



Concept of the Week (PSIR Optional)

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“India, as a civilisational power coming back on the international stage, must draw inspiration from its own ethos and epics and express itself in a distinct way.” Discuss

Answer

Structure

- Introduction- Ancient Linkage
- Body- Explore the statement- where and why?
- Conclusion with examples
- India is an emerging power in a fast-changing multipolar world. India's foreign policy is inspired from its civilization and culture- Upanishads, Gita, Arthashastra, Nitishastra and epics. For example, India aspires for rules-based order and democratic global institutions that uphold its core ethos of Vasudhaika Kutumbakam (Maha Upanishad).
- The Foreign Minister of India, S Jaishankar, in his book 'The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World' argues that from Thirukkural to Mahabharata, Indian epics hold lessons to deal with complexities of uncertain world. He underlines how courage required to implement policy and have strategic guidance and tactical wisdom can be taken from the Bhagavad Gita.
- Jaishankar calls for introduction of India's own diplomatic terms into the IR discourse for its international emergence. He further argues, "India should engage the US, manage China, cultivate Europe, reassure Russia, bring back Japan into play, draw neighbours in, extend the neighbourhood and expand traditional constituencies of support"- exemplifying Kautilyan art of mandala politics.
- The India Way further includes linking contemporary statecraft with cultural learnings:
 - Pursuit of multiple approaches and multiple alliances and partnership with global interests - Strategic autonomy. Former foreign secretary, Vijay Gokhale in Raisina Dialogue commented that India is now issue, and not ideologically, aligned. But this alignment is issue based.
 - Respond with engagement than by distancing; deal with contesting parties at the same time with optimal results- such as in case of China and border disputes;
 - Forge convergences and manage divergences taking advantage of the opening of a world of multiple choices at different levels-such as QUAD as a way of interacting with like powers.
 - Make many friends, few foes, great goodwill and more influence with a stronger competitive spirit and a sharper strategic sense- e.g. SAGAR initiatives.
 - Take on global responsibilities and act as a constructive player- India's HADR operations and the Vaccine Maitri are significant examples.
- Jaishankar gives example of Yoga and Namaste (especially in Covid times) of India's soft power using its civilisational resources. 'India Way' therefore presents a timely message to the new India to help visualize its interests with greater clarity as well as communicate them effectively.