



REFLECTION ON THEORETICAL DEBATES ON INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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ABSTRACT

There are different perspectives explaining foreign policy in India. From theoretical perspective it becomes important to know which thinking matters in the making of Indian foreign policy. Theoretical perspective on Indian foreign policy is somewhat difficult because they fall within a very narrow range of ideas. Sometime, these views have common points in its explanation of foreign policy. This paper analyses the different perspectives on Indian foreign policy.



KEYWORDS: Foreign Policy. Theoretical Debate, International Politics, Realism, Liberalism.

INTRODUCTION

Theoretical explanation for Indian foreign policy starts with the question whether India's foreign policy is well described and explained by internal and domestic variables rather than by global ones (Mitra and Schottli 2007:21). In India, there is a debate between "traditionalist" and "pragmatist" perspectives. The first one forms the main perspective and the latter as the evolving contestant perspectives (Bajpai, Ollapally and Rajagopalan 2011:145). But still this debate is not settled (Ollapally and Rajagopalan 2011). Ollapally and Rajagopalan have divided the Indian foreign policy school mainly into four categories: nationalist, great power realist, liberal globalists and leftists. Further, nationalist school has been divided into three categories: standard nationalists neo-nationalists and hyper-nationalists. Other such as Bajpai argues that there are three approaches for defining international relations in India. These approaches can be defined through the description of Nehruvian, neo-liberal and hyperrealist ideas (Bajpai 2002:251). Tharoor (2012) points out that India's global ambition depends on the capacity of its power to convince its neighbors that India's rise can be perceived as an opportunity not a threat. Sumit Ganguly (2010) has described that Indian foreign policy has transformed from idealist to amalgamation of Idealist and realist paradigm. After the cold war, the nature of the foreign policy is embedded with realist thinking and approach with rhetorical nod for its ideational past.

Along with above ideas of foreign policy, theoretical framework of ideational liberalism can be fruitful for the deeper enquiry of preferences in Indian foreign policy. There could be huge space for analysing and making of India's foreign policy. First, deeper historical backgrounds of strategic worldview would add to the literature on India. Second, the intersection of politicians, bureaucrats, and Indian foreign policy is an interesting space for forthcoming work. Third, there is the requirement of exhaustive studies of the foreign policy apparatus (Narang and Staniland 2012:91). There is a certain shift in Indian foreign policy. Firstly, there is a transition from national consent on structuring a model of socialist society to modern capitalist one. The second transition can be perceived as an emphasis on economy in the creation of Indian foreign policy. Now India has tried to make the entry in world market

and foreign direct investment. A third transition relates to India being recognised as an emerging world power. The fourth important transition was rejecting the anti-western thinking. The fifth transition is seen as the shift from idealism to realism (Mohan 2006). Indian foreign policy is driven by "cautious prudence". It works with the fundamental principle showing reluctance to use force. It can be considered as prudent power as it goes through the ideas versus material interest's divide that described so many accounts of foreign policy. It is beyond the excessive zeal of any particular variety of foreign policy. The case of foreign policy is situational which is not determined by pre-logic (Mehta 2009: 230,231).

