

Explainer

Indian National Flag

Emblem of Cultural Ethos, Sovereignty and Civilisation

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Context

Indian National Flag serves as a strong symbol of cultural sovereignty, democratic flexibility and civilisational continuity as the country approaches its 79th anniversary of independence. Whereas many modern nation-states national symbols originate primarily from political revolutions or military conquests, India's Tricolour represents a distinct historical path, an ancient civilisation that reclaimed political sovereignty through a democratic and mass-based struggle.

The Tricolour, which was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on July 22, 1947, symbolises much more than the end of colonial rule; it signifies the establishment of an independent democratic republic based on constitutional principles and supported by a millennium-old civilisational tradition. The Tricolour provides a fascinating window into a country that has effectively blended traditional cultural roots with current democratic institutions for a worldwide audience looking to comprehend modern India.

The Tricolour is more than just a ceremonial emblem; it is a living epitome of India's national aspirations, constitutional ethos and historical memory. It affirms the faith of one of the oldest surviving civilisations in the world in overcoming the difficulties of the contemporary world while reflecting the values of democracy, multiplicity, moral responsibility and collective progress that form the foundation of the Republic.

India's National Flag reflects a unique vision that embraces democratic legitimacy, diversity and inclusive growth while drawing strength from civilisational continuity in a time of geopolitical unpredictability, ideological polarisation and differing national narratives. As India grows its global influence and participation, Tricolour is becoming more and more of an enduring emblem of a country that is both firmly entrenched in its history and confidently creating its future on the international scene.

Introduction

Every country has emblems that represent its goals as a whole. Laws regulate civic life, institutions oversee government and constitutions specify political systems. However, the national flag frequently invokes a country's intellectual and emotional foundations the strongest.

For India, the Tricolour is more than just a piece of cloth with a wheel in the middle and three colours. It represents a decades-long freedom campaign and a centuries-long civilisational journey that turned an ancient civilisation into a contemporary democratic republic without disconnecting its cultural ties.

India became independent through one of the largest democratic mass movements in history, as opposed to many states that were created by military conquest, ethnic consolidation or ideological revolution. As a result, the Indian national flag represents

the victory of democratic engagement, constitutionalism and non-violent political mobilisation in addition to freedom from colonial authority.

With India's growing influence in international politics, its significance has only increased.

Historical Evolution of the Tricolour

Indian National Flag transformed together with India's freedom struggle. Before the current form was accepted, a number of designs appeared during the liberation movement.

The 1906 Calcutta Flag, the 1907 flag connected to Madame Bhikaji Cama and the 1917 Home Rule Flag were among the earliest iterations. Mahatma Gandhi received a design from Pingali Venkayya in 1921, which underwent additional development as a result of national discussions.

On July 22, 1947, the Constituent Assembly ultimately approved the current Tricolour.

Jawaharlal Nehru, during the debate, emphasised that the Tricolour is identified with millions of common people who fought against colonial rule, farmers, labourers, women, students, saints, lawyers and intellectuals, own the National Flag. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, when he introduced the resolution adopting the flag in the Constituent Assembly, emphasised that it represented the ambitions of the entire country rather than any political organisation.

This distinction is still very important. Numerous national flags honour military triumphs. India honours its democratic right to self-determination. Its power comes from popular legitimacy rather than conquest.

Sovereignty Beyond Political Independence

Generally speaking, sovereignty refers to a state's absolute power within its borders. But India's idea of sovereignty has developed beyond just having its own territory.

Constitutional sovereignty is symbolised by the Tricolour. After the Constitution went into effect on January 26, 1950, sovereignty was transferred from a monarch or colonial authority to "We, the People of India." Thus, people sovereignty is represented by the National Flag.

The authority represented by the Tricolour governs all institutions of the Republic, including the Parliament, Supreme Court, Armed Forces, Election Commission and constitutional offices.

