed to the border settlement with Bangladesh, which could lead to the supposition that Modi's pragmatism had to set aside Hindutva ideology in order to resolve the dispute. Third, Miller argues that India's sense of victimisation has led to a past refusal to compromise territorial sovereignty on 'traditional' borders i.e. territorial borders affected by colonialism. Yet, in the India-Bangladesh case, the Indian government yielded territory to settle the dispute—India lost more physical territory than it gained, a fact which would seem to contradict both PII and realist assumptions of territory as security.

Examining the case, however, we find procedural pragmatism at work. Modi's pragmatism entailed acknowledging and incorporating beliefs and ideas from both Hindutva and PII in

⁶¹ 'India-Bangladesh ratify historic land deal, Narendra Modi announces \$2 billion line of credit to Dhaka,' *Times of India*, June 6, 2015.

order to push ahead with the settlement. The land deal was not a radical shift that only Modi's pragmatism-as-realism would have been able to implement. It had, in fact, been attempted by other governments including, most recently, that of Manmohan Singh. Rather Modi was able to more successfully engage in procedural pragmatism than Singh, that is, to put ideas together that would 'answer political and cultural logics,' resulting in an incremental shift.

The crux of the dispute was the fate of 162 pieces of territory⁶² or un-administered enclaves. An enclave is a piece of the territory of one state that is completely surrounded by the territory of the other state.⁶³ Prior to Partition in 1947, these enclaves or *chhitmahals* were landholdings that dated back to the Mughal incursions into the kingdom of Cooch Behar in the 17th century. While there have been folktales that tell of Cooch Behari kings who gambled and bartered small pieces of territory,⁶⁴ Whyte traces the origins of these landholdings to more mundane Mughal clashes with powerful chieftains who were able to hold on to their land within the Mughal empire. These landholdings thus officially remained a part of the kingdom of Cooch Behar while existing as enclaves within Mughal land. At the same time, Mughal soldiers occupied territory within Cooch Behar that became a discontinuous part of Mughal territory.⁶⁵ Sovereignty was understood not through the actual borders so much as in terms of jurisdiction and tax flows. As the Mughal state disintegrated, the provincial governor of Bengal became the *de facto* ruler and, eventually, he was replaced by British rule. The border with Cooch Behar 'marked the northernmost limit of British

⁶² The actual numbers of the enclaves are disputed and may be greater. We cite the official numbers published by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs ('India and Bangladesh: Land Boundary Agreement', Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, http://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/24529_LBA_MEA_Booklet_final.pdf).

⁶³ From the point of view of the state to which it belongs, such territory is an exclave. From the point of view of the state inside which it is located, such territory is an enclave. (William van Schendel, 'Stateless in South Asia: The making of the India-Bangladesh Enclaves', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61: 1, February 2002, p. 116, Fn. 3). For clarity, we use the term enclave to refer to both.

⁶⁴ Hosna J. Shewly, 'Abandoned spaces and bare life in the enclaves of the India-Bangladesh border', *Political Geography* 32, 2013, p. 24.

⁶⁵ Brendan Whyte, *Waiting for the Esquimo: An historical and documentary study of the Cooch Behar enclaves of India and Bangladesh* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 2002).

territory.’ In 1772, after a British expedition conquered Cooch Behar, the kingdom became a part of the province of Bengal. But it was ruled indirectly through a British political agent who advised the Maharaja and his government. As a result, Cooch Behar was now a Princely State surrounded by districts ruled directly by the British, and the existence of the border enclaves was formalized.⁶⁶ Two years after the border was drawn up between India and Pakistan in 1947, with no heed to pre-existing political or physical boundaries,⁶⁷ the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, like many other Princely States in the aftermath of colonialism, acceded to India. Now 111 enclaves suddenly lay within India, while 51 enclaves lay within East Pakistan and after 1971, Bangladesh.

The losers in this territorial mishmash were the thousands of inhabitants of these enclaves. While officially they were accepted citizens of a country, either India or Bangladesh, in practice they were stateless. There was both ‘a complete lack of contact with the home country and the absence of administration from the host country.’⁶⁸ As a result, the enclaves had no government presence. There were no public schools, hospitals, health clinics, public works, courts or even police. In addition, the inhabitants lived risky lives, crossing into the host country for daily goods and services, knowing the crossing was illegal and that they could be arrested or shot by border security forces. Crossing legally was a mind-boggling proposition—they would have to cross illegally into the host country, traverse it, cross into the home country, apply for a passport, and then cross back illegally through the host country, back into their enclave, before venturing forth illegally again for a visa.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ van Schendel, ‘Stateless in South Asia’, p. 119.

