

Foreign Policy of India: Evolution and Determinants



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Abstract

India's relations with the world have evolved since the British Raj, when the British Empire monopolised external and defence relations. When India gained independence in 1947, the first Prime Minister of free India Jawaharlal Nehru promoted a strong personal role and he made all major foreign policy decisions himself. Indian prestige and moral authority were high and it facilitated the acquisition of developmental assistance from both east and west. India's foreign policy is a forward looking engagement with the rest of the world based on a rigorous, realistic and contemporary assessment of the bilateral, regional and global geo-political and economic milieu. An important role of India's foreign policy has been to ensure the welfare and well being of 20 million people of Indian origin living and working abroad. Against this backdrop, the author has described in detail the three phases of evolution of Indian foreign policy and analysed the various determinants of Indian foreign policy so as to understand its significance in manoeuvring the international relation of the state.

Keywords: League of Nations, United Nations, Raja Rammohan Roy, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Foreign Policy, Britain, India.

Introduction

The present age is of nation, states and internationalism in which no state, however strong it may be, cannot live in isolation. Every state has to establish economic, social, political, scientific and cultural relations with the other countries for safeguarding its national interests. The truth is that establishing relations with the other countries has become an important and essential function of every state and the policy adopted by one state, keeping in view the protection and promotion of its national interests in order to determine its relations with others, is known as the foreign policy.

India has formal diplomatic relations with most nations, as the world's second most populous country, the world's most populous democracy and one of the fastest growing major economies in the world, having largest population by purchasing power. India is a regional power, nuclear power and a potential Superpower. It is India's growing international influence that increasingly gives it a more prominent voice in global affairs.

India is a newly industrialized country; it has a long history of collaboration with several countries and is considered a leader of the developing world. India was one of the founding members of several international organizations, most notably the League of Nations, the United Nations the Asian Development Bank, G-20 industrial nations and the founder of the Non-Aligned Movement, SAARC and BIMSTEC. India is currently seeking a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

India has given importance to its foreign policy since before its independence. Members of the Indian Freedom Movement have also contributed to it by constantly collaborating with the leaders of other countries in their work in the interest of the country. Subhash Chandra Bose met up with the Germans and the Japanese to form a mutually beneficial alliance. Under this alliance, the Imperial Japan and Germany agreed to help India attain its freedom from the British as the British were already waging wars against them. In return, India would withdraw all its soldiers and support from Britain's war efforts. An army of prisoners of war was trained by the Imperial Japan, to infiltrate the India under British Raj so that they could shake the Britishers from the Indian soil. This aid helped in framing the foundation of Indian Independence.

Objective of the Study

The present paper is an attempt to deal with major aspects of the Foreign Policy of India in detail during its evolution phase. It is an attempt to show that India had started establishing relations with other countries before independence and when India gained independence, it stood with the principles of international peace and co-operation. The paper tries to prove that India believes in 'vasudev kutumbham'. There can not be any contradiction between national and international interests.

Evolution of Indian Foreign Policy

India has got independence in 1947 and it has been more than seventy years now. Seventy years may not be a sufficiently long period in the life of a country for arriving at a holistic evaluation of the perspectives and policies related to foreign policy. Nevertheless, seventy years is a time long enough to undertake an interim evaluation. Looking back at the origins of Indian foreign policy in terms of its ethos and its motivations shows that its origins precede India's achieving dominion status in 1946 and independence in 1947. They had their roots in the thought process of the leaders of the renaissance movement in the late 19th century and of the national freedom movement during the first four decades of 20th century. The leaders of the Indian renaissance movement felt that if India was to find an appropriate place in the comity of nations, it would have to redefine its geo-political identity and cultural individuality. The intellectual and cultural interface between the British and Indian intellectuals in areas in India where the British had acquired direct control led to this broad consciousness.

The initial process of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic connections between colonial powers in India at that point of time like the British, the French, the Portuguese, the Danish and the Dutch made the Indian elite aware of the world beyond its traditional political and diplomatic reality of the international community.

Raja Rammohan Roy was the earliest and most impressive articulator for India to be the part of the world at large which was coming closer due to the expanding facilities and increasing speed of communication between different parts of the world. The industrial revolution and the new economic trends spread throughout Europe led to a realisation that India could not remain isolated from the macro-level political and economic forces at work in different parts of the world. The consequence was the urge to learn English, the desire to emulate British political institutions, to eliminate the negative and evil orthodoxies of religions practised in India and to visualise an India which would be similar to the nation states of Europe.

Raja Rammohan Roy, Dwijendranath and Dwarkanath Tagore, the earlier leaders of the Brahmo Samaj Movement, advocated India's modernization and establishing relations with other societies with the above mentioned objectives. It could be said that this was the first phase of India's developing an international consciousness and acquiring aspirations to become a part of the modern world.

Thus, the first phase was characterised by curiosity about the western world, being impressed by the military, technology and economic power of the European Countries being in awe of the resulting political influence and the reach of their power in different parts of the world, all this leading to a complete change of Indian society and the Indian policy in a manner where India, in subordinate partnership with England, would merge into the International Community.