Geographical Borders, National Identity and Indian Foreign Policy

The question of social identities in the context of geographical borders and its impact on India's foreign policy behaviour or preferences is quite significant. In Indian circumstance, historically, the question of the identity is deep rooted. First Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out that broadly the external affairs has been shaped by the internal affairs, and there is no relevance of external affairs if domestic affairs go wrong. Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out these words in address to Indian Constituent Assembly on March 8, 1948. (Appadorai 1982). In fact, its pluralism, diversity, democratic practices, and multiculturalism are all perceived internationally as rudiments of power rather than weakness. The social structure of a state was given in 1947 and the leading elites tried to unite a nation. Consequently, foreign policy became a means for nation building process and its identity-construction. (Metra and Schottli 2007:33-34). Geetika Commuri (2010) tries to locate identity discourse in Indian foreign policy and its security paradigm. Priya Chacko in her book '*Indian Foreign Policy: The Politics of Post-Colonial Identity from 1947-2004*' argues that Indian foreign policy tried to yield a picture of postcolonial India founded on joint meanings. Her social analysis about Indian foreign policy and identity designates the extent to which inner critiques of the nation self can be decisive in the construction of identity. For Ananya Vajpeyi in the construction of identity, '*The Idea of India*' has deep rooted origins in Indian history. Its modern practice arose with a warm commitment with, and not at all a refusal or denial of Indian intellectual traditions. She contends that in shared pursuit for Indian selfhood, the founders of India were deeply inclined to Indian customs of moral and political philosophy, and moved to ancient and classical texts, ideas, and ideals in the groundwork of their political values and visions. India's devotion to shared values will be a basis of legitimacy of Indian state in the international system. It ought to be clear about what values it positions for (Khilnani et al.2012:69). Now diversity and democracy have developed an intensely rooted shared sense of Indian politics in present time (Pingle and Varshney 2006). Engelmeier (2009) also contends that foreign policy continues to be an essential part in nation-building project of one country (which he looks as ongoing). Different to other nations which took the simple method of structuring a national identity around noticeable features such as race, religion or language, India's nation builders followed 'value-based nationalism', more nonconcrete and less visible at first, but eventually a vivid method to making a nation of unmatched cultural multiplicity. Sinderpal Singh (2013) skillfully and rigorously makes the case that India's domestic identity politics shapes its regional relationships. His study has tried to make the relationship between identity and Indian foreign policy. National identity is also one component in the making of Indian foreign policy. Some researchers have found the idea of "state nationalism" "helpful, or the state-sponsored notion of a nation with certain goals and a notion of how they can be accomplished (Bajpai and Mallavarapu 2005). Malone and Mukherjee (2010) have argued that there are three types of national factors pertinent to ethnic identity that effect India's strategies towards certain states. One of which is transnational ethnic groups that play a major role in influencing the foreign policy. The population of Indian border areas often share an ethnic and religious link with neighboring areas of other countries (Malone and Mukherjee2010:7). For example, secessionist movements and insurgencies influence the preferences in foreign policy. Secessionist movements in boundary areas are mainly challenging because they become flashpoints with neighboring states. These numbers of movements have influenced in many way the foreign policy of India from the security point of view and have its implication on India's foreign policy. The state project in India was grounded on a united but

multiethnic and multi-religious social democracy (Chacko 2014:439). So, in this case the project of foreign policy becomes the project of domestic politics for satisfying the values of these disturbed region of the country. The conception of look east policy wanted to redefine the geographical delineations of India's regional commitment and engagement. This engagement is considered essential to ensure effective state building in Indian foreign policy. The policy makers started and united ideational change in foreign policy for regional engagement and economic reforms along with recasting India's state project (Chacko 2014:442). It revolves around that India is a great civilization, emphasizing the great achievement of the past. Identity narratives adds layers to understand the relationship between India and Pakistan. It may be seen to influence the conflictual behaviour of two countries. It is more important in the case of religious cultural identity. It appears that there is considerable closeness influenced by the two national identity discourse (Commuri 2009:169).

On the basis of above writings, it can be argued that it becomes essential to find out the role of values in Indian foreign policy which satisfy the needs of those areas of Indian state which are more challenged from the security point of view. The values which are more inclined to satisfy the aspiration of these border region especially in Jammu and Kashmir and Northeast becomes an important aspect of analysing the Indian foreign policy. The question of their aligning with the mainstream character of Indian democracy becomes significant in Indian foreign policy. The interaction of democratic nature of Indian polity with these border region and its link to satisfy the values of these region for bringing peaceful environment has an important impact on Indian foreign policy.