⁶⁷ Azmeary Ferdoush, ‘Rethinking border crossing narratives: A comparison between Bangladesh-India enclaves’, *Journal of South Asian Studies* 2:2, 2014, p. 107.

⁶⁸ Reece Jones, ‘Sovereignty and statelessness in the border enclaves of India and Bangladesh’, *Political Geography* 28, 2009, p. 373.

⁶⁹ Jones, ‘Sovereignty and statelessness’; Jason Cons, ‘Histories of belonging(s): Narrating territory, possession and dispossession at the India-Bangladesh border’, *Modern Asian Studies* 46: 3, 2012, pp. 527-558; Shewly, ‘Abandoned spaces and bare life’.

Cognisant of the precarious situation of the inhabitants and the porosity of the border, in 1974, India and the newly-created state of Bangladesh signed a Land Boundary Agreement that provided guidelines for the exchange of the enclaves. Bangladesh ratified the agreement but, despite failing to provide basic human rights for its enclave dwelling citizens,⁷⁰ India refused to exchange the enclaves until the entire border was demarcated.⁷¹

PII suggests that this refusal was in keeping with India's rigid stance on territorial sovereignty fuelled by a sense of victimization about 'traditional' borders, that is, borders that were drawn or formalized as a result of colonialism. Indeed, this intransigent stance persisted for a long time, not only as a prerogative of the Indian National Congress, a party with a strong history of anti-colonialism, but also of the BJP.⁷² As Reece Jones points out, 'the Hindu Right argues that the true Hindu homeland of India is the homeland that was described by the early India (anti-colonial) nationalists, which includes all the territory currently controlled by the sovereign states of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Consequently, any agreement that includes the transfer of territory, even the small area of the enclaves, is perceived as illegitimate because it would divest more of the Hindu homeland to a Muslim controlled government.'⁷³ The BJP, thus, strongly opposed an exchange of the enclaves on the grounds that not only were these borders unfairly affected by colonialism that such a move would also show India's weakness since it would cede territory, even if it were only an '85 metre x 175 metre strip of land',⁷⁴ to a Muslim country.⁷⁵

This state of affairs changed in June 2015, a little over a year after Narendra Modi took office. Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Modi released a joint statement, which

⁷⁰ Jones, 'Sovereignty and statelessness'; Cons, 'Histories of belonging(s)'.

⁷¹ Shewly, 'Abandoned spaces and bare life', p. 25.

⁷² Bharatiya Janata Party Manifestos, <http://www.bjp.org/documents/manifesto>.

⁷³ Jones, 'Sovereignty and statelessness', p. 379.

⁷⁴ Jones, 'Sovereignty and statelessness', p. 380.

⁷⁵ 'Throwback Thursday: The Indo-Bangladesh enclaves', *Lawfare*, 22 January 2015, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/throwback-thursday-indo-bangladesh-enclaves>.

was titled ‘Notun Projonmo — Nayi Disha’ (New Generation, New Direction). It ‘gave directives to the concerned officials on both sides for the expeditious implementation of the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement and its 2011 Protocol on the ground.’⁷⁶ According to the joint statement, ‘[t]There would now be a fixed demarcated boundary in all the undemarcated segments, exchange of 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh with 51 Bangladesh enclaves in India and a resolution of all adversely possessed areas.’⁷⁷

A simplistic assessment of this successful outcome might claim that Modi had effected a complete change in Indian foreign policy on the question of borders with Bangladesh. In the words of one analyst, Modi acted pragmatically.⁷⁸ He did not allow Hindutva to obstruct a land deal with Bangladesh, not only a predominantly Muslim country but one from which there are flows of illegal Muslim migrants into India. Nor was he constrained, as past governments had been, by either institutionalised sensitivity to the territorial loss of colonial era borders or a sense of victimisation relating to these borders.

