

## Indian Foreign Policy: From Idealism to Realism



## Political Science

KEYWORDS :

**Dr.Mona Singh**

Assistant Professor,Giest Lecturer,Aurbindo college,Delhi University

### ABSTRACT

*Indian Foreign policy underwent a change from idealism to realism keeping in view the changed circumstances and according to the foreign policy requirements .While realism aims at securing power by the use of military power keeping in view the national interests .On the other hand idealism is based on peace between nations and on the principles of mediation and not confrontation.*

The Foreign Policy of a nation flows from several sources, which include the overall international system to domestic political imperatives, from cultural factors and personal characteristics to perceptions of individual decision makers. Like most of the other nations India's foreign policy has been a result of these various factors interacting and influencing at different levels and transforming each other. Great Powers dominate, shape and influence international politics and foreign policies of other nations. In addition, their behavior is largely a product of their external environment. Therefore, the structure of the international system more than anything else shapes the foreign policies of great powers.

States do not become great powers because they possess or excel in only one or another individual kind of capability. A great power achieves its interests through the application of various or all measures of power which include economic, military, territorial, demographic and political. With respect to material capability, India can be regarded as a rising power in the international system. Although, it is not yet a great power but most certainly it is a leading contender for achieving a great power status. A growing wealthy economy along with a large population has enabled India to build its military might. Another major factor contributing to India's rise has been India's soft power and also because of India being a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic secular democracy.

During the cold war power politics, India was very much concerned about becoming entangled in super-power rivalry between US and former-USSR. From 1947 to 1964, Nehru's grand strategy involved a major power role for India but not exclusively a realist one. India under the leadership of Nehru pursued a foreign policy of idealism, giving more emphasis on moral and idealistic dimensions. India decided to adopt non-alignment and peaceful co-existence instead of containment of communism. It was in the year 1954, that India's foreign policy under went a major shift, a shift from idealism to realism in response to security pressures from the international and regional systems.

Since the Ideologies of Idealism and Realism became a part of India's foreign policy, these two ideologies become important in theoretical interpretation.

### Theoretical Underpinnings

The discipline of International Relations confronts unprecedented challenges today. Out of the two schools of thought of idealism and realism, in particular the realist school of thought, through which policy makers have viewed the world over the countries, has been reinventing itself. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the two schools of thought, the realist school and the idealist school emerged.

### The Realist School

The realist tradition, where the states were in a constant state of competition for power, focused on securing power and security through military power. While on the other hand, idealism, stressed other considerations that all states have peace and that state action may not be based or be motivated by power politics. Realism mainly focused on state security and power.

Early realists included E.H Carr, and Hans Morgenthau argued that states were self interested, power seeking rational actors and were basically interested in maximizing their security and survival. In addition, an act of war was being based on self-interest. Classical writers like Thucydides, Niccolo Machiavelli and Hobbes are known as founding fathers of realism.

### Historic Antecedents

Realism as a formal discipline did not arrive until World War II. A few of early writings, which expressed realism, included those of Sun Tzu or Sunzi, an ancient Chinese military strategist, who wrote the Art of War; Thucydides, a Greek historian whose work included the History of the Peloponnesian War, Chanakya or Kautilya (his Saptanga theory and the mandala theory still have modern day relevance) as he is known in Hindu mythology, early Indian Statesman and writer of Arthashastra, Niccolo Machiavelli, a Florentine political philosopher who wrote the Prince in which he explained that the main aim of a prince was to seek power irrespective of religion or ethical considerations. Also Hobbes, an English philosopher, who wrote the Leviathan in which he clearly stated that the State of Nature, was prone to a war of all against all. All the above were classified as realists thinkers.

Their primary assumptions have been expressed in early writings of realists which included Hans Morgenthau it's main proponent. Others included George Kennan, E.H. Carr, Nicholas Spykman, Walter Lippmann, and many more. Recent practitioners of realism in the US included Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. During the Bill Clinton presidency, American diplomats reflected the Wilsonian school to such a degree that those in favor of the realist approach linked President Clinton's policies to social work. According to Kennan, whose concept of American diplomacy was based on the realist approach, such moralism without regard to the realities of power and the national interest was self-defeating and would result in wearing away of power, to America's detriment.