Role of Liberal Ideology in Foreign Policy of India:

A second component of ideational liberalism is the inclination of people and groups to particular ideology. Economic liberalization as an ideology is playing a significant role. So far, as the role of India in the globalisation process is concerned, it is poised to continue the unalterable policy of economic liberalization introduced by the Rao Government in mid of 1991 under the economic stewardship of bureaucrat-turned-politician Mr. Manmohan Singh, then finance minister. The rationale behind introducing economic reforms was to free the Indian economy from the fetters of ideological rigidities so that Indian economy could be integrated with global economy. And these are also aimed at establishing multilateral economic linkages at international level. India has been active in its international engagement through different kind of multilateral engagement from the very beginning of its independence. But as an emerging economic power it has intensified its multilateral engagement. This process can be traced through India's economic engagement in different kind of international and regional economic organisation. The role of India in World Trade Organisation, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and BRICs is significant. Through this process of multilateral engagement India has integrated its economy in this globalised world. Many observers of India now describe the country as an emerging great power with changing capacities. Such assessments of the potentiality are given on the basis of India's economic reforms in 1991 (Malone 1991:75). As the cold war ended, the prevailing conditions changed the international structure. In early 1990, Indian leaders started to focus on trade and energy requirement. This was considered as the need for economic growth. It necessitated the need to embrace the globalisation. India's global interaction continued to increase as Indian leaders tried to restore India's great power status. In order to this, they garnered new trade relations (Ogden 2014). Mehta points of three basic rudiments of India's foreign policy formulations: uninhibited economic openness, pluralism and membership of multilateral institutions strengthen each other. India is single society in the world that is proficient in exchanging a deep diversity. It is also related with foreign policy which shows heterogeneity by creating meanings on shared values and one kind of multilateralism (Mehta 2006). Bhiku Parekh notes that Nehru gave India a "distinct moral voice" in the world, derived primarily from his and Gandhi's guidance to the anticolonial struggle. In current times, Parekh notes that India has advanced a new identity that is a careful reaction to Nehruvian nationalism. It pursues to break from the Indian tradition of "poverty, moralizing and isolation" to emphasis more on economic and military power in foreign policy (Parekh 2008).

Domestic Socio-economic Compulsions on Indian Foreign Policy:

The third component of ideational liberalism is domestic socio-economic regulation. Socio-economic regulation determines the Indian foreign policy widely. This normative framework is quite significant in Indian foreign policy. It works as a tool for the socio-economic regulation in framing of Indian foreign policy. The substantial contents of socio-economic regulation could not be ignored while framing the structure of foreign policy. The issue of climate, health and food security are quite significant towards this direction in shaping the Indian foreign policy. Socio-economic regulation determines the Indian foreign policy widely. A developing country like India cannot follow a policy of autarky or isolationism in a world which is essentially interdependent. But global interdependence does not mean that a developing country should surrender its sovereignty under the pressures of foreign aid givers or private foreign investors (Bhambri 1982). It encourages foreign policy makers to think of foreign policies which are closer to the distinct characteristics of Indian society. In the present time, it is conceived that democratic state accept the responsibility of the pursuit of common interest and puts up barrier against market egoism and profit seeking. Self-preserving instinct of society supported by the state authorities ensure the interest of common welfare and good. Indian foreign policy makers have kept in mind the concept of social welfare while framing the foreign policy of the country. The Indian state has gone so far to protect the interest of common people. The state in India is seen to be retreat since 1991. Kothari (1995) has argued that Indian state is playing major role in providing opportunities to the minorities, backward class, tribal communities, women and children. It is encouraging the initiatives and indigenous thinking in key areas such as education, environment, health and housing. It is implementing the laws of the land for the betterment of the poorer and the oppressed sections of society. These issues of social welfare have worked as a domestic compulsions on Indian foreign policy. Indian foreign policy on the issues of climate change and energy security, trade in specific reference to agriculture and Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) has been constrained by socio-economic domestic compulsions.

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