A closer look, however, suggests greater complexity and nuance. To begin with, the policy that Modi enacted was not new or a sea-change from the previous government. The UPA government under Manmohan Singh had already been inching towards the exchange with Bangladesh. The 2011 Protocol to the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement had been enacted when Manmohan Singh visited Bangladesh. Singh had made better relations with Bangladesh a cornerstone of his regional policy. However, the political and cultural logics for Singh were different than Modi’s and ultimately proved too difficult to negotiate. He was stymied in his efforts by the BJP, who in 2013 blocked the parliamentary bill that would have operationalized the land boundary agreement. Arun Jaitley, then BJP leader of the opposition,

⁷⁶ ‘Delhi, Dhaka vow speedy implementation of boundary pact’, *The Indian Express*, 8 June 2015.

⁷⁷ ‘India and Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement’, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, p. 4.

⁷⁸ ‘Progress through pragmatism in the Indo-Bangla relationship’, *SouthAsia@LSE blog*, London School of Economics and Political Science, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2015/06/03/progress-through-pragmatism-in-the-indo-bangla-relationship/>.

declared his opposition to any exchange of the enclaves, professing that the territory of India is a part of the Constitution and ‘cannot be reduced or altered by an amendment to the Constitution.’⁷⁹ At the same time, the secular ideas of the Congress which are a part of Singh’s ‘ideational toolkit’ were cast by the opposition as ‘softness towards illegal immigrants’ from Bangladesh, most of whom were Muslim.⁸⁰

Given this previous opposition by the BJP and even the RSS, whose mouthpiece penned an aggressive editorial on illegal immigration immediately before the landmark deal was enacted,⁸¹ Modi’s procedural pragmatism meant neither ignoring Hindutva nor notions of victimhood and territorial loss. Modi explicitly emphasised a policy position that took on board elements of both Hindutva *and* PII.

To begin with, Modi made efforts to counter the objection that the exchange would infringe India’s territorial sovereignty. His government emphasised how borders were not only *not* being compromised but how the agreement was simply a mere formalisation of *de facto* borders. A document on the agreement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs, for example, reiterated several times that although India would be ceding approximately 17,000 acres for approximately 7,000 acres of land in return, the exchange only ‘*seems*’ like ‘a loss of Indian land to Bangladesh and the actual scenario is quite different... in reality, the exchange of enclaves denotes only a notional exchange of land as the Protocol converts a *de facto* reality into a *de jure* situation.’⁸²

To further assuage concerns that the physical land exchange was unfair, the Modi government offered numerous emotive assurances that the exchange would formalise the

⁷⁹ ‘Assam included in India-Bangladesh land swap agreement’, *First Post*, 6 May 2015, <http://www.firstpost.com/india/assam-included-in-india-bangladesh-land-swap-agreement-all-you-need-to-know-about-the-deal-1830365.html>

⁸⁰ ‘The land that maps forgot,’ *The Economist*, February 15, 2011.

⁸¹ ‘Seal India-Bangladesh border: RSS editorial’, *The Indian Express*, 18 May 2015.

⁸² ‘India and Bangladesh Land Boundary Agreement’, pp. 4-5, 19, 20-21.

boundary, allowing the Indian government to crack down on illegal Muslim immigration.⁸³ Moreover, Modi emphasised how the swapping of enclaves would cement ties with Bangladesh at a time when the India-Pakistan relationship was strained.⁸⁴ These assurances were strengthened by the strongly politically contingent nature of Bangladesh's relations with India. Historically, Sheikh Hasina and the secular Awami League have had more positive relations with India than the Islamic nationalist Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Thus, the Indian government was able to minimize the spectre of a territorial loss to a Muslim government and emphasise Sheikh Hasina's commitment to the deal. At the same time, shortly after the Indian elections, BJP leaders were instructed to reach out privately to high-level officials in Sheikh Hasina's government to reassure them that Hindutva was nothing more than election rhetoric.⁸⁵

In sum, to characterise the territorial exchange as either continuity or change would be problematic because, in reality, it contained elements of both. Modi's procedurally pragmatic approach entailed navigating both Hindutva and PII. India did not suddenly become receptive to the loss of historical territory or cease to have emotive ideas about the exchange, thereby demonstrating the powerful transformational capacity of an individual leader. Nor was it that Modi put aside Hindutva. His pragmatism involved redirecting and assuaging an emotional response on the issue. He focused attention on the strengthening of the border that his government said would result, ironically, because of the physical loss of land. He appealed to the Hindu religious nationalism of his base by tying it to a crackdown on illegal Muslim immigration and by invoking the 'other,' Pakistan. And he gave private assurances to Bangladesh that the religious nationalist rhetoric of his election campaign would not publicly surface in the bilateral relationship. In short, Narendra Modi's procedural pragmatism in this

⁸³ 'How Modi brought BJP around on India-Bangladesh land deal', *Business Standard*, 2 December 2014.