The flag represents India's autonomous strategic identity on a global scale. From a Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War to the current policy of strategic

autonomy, India has continuously aimed to maintain independent decision-making rather than permanently affiliate with rival power blocs.

Whether it is flown over Indian embassies or raised at the UN, Antarctic research stations, Indian naval vessels protecting the Indo-Pacific and on the lunar surface through the Chandrayaan missions, the flag conveys India's sovereign presence based on peaceful engagement rather than territorial expansion

Its significance has expanded in tandem with India's rise to become one of the biggest economies in the world, a major force in the digital space and a more powerful voice of the Global South.

Democracy Woven into National Identity

Every sovereign nation needs symbols that inspire popular loyalty and respect for the constitution. The National Flag of India serves this purpose.

The democratic nature of India's national flag may be its most distinctive feature.

India is the world's largest democracy, not just because of its elections, but because democratic participation is part of its identity. In contrast to flags that have traditionally been exclusive to the governing class, India's Tricolour is owned equally by all citizens.

Every Indian citizen, under Article 51A(a) of the Constitution, is required "to abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem." This constitutional positioning emphasises that the flag does not represent any current government, but rather the Republic itself.

The historic Supreme Court ruling in *Union of India v. Naveen Jindal* (2004), which acknowledged flying the National Flag with dignity as an expression protected under Article 19(1)(a), subject to reasonable constraints specified by the Flag Code, was equally significant. The residents' relationship with the flag was changed by this decision. It became an outward manifestation of democratic citizenship rather than just an official insignia. This civic ownership was reinforced while maintaining constitutional dignity with the subsequent liberalisation of the Flag Code.

Meaning of the Tricolour

Post-1947 statehood perspective is not sufficient to grasp India's national identity. It comes from one of the earliest continuously existing human civilisations, which is distinguished by its great cultural durability, diversity of intellectual perspectives and multiple traditions.

The moral principles ingrained in the design of India's national flag are what give it its timeless appeal.

Saffron is a symbol of bravery, selflessness and public service.

White stands for honesty, harmony and openness.

Green symbolises hope, prosperity and harmony with the nature.

Significantly, these colours were intentionally understood in terms of universal ethics rather than religious beliefs. Their significance goes beyond religious affiliations. They define civic values that are demanded of both citizens and public institutions.

India's national flag, by this ethical framing, is set apart from emblems that are largely based in political ideology or ethnicity.

Ashoka Chakra: India's Civilisational Compass

Philosophical core of the Tricolour is occupied by the Ashoka Chakra.

Chakra connects the Republic to an intellectual heritage spanning more than two millennia. It was adapted from the Lion Capital at Sarnath, which was also chosen as India's State Emblem.

The wheel represents Dharma, which is not just religion but also the moral code that upholds moral behaviour, fair governance and societal peace. Its twenty-four spokes represent constant motion. A country can't stay the same. Moral responsibility must be the driving force behind ongoing progress.

During the Constituent Assembly deliberations, Gandhi's spinning wheel (Charkha) was replaced with the Ashoka Chakra, signifying a shift in the country's aim from economic independence to constitutional rule based on fairness.

Ashoka Chakra broadened the national imagination to include constitutional administration, fairness and universal moral ideals, while the Charkha represented economic independence during the liberation fight.

This fusion of contemporary constitutionalism with ancient symbolism demonstrates India's capacity to reconcile democratic systems with the legacy of civilisation.

Civilisational Confidence in a Modern Republic

Indian Republic did not arise in isolation. Its constitutional framework is grounded in an ancient civilisation while also embracing universal democratic values. Cultural exclusivism and civilisational confidence are distinctly different concepts. This framework reflects continuity through time rather than asserting superiority over other cultures.

India has maintained philosophical traditions that emphasise coexistence, multiplicity and discourse while absorbing diverse influences.

Philosophies like *Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah*, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, and *Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti* continue to influence India's moral vocabulary in both domestic and foreign affairs.

