

Objectives & Principles of India's Foreign policy; Continuity & Change

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Abstract:

India's foreign policy and its relationships with neighboring countries hold critical significance in shaping regional dynamics and global geopolitics. India's foreign policy towards its neighbors is characterized by a complex interplay of historical legacies, geopolitical imperatives, economic interests, and strategic considerations. As a rapidly growing regional power with aspirations for global leadership, India's interactions with its neighbors are central to its quest for regional stability, economic integration, and security.

The paper explores India's foreign policy objectives in relation to its immediate neighbors, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Myanmar. It examines the historical context of these relationships, focusing on factors such as colonial legacies, territorial disputes, ethnic and religious affinities, and geopolitical rivalries.

Key Words: foreign policy, objectives, non-alignment, panchsheel

Introduction

India's foreign policy and its relations with neighboring countries constitute a cornerstone of its strategic vision and geopolitical landscape. As one of the world's largest and most populous democracies, India's interactions with its neighbors have profound implications not only for regional stability and security but also for global dynamics. Since gaining independence in 1947, India has pursued a foreign policy characterized by a delicate balance of pragmatism, non-alignment, and strategic autonomy. Central to this policy is the imperative of fostering peaceful and mutually beneficial relations with its immediate neighbors, based on principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference. At the same time, India has sought to assert its regional

leadership and strategic interests, particularly in South Asia, a region of immense geopolitical significance.

India's engagement with its neighbors is influenced by the presence of external actors, notably China and the United States, whose strategic interests intersect with India's in the region. The rise of China as a global power and its assertive behavior in South Asia, particularly through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), adds another layer of complexity to India's neighborhood dynamics.

Despite these challenges, India has pursued various initiatives to enhance regional cooperation and connectivity through platforms such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Economic diplomacy, cultural exchanges, infrastructure development, and security cooperation have been key pillars of India's neighborhood policy.

Review of Related Literature

Given these questions, the initial literature review has been undertaken. A comprehensive review of existing literature, including academic journals, books, government documents, policy reports, and media sources was conducted to gain insights into the historical context, theoretical frameworks, and empirical evidence related to India's foreign policy and its relations with neighbors.

Sumit Ganguly's in his work "India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect" (2010) provides a comprehensive examination of India's foreign policy, shedding light on its historical evolution and current challenges. While the book covers a wide range of topics, including India's global engagements, it also explores India's relations with its neighbors, offering valuable insights into the complexities of these relationships.

Happymon Jacob's edited volume "India's Foreign Policy: The Democracy Dimension" (2013): This collection of essays explores how India's commitment to democracy influences its foreign policy decisions, including those concerning neighboring countries. Jacob and other contributors analyze India's efforts to promote democratic values in its neighborhood and the impact of these efforts on regional dynamics. Rama Rao Bonagani in his chapter "Continuities and Changes of India's Foreign Policy since its Independence for Making a better India", explained that foreign policy means a policy pursued by a nation in its dealings with other nations, designed to achieve its national objectives. This is the same in the case of India also.

"India's Neighborhood: Challenges in the Next Two Decades" (2012) edited by Rajiv Kumar and Pratap Bhanu Mehta: Focusing specifically on India's neighborhood policy, this book examines the various challenges and opportunities facing India in its relations with neighboring countries. From security concerns to economic cooperation, the chapters offer nuanced perspectives on India's engagement with its neighbors. It investigates into the intricacies of India's

neighborhood policy and the challenges it faces in managing relationships with neighboring countries.

Chris Ogden's "India and its Neighbors: Renewed Threats and New Strategies" (2014): Ogden's work delves into the security dimension of India's relations with neighboring countries. By analyzing issues such as border disputes and terrorism, Ogden highlights the complexities of managing these relationships and evaluates India's strategic responses. Ogden's book provides a detailed analysis of India's security challenges and strategies in managing its relations with neighboring countries. It discusses issues such as border disputes, terrorism, and regional power dynamics, and evaluates India's policy responses.

Gurmeet Kanwal's "The New Arthashastra: A Security Strategy for India" (2016): Kanwal's book provides a strategic perspective on India's foreign policy, with a focus on security challenges and strategies. While not exclusively focused on India's neighbors, the book offers insights into India's broader security concerns, which inevitably shape its relations with neighboring countries. Kanwal's book offers insights into India's security strategy, including its approach towards neighboring countries. It discusses India's efforts to enhance regional cooperation, manage conflicts, and pursue economic and diplomatic initiatives to strengthen its position in the neighborhood.

David Brewster and Jeff M. Smith's edited volume "India's Approach to Asia: Strategy, Geopolitics and Responsibility" (2016): This collection of essays examines India's role in the broader Asia-Pacific region, including its interactions with neighboring countries. By analyzing India's strategic imperatives and diplomatic initiatives, the contributors offer valuable insights into India's efforts to enhance regional stability and cooperation. This edited volume explores India's engagement with the Asia-Pacific region, including its relations with neighboring countries. It examines India's strategic imperatives, economic interests, and diplomatic initiatives aimed at enhancing stability and cooperation in the region.