⁸⁴ 'BJP changes its mind for the fourth time on Indo-Bangla land swap', *First Post*, 6 May 2015, <http://scroll.in/article/725385/bjp-changes-its-mind-for-the-fourth-time-on-indo-bangla-land-swap>

⁸⁵ Interview by author with senior official, Government of Bangladesh, 13 November 2015.

case did not mean that he set aside ideological and institutionalised stances, but that he embraced them. In line with Carstensen's characterisation of politicians' resourceful combination of ideas, Modi's innovative policy success was dependent on taking institutionalised policy frameworks seriously, as well as appealing to his Hindu nationalist base of political support.

Modi and the International Day of Yoga

On 11 December 2014, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) approved by consensus a resolution⁸⁶ establishing an International Day of Yoga (IDY) to be held each year on 21 June. Six months later, on the first IDY in 2015, the Modi government organised and publicised yoga-related events across India and, through its overseas missions, events around the world, generating national and international publicity that underscored yoga's cultural origins in India. This case is illuminating for three reasons. First, the India-led effort to celebrate the value and international appeal of yoga through the UNGA resolution and subsequent Yoga Day celebrations was one of Modi's early diplomatic achievements as prime minister.⁸⁷ His campaign to 'to seize on yoga as India's signature cultural export' broke with a previously low-key official promotion of yoga.⁸⁸ Second, Modi's championing of IDY centred on a quite specific, Hinduised understanding of yoga's origins that initially contradicted the internal face of India's exceptionalism, the claim that India was a pluralist society based on peaceful coexistence. Third, Modi's establishment and stewardship of the IDY explicitly drew on what Sullivan describes as the external face of Indian exceptionalism: the idea of India as a model for other states to follow and the promotion of Indian values and

⁸⁶ United Nations Resolution A/RES/69/131.

⁸⁷ He first proposed the initiative in his address to the United Nations General Assembly in late September 2014, and had begun preparations for the mobilisation of co-sponsors of the resolution even earlier, see: Yashwant Raj, 'How 'superfast' China lent a helping hand to PM's Yoga Day initiative', *Hindustan Times*, 19 June 2015.

⁸⁸ Rupam Jain Nair and Andrew Macaskill, 'India PM Modi's yoga offensive gets Muslims stressed', *Reuters*, 16 June 2015, <http://in.reuters.com/article/india-yoga-idINKBN0OW0AI20150616>

thinking as a solution to international conflict. Thus, Modi's procedural pragmatism included both Hindutva ideas about the Hindu origins of yoga—although political logics eventually demanded these be diluted to please supporters and assuage critics appealing to the internal face of India's exceptionalism—and elements of the ideational framework of Indian exceptionalism, namely through an emphasis on the fostering of peace between peoples and nations.

There is no doubt that the Indian state's official promotion of yoga predates Modi's leadership. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations has disseminated yoga through its overseas centres for decades, and yoga formed a major visual theme of the cross-ministerial *Incredible India* tourist campaign, launched in 2002.⁸⁹ Attempts, most conspicuously in the United States, by private entities to register intellectual property claims to yoga have been a matter of concern to Indian leaderships for over a decade.⁹⁰ And previous Indian prime ministers, too, have personally endorsed yoga: Jawaharlal Nehru practised a daily routine of yoga postures, and Indira Gandhi both travelled often with her yoga instructor in tow, and introduced yoga into some school curriculums.⁹¹ Modi's championing of yoga, however, is of a different magnitude.

It was Modi and his government who leveraged both the establishment of the observance of IDY itself, as well as the celebration of the first ever Yoga Day. Modi's campaign began with his maiden speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2014, when he called for an

⁸⁹ Ian Hall, 'India's new public diplomacy: Soft power and the limits of government action', *Asian Survey* 52: 6, November/December 2012, pp. 1089–110; Amitabh Kant, *Branding India: An incredible story* (Noida: Harper Collins, 2009).