This continuity is represented graphically by the National Flag. It conveys the idea that India's modernity is neither alien nor disconnected from its cultural roots. Rather, India's democratic institutions are presented as modern manifestations of a long-standing civilisational ethos.

Tricolour in Contemporary Diplomacy

The symbolic prominence of India's national flag on the world scene has increased due to the country's expanding international engagement. Through the Chandrayaan and Aditya-L1 missions, humanitarian aid and disaster relief efforts throughout Asia and Africa, partnerships in digital public infrastructure, vaccine diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic and leadership in organisations like the G20, BRICS and Quad, Tricolour has accompanied India's accomplishments in space exploration.

Inspired by the civilisational ideal of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, India hosted the G20 Summit in 2023 under the theme *One Earth, One Family, One Future*. The Tricolour symbolised a country attempting to influence global governance through dialogue rather than dominance.

The flag increasingly represents both developmental cooperation and democratic legitimacy.

It is now linked to respect for national sovereignty, pharmaceutical collaboration, affordable technology and capacity building for many nations in the Global South.

National Symbols and Democratic Citizenship

Over time, citizens' relationships with national symbols change. India's experience shows that constitutional democracies can increase citizen engagement without compromising the integrity of their institutions.

Thanks to the Har Ghar Tiranga initiative, which was started under the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, millions of people were encouraged to voluntarily fly the national flag with dignity and respect while adhering to the standards outlined in the Flag Code of India, 2002. Instead of demonstrating performative nationalism, such involvement exemplifies constitutional patriotism. It strengthens democratic institutions' shared ownership.

In a heterogeneous community, shared constitutional commitments are more important for maintaining national unity than uniformity. That is exactly what the tricolour represents.

The connection between national pride and democratic freedoms was strengthened by further court rulings, most notably the Supreme Court's acknowledgement of flying the national flag as an expression protected under Article 19(1)(a).

Few democracies are good at demonstrating this synchronisation between public ownership and constitutional regulation.

Global Symbol for the Twenty-First Century

Countries are using symbols more and more to convey their beliefs as geopolitical rivalry heats up. The Indian national flag conveys a unique story. It symbolises a state that blends constitutional government, electoral democracy, cultural diversity, technical advancement and the continuation of civilisation.

In contrast to ideological emblems connected to strict doctrines, The Tricolour nonetheless remains purposefully inclusive. It concurrently addresses India's fight for independence, hopes for the constitution and aspirations for the future. As a result, its symbolism is remarkably enduring.

Because it is rooted on ideals rather than ephemeral political circumstances, it endures over generations.

Citizens as Custodians of National Symbols

National flags are powerful because of public respect as well as constitutional recognition.

The Tricolour has become a truly shared civic emblem, as evidenced by the extensive participation of Indians in national festivals across generations, regions, and communities.

The development of Indian democracy is demonstrated by the shift in public opinion from restricted ceremonial use to responsible citizen engagement.

Therefore, respecting the national flag signifies constitutional patriotism based on shared citizenship rather than just governmental conformity.

Concluding Observations

The Indian National Flag is the timeless symbol of a democratic society and is much more than just a tricolour of saffron, white and green. It symbolises the sovereignty of a republic whose foundations are based on the constitutional values of liberty, equality, fairness and multiplicity and whose power comes from its citizens. It was born out of one of the most notable freedom movements in history. The Tricolour, nearly eight decades after India gained its independence, symbolises the country's exceptional capacity to reconcile a traditional civilisational culture with contemporary democratic governance.

At a time when the world struggles with conflicting narratives on identity, sovereignty and global order, it serves as a strong reminder that enduring national strength is based not only on economic or military might but also on constitutional legitimacy, democratic participation, moral purpose and civilisational confidence.

The Indian Tricolour is more than just the flag of a rising power; it represents a country dedicated to supporting a fair, inclusive and cooperative global order.

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