Harsh V. Pant's edited volume "India's Foreign Relations: Issues and Challenges" (2019): Pant's book provides a comprehensive overview of India's foreign relations, covering various aspects including its relations with neighboring countries. By addressing key issues and challenges facing India in the international arena, the book offers a nuanced understanding of India's foreign policy priorities. These works collectively contribute to our understanding of India's foreign policy and its relations with neighboring countries, offering valuable insights into the complexities of these relationships and the challenges they entail.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to comprehensively analyze India's foreign policy towards its neighboring countries and assess the dynamics of its relations with each neighboring nation. The study aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the historical evolution of India's foreign policy towards its neighbors.
2. To analyze the objectives and principles of India's foreign policy; Continuity & change

Methodology

The study has employed a descriptive and analytical method, incorporating qualitative research methods to achieve its objectives. For a comprehensive analysis of India's foreign policy towards its neighboring countries, data was collected from secondary sources like academic journals, books, government documents, policy reports, and media sources. A detailed research was made to gain insights into the historical context, theoretical frameworks, and empirical evidence related to India's foreign policy and its relations with neighbors.

MEANING AND DEFINITIONS

Foreign policy is how a country uses different strategies to guide its relationships with other countries and international organizations. This means that foreign policy is made up of different global issues, relationships with other countries, and even domestic politics. Foreign policy is the sum total of principles, interests and objectives which a state formulates in conducting its relations with other states. Similarly, each state has its foreign policy through which it tries to develop relations with other nations at international level. Through its foreign policy, states make efforts to change the behaviour of other states or to control and regulate the activities of other states to attain its nation interests. Hence, foreign policy represents both continuity and change in the relations among states. Besides, it represents both positive and negative dimensions.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign Policy of any country, to great extent, is determined by the specific nature of external and internal environment. Besides, the history, legacies, personality, ideologies, structural set up etc also influence the foreign policy of a country. India's foreign policy development is no exception to this fact. Multiple factors have contributed towards the finalisation of different goals and principles of its foreign policy. Hence, to study the impact of historical background on India's foreign policy becomes imperative as this has deep impact on the foreign policy making over the years. We can divide the global political and security order and India's Foreign Policy response to the same in three phases.

First Phase from 1947 to 1991, the world was characterized by a bipolar world order. The League of Nations had withered away, and the United Nations was born, molded by the victorious World War II allies namely, the US, USSR, UK and France. Global economic and financial power was usurped by the Western developed countries primarily the US and its European allies who developed the Bretton-Woods arrangement with the World Bank and IMF duo controlling the global financial system and the GATT (later replaced by WTO) shaping global trade. In this environment, India's response was to adopt the policy of non-alignment. The purpose behind this stance was so that the young nation could overcome its severe political, social and economic stress and degradation, after two centuries of colonial rule.

In the second phase from 1991 to 2008, two major events in 1991 kick-started the process of change. The former Soviet Union collapsed and splintered into many independent countries, Russia being the largest among them, and successor to the USSR in the UN. The second was the foreign currency crisis faced by India, the likes of which we had never experienced before. We witnessed a changing world order with only one country remaining as the major political, economic and military power, viz., the USA.

The third period is from 2008 to the present times. In 2008, the US and the global banking and financial systems were severely jolted, starting with the collapse of the Lehman Brothers. This led to a severe economic meltdown in the advanced economies of the world, and even among most of the erstwhile champion emerging economies like South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand. In this period, the United States' economic and military superiority is being chipped away, with most of the slack taken up by China, which is also becoming a more attractive political model for some developing countries. Indian foreign policy has responded vigorously to these changes with non-alignment dropped altogether. Today, Indian diplomacy is primarily focused on the USA, China, other P-5 member countries, and our neighborhood. Look East has been expanded to Act East.

OBJECTIVES OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY; CONTINUITY & CHANGE

Major objectives of every country's foreign policy are aimed at to fulfil the national interests of that state. India is no exception to this phenomenon. A depth analysis reveals that generally a consensus is found on the national interests in the country. But it may not always be necessary all the time.

National Security

For any country, national security and territorial integrity used to be the prime concern and main objective for it. In case of India, to a great extent, security includes both traditional and non-traditional threat concerns. It also includes independent decision making on international issues,

opposition to military alliances, friendly relations with neighbors and opposition to policies of colonialism and imperialism.

Economic Development

For a developing country like India, rapid economic development naturally becomes significant determinant of its foreign policy. In this context, first of all it has to develop its power potentials which is dependent on three important variables- (I) population; (ii) natural resources: and (iii) technology. Later on, the pattern of growth in India has to be determined in terms of its constitutional limitations, role of state, and ideology of economic development.

World Order

Foreign policy of a country works in a particular international milieu. Major task of any country's foreign policy is to fulfil its national interests by making a favorable world order. That is why; Jawaharlal Nehru visualized the working of foreign policy in a larger global order. India has been supporter of policy of disarmament in the contest of threats from the nuclear explosions. Similarly, it opposed cold war politics in the larger interest of the requirement of peace for the developing countries.