⁹⁰ Allison Fish, 'The commodification and exchange of knowledge in the case of transnational commercial yoga,' *International Journal of Cultural Property* 13, 2006, pp. 189–206; V.K. Gupta, 'Protecting India's traditional knowledge', *WIPO Magazine*, June 2011, http://www.wipo.int/wipo_magazine/en/2011/03/article_0002.html

⁹¹ Winthrop Sargeant, 'Nehru: Like the lotus, India's prime minister lives half in and half out of the mystic Hindu-world', *Life Magazine*, 24 January 1949, pp. 89–103, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/16/world/asia/india-modi-yoga.html?_r=0

IDY and described yoga as ‘an invaluable gift from our ancient tradition’.⁹² Upon the passing of the resolution, influential yoga figures within India voiced their approval: Baba Ramdev, for example, a spiritual leader and Modi supporter, well-known in India for his daily televised yoga routines (as well as his vast business empire), reportedly declared that Modi had brought ‘glory [to yoga] on the global stage’ and ‘honour to India and Indianness.’⁹³

Even though the passing of the resolution and the establishment of IDY affirmed yoga’s global popularity, the resolution notably did not mention India and made no reference to the origins of yoga, instead laying stress on yoga’s health benefits.⁹⁴ The act of adopting the IDY therefore in itself did not formally link yoga with India’s cultural or spiritual heritage, although arguably the connection is implied, and Pakistan stood out among the few states that did not co-sponsor the resolution.

Yet it was evident that the Modi government was claiming to link yoga with a system of values of Indian origin and to project these beyond India’s borders. The permanent representative of India to the UN, Asoke Mukerji, celebrated the ‘record number of 175 sponsors’, hailing the decision as ‘testimony to the enthusiastic cross-cultural and universal appeal that yoga enjoys among Members of the United Nations.’⁹⁵ On 21 June 2015, at dawn on the first ever IDY, *The Economist* reported that Modi headed a crowd of 37,000 people on Delhi’s iconic avenue, Rajpath, as they performed a routine of yoga postures in unison. For

⁹² UN General Assembly Proceedings, 69th session, 2014, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/PV.69

⁹³ ‘Why International Yoga Day is so important’, *Patheos.com*, 22 March 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/hindu2/2015/03/why-international-yoga-day-is-so-important/>; ‘Godfellas I – A series on gurus and their politics’, *Tehelka Magazine*, 4 June 2011, http://archive.tehelka.com/story_main49.asp?filename=Ne040611GODFELLAS.asp

⁹⁴ A/RES/69/131, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/69/131 Indeed, the draft version of the resolution was introduced as part of discussions over ‘Global health and foreign policy’ among the General Assembly, UN General Assembly Proceedings, 69th session, 2014.

⁹⁵ UN General Assembly Proceedings, 69th session.

Modi's supporters, 'it was a day when India announced itself as a newly confident cultural force.'⁹⁶

Modi sought to underscore the unique elements of India's spiritual tradition manifested in the practice of yoga and to argue for their emulation elsewhere. For Modi, 21 June 2015 was 'not just the first-ever IDY, but the beginning of a new era that would inspire humanity in its quest for peace and harmony.'⁹⁷ He declared that yoga could reduce violence between nations and bring 'a dramatic reduction in conflicts and misunderstandings within families, communities, and between nations'.⁹⁸ This was an explicit attempt to promote Indian values sourced from a distant past, rather than from India's post-independent experience, but nonetheless to position India as spiritually superior, and as the world's yoga guru.

At home in India, however, Modi's yogic message of peaceful coexistence among diverse groups became mired in controversy. Certain Muslim and other minority groups objected to what they saw as overtly Hindutva elements of the yoga-related initiatives proposed by Modi in the lead up to the IDY. Some opponents explicitly claimed that the Yoga Day celebrations had a 'Hindutva agenda' that was 'at the cost of India's secular democratic fabric'.⁹⁹ Critics suspected the government of privileging Hindu practices and ideas in an effort to marginalise religious minorities. One commentator labelled the IDY as 'majoritarianism disguised as a national project' and questioned the 'naiveté' of the United Nations, in establishing the day, 'without considering the controversial profile of the man who had proposed it.'¹⁰⁰ The allusion was to Modi's past connection with violence against Muslims in Gujarat, and the

⁹⁶ 'The lotus leaders', *The Economist*, 21 June 2015.