The second phase in the evolution of Indian foreign policy dates back to the aftermath of the Indian mutiny of 1857. Some parts of India had become familiar with Europeans in general and British in particular over a period of nearly one hundred years by then. This familiarity and the resulting knowledge about the motivations of the colonial power, led to the general discontentment resulting in the mutiny of 1857. There was a fundamental change in the attitudes of the British towards Indians after the mutiny, not just in terms of political postures and administrative practices, but also in terms of cultural, intellectual and psychological attitudes. The previous harmonious social relationship between the foreigners and Indians was replaced by racial superiority and intellectual arrogance. Expansion of Christian missionary activities backed by the political authority of the colonial regimes in India looked down upon the native Indians, questioning the very existence of their culture, the value of their literature and the relevance of their social values. Whereas, the leaders of political and intellectual renaissance movement like Bankim Chandra, Swami Vivekanand, Maharishi Dayanand emphasised on glorious Indian history, its intellectual heritage and its cultural and religious identity.

The third phase of evolution of Indian foreign policy relates with the increasing familiarity of the Indian intelligentsia with British political writings. The gradually increasing number of Indians going to England for study or for economic purposes contributed to awareness of the wider world. The works of Max Muller, Professor William Jones and Sir William Hunter are illustrative of the inputs which the collective psyche of the Indians received, making them rediscover their identity in contemporary perspectives at that point of time.

Thus, all these developments ultimately led to the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Great leaders like Womesh Chunder Banerjee, Surendranath Banerjee, Monomohun Ghosh, Lalmohan Ghosh, Badruddin Tyabji, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Dadabhai Naoroji, Pheroze Mehta contributed in realizing a sense of nationhood, rooted in Indian history, Indian value system and Indian religio-cultural ethos. Now, India had the beginnings of an organized political party capable of articulating Indian aspirations and expectations regarding domestic affairs but also regarding India's attitude towards the rest of the world.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi became leader of Indian National Congress immediately after the end of the First World War. He became conscious about the possibilities of utilising India's contributions to the British Empire for demanding an appropriate

role for India under Britain. A British Indian delegation being given separate representation in the post-First World War international conferences and deliberations, and India become founding member of the League of Nations. This intensified India's international consciousness and initiated Indian experience in foreign relations. These developments germinated ideas which between the first and second world wars, crystallised into Indian foreign policy orientations.

The phase between 1920-1946 was the time when the fundamental terms of reference for Independent India's foreign policy were formulated. Mahatma Gandhi's influence was the predominant factor in this process. While Gandhiji defined the framework for India's foreign policy, Nehru characterised its orientations and details.

A commitment to freedom based on truth, a commitment to democracy predicated on safeguarding diversity and individual freedom and commitment to encourage reason and impulses of peace in international relations were the ideals which Mahatma Gandhi provided for India's foreign relations before India became free. Two major influences on Gandhi's successor Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs in free India in the sphere of foreign relations were his participation in India's freedom struggle within the ideological framework of Gandhian thought. The second influence was the socialist ideology of early 20th century Europe emphasising the imperatives of social equality and economic justice and opposition to all forms of oppression and exploitation.

Since independence, India's foreign relations tends to cast Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as the sole articulator, formulator and executor of Indian foreign policy, unchallenged and unmatched in his expertise and reading of international relations. Pandit Nehru's policies are still relevant today.

Determinants of Indian Foreign Policy

- 1 Geographical factors-it includes the size, location, natural resources and population of the country.
- 2 Historical factors-the historical background of the country and its traditions have also affected its foreign policy.
- 3 Economic factors-the deficiency of food grains, soaring prices, unemployment, poverty and inequality in the country-compels for assistance from foreign countries.
- 4 Ideological factors-the impact of Western Liberalism, Socialism and Gandhism is clearly visible on India's foreign policy.
- 5 National Interests-every nation keeps in view its national interests while framing its foreign policy.
- 6 Personal factors-influenced by Pandit Nehru, Mrs. Gandhi and other personalities of India.

- 7 Search for national security-the protection of national interests reigns supreme in determining the foreign policy.
- 8 Ideals which inspired our national leaders-the leaders who led the freedom struggle, were against racial discrimination and were of the opinion that there cannot be any contradiction between national and international interests.
- 9 Constitutional factors-the determinants of the foreign policy of India have been mentioned in Article-51 of the part IV of the Constitution.

Conclusion

Foreign policy of a country is a set of principles, policies and decision making in connection with its national interests. The foreign policy of a country is formed and implemented by leaders, statesmen and diplomats. The ideas, orientations, attitudes, likings, disliking of the national decision-makers effects the foreign policy of a country. The Indian foreign policy till 1964 was described as Nehru's foreign policy while in present times, personality aspects of Prime minister, Narendra Modi has a strong bearing on India's foreign policy and India's international relations.

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