Opposition to Colonialism, Imperialism and Racialism

Struggle against colonialism, imperialism and racialism has been the leading “ideological currents” in Indian foreign policy. Based on India's own experiences with serviette, in the post-independence era India supported the cause of anti-imperialism in the context of other such nations. India opposed all such policies of other such countries within the United Nations and outside this forum. Besides, India has been ardent critic of the policy of apartheid in South Africa.

Supporter of Disarmament

India has been striving hard for disarmament through United Nations and other such forums. It had introduced numerous resolutions or amendments to resolutions introduced by other states in the United Nations to achieve the aim of general and complete disarmament. It has taken active part in the 18 nations committee on Disarmament (CD), which was created by the General Assembly in 1961, and opened in Geneva on 14 May 1962, and has been functioning ever since.

Important Role in Asia

One central point of India's foreign policy has been to play an important role in Asia. Due to its history, cultural legacy, area, geographical conditions etc. its ruling elite perceived an important role for India in this region. Even during freedom movement, it raised the grievances of these states along with its own concerns. Thus, India always made efforts to play a significant role in Asia.

Afro-Asian Regional Cooperation

Since its inception India is making serious efforts to bring out cooperation among the states of Asia and Africa. During cold war era, this effort has mainly been limited to political dimension. After covering of Asian conference in 1947 and 1949, India was also instrumental in bringing about unity and cooperation among Afro-Asian conference at Bandung (Indonesia) in 1955. Finally, non-aligned movement (NAM) was established from the majority of its membership from Asian and African nations.

Faith in United Nations

One of the essential aims of India's foreign policy has been its quest for peace through the United Nations. India's deep commitment towards this body can be seen from its joining of the United Nations as primary member even prior to its freedom. India considers it as the only hope for peaceful cooperation among nations.

Protection of Overseas Indian

Protection of the interests of the overseas Indians has been an important objective of India's foreign policy. Basically, overseas Indian could be categorized into three groups: (i) Indian citizens staying abroad for an indefinite period for whatever purpose (ii) people who were forced to immigrate to different parts of the British Empire. Now the descendants of those migrants who are called people of Indian Origin (PIOs); and, (iii) finally, people who are legally and technically branded as stateless persons of Indian origin (SPIOs).

PRINCIPLES OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

To fulfil the above objectives India's foreign policy is governed by certain principles. Principles on the one hand, provide rational analysis of foreign policy, and on the other hand, they represent continuity in foreign affairs. The principles governing India's foreign policy are as under: –

Non-alignment

Most important and central focus of India's foreign policy is its principle of non-alignment. Basically, India's policy of non-alignment Besides, India regarded it as a principle having independent outlook in global politics. It is a policy, which provides India an opportunity to act independently on world problems without any pressures from the so-called superpowers. This policy of independence of choice was first determined by national interest and then by merit of the issue and the world situation.

Panchsheel

Ethical and peaceful dimensions of India's foreign policy are also reflected through its policy of *Panchsheel* which means five principles of peaceful co-existence. These principles were first enunciated in the preamble of trade agreement signed between India and China on 29 April 1955. Later on, these were reiterated in a joint statement issued during the visit of China's Premier Chou en Lai to India on 28 June 1954. Five principles of *Panchsheel* are: (i) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; (ii) non-aggression; (iii) non-interference in each other's domestic affairs; (iv) equality and mutual benefits; and, (v) peaceful coexistence.

Dynamism and Adaptability

India's foreign policy apart from being a dynamic policy has the capacity to adapt itself to international changes. For instance, non-alignment did not mean that India always opposed the receipt of military assistances. Rather it had accepted such aid and assistance whenever national interests demanded so. For instance, it accepted America's military assistance during 1962 crisis.

Peaceful Coexistence

Finally, the principal of peaceful coexistence also constitutes one of the principles of India's foreign policy. Though it is constituent of India's principle of *Panchsheel*, yet in a more comprehensive manner it represents the overall cultural ethos of 'live and let others live' of India's tradition.

CONCLUSION

Thus, India's foreign policy has been the by-product of specific historical backgrounds in which contribution of INC, experiences of freedom movement and its leadership have been outstanding. This historical backdrop to a great extent has influenced the growth of various principles of India's foreign policy. That is why in the post-independence era, three basic objectives i.e., national security; economic development and world order proved to be the core issues around which India's foreign policy revolved. Besides it has given birth to certain objectives which provided the goals for its foreign policy. Broadly speaking, these objectives have been in opposition to colonialism and racialism; efforts towards establishment of Afro-Asian unity; develop faith in UN systems; friendship with all nations; protection of overseas Indians etc. To implement these objectives, it adopted the twin main principles of non-alignment and *Panchsheel* as its basic framework. Besides, the principles of pragmatism, dynamism and adaptability and peaceful coexistence have been adhered to. Through these principles, India has been pursuing its interests and adapting itself to meet the challenges of changed global milieu.

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