⁹⁷ International Yoga Day, <http://www.narendramodi.in/international-yoga-day-163355>

⁹⁸ 'Text of PM's remarks at International Conference on Yoga for Holistic Health', <http://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-pm-s-remarks-at-international-conference-on-yoga-for-holistic-health-163380>

⁹⁹ 'Yoga Day organised by Modi government to promote Hindutva agenda: Sitaram Yechury', *First Post*, 22 June 2015, <http://www.firstpost.com/politics/yoga-day-organised-modi-govt-promote-hindutva-agenda-sitaram-yechury-2305844.html>

¹⁰⁰ 'By endorsing yoga, has the UN put Indian Muslims on the mat?', *DailyO*, 17 June 2015, <http://www.dailyo.in/politics/yoga-day-indian-muslims-united-nations-guinness-record/story/1/4393.html>

suggestion was that such a leader could not be trusted to advance the cause of yoga in India in a secular and inclusive manner. The most vocal opposition reported by the India media came from the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), a private body which some consider a central vehicle of Muslim opinion. High-ranking members of the AIMPLB declared Modi's attempts to promote yoga as 'a campaign to enforce Hindu rituals on all non-Hindus', and accused the government of violating the Indian constitution, which does not permit the official promotion of religious activities.¹⁰¹ Much of the controversy centred on plans to include the *surya namaskar* or salutation to the sun in a series of postures to be performed during the IDY celebrations, and the apparent requirement to chant 'om', a sacred sound in many Hindu traditions. Muslim MP Asaduddin Owaisi noted that '[m]any Muslim scholars say that yoga is against the fundamental tenets of Islam – to pray to the sun, for example' and objected that the patriotism of Muslims who did not wish to practice yoga was being called into question.¹⁰²

Objections were also raised over the specific date selected for the observance of the IDY. While Modi had reportedly proposed 21 June as the longest day of the year and a day of special significance in the northern hemisphere, other accounts linked the date to a particular yogic tradition based on Hindu mythology.¹⁰³ Indian Christian organisations opposed the first celebration of the first IDY on a Sunday, following other national events held by the Modi

¹⁰¹ 'AIMPLB slams govt over Yoga', *The Hindu*, 23 June 2015; 'PM Modi's yoga offensive gets Muslims stressed', 16 June 2015, <http://in.reuters.com/article/india-yoga-idINKBN0OW0AI20150616>

¹⁰² 'Modi's plan to change India and the world through yoga angers religious minorities', *The Guardian*, 6 June 2015.

¹⁰³ 'Is Modi's real motive behind Yoga Day on June 21 to honour RSS founder?', *DailyO*, 18 June 2015, <http://www.dailyo.in/politics/narendra-modi-yoga-international-yoga-day-ayush-rss-bjp-keshav-baliram-hegdewar/story/1/4426.html>; 'Why International Yoga Day is so important', *Patheos.com*, 22 March 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/hindu2/2015/03/why-international-yoga-day-is-so-important/>; 'Modi's yoga celebration is a mix of cultural nationalism, commercialisation and subtle coercion', *Scroll.in*, 4 June 2015, <http://scroll.in/article/732049/modis-yoga-celebration-is-a-mix-of-cultural-nationalism-commercialisation-and-subtle-coercion>

government on Christian holy days.¹⁰⁴ Muslim groups complained because in 2015, 21 June fell during the Muslim holy month of Ramzan.¹⁰⁵ And, perhaps most controversially, one observer recognised 21 June as the death anniversary of K. B. Hegdewar, who founded the RSS in 1925, and suggested that through the IDY Modi was therefore seeking to please his RSS supporters by marking an occasion close to their hearts.¹⁰⁶

Meanwhile, international reports saw Hindu nationalist groups, including the BJP and RSS, as attempting to reclaim yoga as part of India's past glory, hailing from an era prior to the presence of Christian and Muslim communities.¹⁰⁷ Emphasising the Hindu nationalist flavour of the Modi government's celebration of yoga, a *New York Times* article drew parallels between new forms of yoga in India and 'the daily, military-style drills' of the RSS.¹⁰⁸

As the controversy spread, officials in the Modi government had to assuage fears that the IDY was a vehicle of Hindutva by making concessionary moves towards India's Muslims. Official statements aimed at an international audience stressed that yoga should not be seen as the property of 'any particular religion'.¹⁰⁹ A flurry of media reporting in early June documented official attempts to diminish the opposition, or the appearance of opposition, by minority groups. Shripad Naik, the First Minister of AYUSH¹¹⁰, India's ministry for yoga and traditional medicines, encouraged Muslims to participate in the IDY celebrations by

¹⁰⁴ 'Modi's UN Yoga Day latest example of co-incidence with Christian 'high days and holidays'', *World Watch Monitor*, 29 June 2015, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2015/06/3909729/>

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-asaduddin-owaisi-objects-to-yoga-day-in-maharashtra-schools-2092482>

¹⁰⁶ 'Is Modi's real motive behind Yoga Day on June 21 to honour RSS founder?'

¹⁰⁷ Nair and Macaskill, 'India PM Modi's yoga offensive gets Muslims stressed'; 'Modi's Yoga Day grips India and "Om" meets "ouch"', *The New York Times*, 15 June 2016.

¹⁰⁸ 'Modi's Yoga Day grips India and "Om" meets "ouch"'.
¹⁰⁹ 'UN's decision to mark Yoga Day shows India's soft power: Sushma Swaraj', *NDTV*, 22 June 2015,

<http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/uns-decision-to-mark-yoga-day-shows-indias-soft-power-sushma-swaraj-774031>

¹¹⁰ The Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy, founded by Modi in 2014 (formerly a government department), whose aims include enhancing the provision of traditional Indian medicine and health, see <http://www.indianmedicine.nic.in/>

taking Allah's name in lieu of chanting 'om'.¹¹¹ Naik went on record again, to disassociate the yoga day from religion, while the usually less peaceable Union Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, who has served twice as President of the BJP, also claimed that participation in the Yoga Day was voluntary and should not be linked to religion.¹¹² The Ministry of AYUSH released a press statement reporting how a delegation of Muslim minority leaders had met the Minister and expressed their support for the yoga day.¹¹³

At the same time, while the government sought to fend off accusations that the yoga day was being utilised as a vehicle for Hindutva, its response did not go further than to 'permit' Muslims to opt out of parts of the celebrations, and no statement was released declaring yoga to be secular or inclusive. Equally, there was no clear attempt by the Modi government to present yoga as a set of diverse traditions that could be practiced in different ways. Modi did not therefore actively champion the internal face of Indian exceptionalism that celebrates India's pluralism and diversity, but, as political logics demanded, he sought to ensure that it was not entirely negated. In the lead up to the 21 June celebrations, the Ministry of AYUSH released a booklet (as well as a video) laying out a *Common Yoga Protocol*.¹¹⁴ One analysis of the *Protocol* described it as presenting 'a narrowly conceived definition of yoga' that captured 'one Hindu understanding of yoga's aims' and ignored a variety of other aims that Hindu and non-Hindu traditions have historically attributed to yoga.¹¹⁵ Conspicuously,

¹¹¹ 'Muslims can chant "Allah" instead of "Om" on International Yoga Day: Indian Government Minister', *Huffington Post*, 12 June 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/12/international-yoga-day-muslims_n_7571154.html

¹¹² 'No compromise on Surya Namaskar: Sadhus threaten protests if it isn't included in Yoga day event', *First Post*, 9 June 2015, <http://www.firstpost.com/india/no-compromise-on-surya-namaskar-sadhus-threaten-protests-if-it-isnt-included-in-yoga-day-event-2287476.html>; 'No Surya Namaskar on International Yoga Day: Centre axes asana to soothe irate Muslim groups', *First Post*, 9 June 2015, <http://www.firstpost.com/india/no-surya-namaskar-on-international-yoga-day-centre-axes-asana-to-soothe-irate-muslim-groups-2286068.html>

¹¹³ 'Minority leaders support International Day of Yoga', *Press Information Bureau*, Government of India, 11 June 2015, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=122447>

¹¹⁴ 'Common Yoga Protocol', Government of India, 2015, <http://mea.gov.in/images/pdf/common-yoga-protocol.pdf>

¹¹⁵ Andrea Jain, 'On International Yoga Day, yoga is just politics by other means', *Quartz India*, 21 June 2015, <http://qz.com/433356/on-international-yoga-day-yoga-is-just-politics-by-other-means/>

however, the *Protocol* omitted ‘om’ and *surya namaskar*, although it contained prayers in Sanskrit.¹¹⁶

Internationally, the Modi government tried to seek to calibrate India’s image on the issue of the IDY such that both of the standard tropes of India’s external and internal exceptionalism were reinforced. Present at the United Nations to celebrate the first IDY, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj declared that ‘the entire world is one family, and we can unite it with Yoga. At a time when ethnic conflicts and extremist violence are threatening to destabilise societies, Yoga can serve as the perfect antidote to stem such negative tendencies and move us on the path of harmony and peace.’ She also underscored how ‘the UN’s decision to commemorate the day underlines the appreciation for India and its growing soft power’.¹¹⁷

Overall, this case demonstrates how Modi’s procedural pragmatism saw him navigating and responding to both Hindutva and the ideational framework of Indian exceptionalism. While the championing of yoga was in itself not a new venture, Modi pushed it more rigorously than his predecessors. In order to do so, he needed to both appeal to his political base and push the idea of external exceptionalism, and did so by emphasising the Hindu elements of yoga. When constrained by the internal face of Indian exceptionalism, however, amidst calls that his aggressive brand of yoga promotion was belying India’s secular and pluralist identity, he had no choice but to pragmatically modify, rather than reject, ideational elements of his policy both domestically and internationally. Again, Modi’s procedural pragmatism in this case spelt an embrace rather than a rejection of ideological and institutionalised stances, and, indeed, the recalibration of his approach was exemplified by his government’s attempts to—

¹¹⁶ This reportedly following a meeting of the Indian Yoga Association far earlier, in February 2015, whose members foresaw controversy and agreed that ‘religion should not be mixed with Yoga’ (‘It was decided to drop “Aum” from Yoga Protocol in contrast to Ram Madhav’s claims, confirm experts’, *The Economic Times*, 21 August 2015).

¹¹⁷ ‘UN’s decision to mark Yoga Day shows India’s soft power: Sushma Swaraj’.

if not include—avoid explicitly excluding India’s religious minorities from India’s first national and international celebration of the IDY. Modi used, or was politically compelled to use, both Hindutva and Indian exceptionalism as ideational ‘toolkits’.

Conclusion

In this article, we presented a distinctive conception of both Modi’s pragmatism and Indian foreign policy pragmatism in general. Rather than equating pragmatism with a willingness to put aside Hindutva ideology or to discard entrenched foreign policy ideas, we presented pragmatism as a mode of engaging responsively to existing stocks of ideas and ideology. That is to say, we interpret pragmatism procedurally rather than substantively.

Modi’s procedural pragmatism mirrors the characterisation of policy innovation that sees politicians and officials by necessity combining ‘logically incompatible ideas’ in order to ‘answer political and cultural logics’. This reading of pragmatism allows us to draw out the nuances and complexities of our two case studies, which, on the surface, seem to be examples of foreign policy change, where ideas are either deliberately ignored or cease to matter in achieving success.

A procedural understanding of Indian foreign policy pragmatism matters for practitioners in two key ways. First, when analysts talk of Modi’s pragmatic approach to Indian foreign policy, the dominant question is whether or not he will be able to bring change. Because we take the constraints of both his domestic political supporters and India’s institutionalised foreign policy ideas seriously, our answer is that he must indeed bring some change to please the former, but that the degree or extent of change is limited by the latter. This means that Modi’s foreign policy transformation operates in a narrow space, but it also implies that he does have a limited capacity, and indeed a drive, to bring elements of Hindutva into the

domain of foreign policy. Modi's procedural pragmatism may derive some transformative policy successes, but because it must include ideas and ideologies, as a type of innovative political behaviour, it is and will be less original and ground-breaking than some commentators suppose. In other words, radical changes to India's foreign policy under Narendra Modi's leadership seem unlikely.

Second, our reading of pragmatism dispels any claims that Indian foreign policy thinking has shifted to rely predominantly on a pared-back logic of power and interest. Indeed, our reading challenges some of the claims made by commentators and analysts who argue that the end of the Cold War signalled the discarding of India's prior commitment to 'idealism' in favour of a rapid shift towards pragmatism and an embrace of realism. Instead, we point to incremental shifts in foreign policy-making that still pay homage to entrenched institutionalised ideas and ideational frameworks.

Our conceptualisation of pragmatism as procedural, together with our exemplification of procedural pragmatism at work in two empirical case studies, also has implications for the larger discourse on the subject of Indian foreign policy that has been circulating since the 1990s. It offers an avenue for scholars of Indian foreign policy to take ideas seriously in their study of foreign policy change. A crucial research agenda will involve tracing the process by which select realist and other ideas have taken hold in Indian foreign policy, while others have not, with the aim of deeply understanding both recent ideational and policy shifts, and gauging possible future foreign policy directions.