Realism or Political Realism is a school of international relations that gives primary importance to national interest and security over ideology, morality and social reconstructions. This term is synonymous with power politics and it shares the following assumptions; States are rational actors who tend to move towards their own national interest and national interest denotes 'national security' and 'survival'. In addition, relations between states depend on power derived from military and economies capabilities.

### The Idealist School

Idealism in American Studies of International Relations usually refers to the School of thought initiated by Woodrow Wilson, also known as Wilsonianism, or Wilsonian Idealism. Idealism advocated that a state should make its internal political philosophy the goal of foreign policy. Since 1980's, many writers of idealist traditions existed. These included Sir Alfred Zimmern, Norman Angell and John Maynard Keynes to name a few. One of the most important tenets of modern idealist thinking has been the Democratic Peace Theory, According to this theory, states having similar modes of democratic governance normally do not enter into conflict with one another. Woodrow Wilson's

idealistic thought was embodied in his Fourteen Points speech, which resulted in formation of League of Nations and finally the United Nations.

The concept of polarity arose in International Relations, which meant arrangement of power. Bipolarity, too emerged giving rise to two power blocks, the Communist led by former USSR and Capitalist led by US. Bipolarity led to the emergence of cold war. The term 'bipolar' was used by Stalin. He referred to the international system as a bipolar one having two power bases based on different ideologies.

### **Shift in India's Foreign Policy: From Idealism to Realism (1954-1964)**

An important accomplishment of Idealism was the conclusion of Bandung conference in 1955, Suez in 1956, founding of non-alignment in 1961 by the troika of Nehru, Nasser and Tito.

Indian foreign policy underwent a major shift in 1954, the balance between the two elements began to shift in favor of Realism starting in 1954. India could no longer remain relaxed about its national security in response to pressures from the international system and also the regional sub-system. India was a satisfied power initially but from 1954 onwards national security acquired important significance. Earlier India never gave any importance to military capability and military preparedness but certain developments led to India adopting a realist approach. As a consequence, the reign of Idealism was short-lived in India's foreign policy.

US decision in 1954 to supply military aid to Pakistan for expansion of its armed forces marked the first open intervention by a superpower in the affairs of the sub-continent. New Delhi initially followed a foreign policy of idealism, emphasizing a moral and idealistic dimension, denouncing balance of power politics, following a policy of Non alignment and peaceful coexistence. However from the year 1954, New Delhi moved towards realism responding to security pressures from international and regional systems.

## **REFERENCE**

- Harsh V. Pant, "Indian Foreign Policy Challenges: Substantive Uncertainties and Institutional Infirmities", Asian Affairs, Vol. XL, No. 1, (March 2009), p.91 | *ibid.* p. 91. | Kenneth Waltz, Theory of International Politics (Reading, Mass : Addison- Wesley Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 129-131 | Harsh V. Pant, "A Rising India's Search For a Foreign Policy", Orbis, vol.53, no.2, (Spring, 2009), p.252 | | Dinshaw Mistry, "A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment of India as an Emerging World Power", in Subrata K. Mitra (ed.), Politics of Modern South Asia, Critical Issues in Modern Politics, Vol. 5, (London and New York: Routledge, 2009). pp.381-402 | Basrur, Rajesh M., "Theory for Strategy : Emerging India in a Changing World ", South Asian Survey 16,1 (2009) pp.5-21 | [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political\\_realism/25/7/2010](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_realism/25/7/2010) | [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idealism\(international\\_relations\)/22-7-2010](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idealism(international_relations)/22-7-2010) | Baldev Raj Nayar and Paul T.V., India in the World Order, Searching for major power status ( New Delhi : Cambridge University Press ,2004 ) pp.146-147 | *Ibid.*, p.146 | Subrata K.Mitra, Politics of Modern South Asia, Critical issues in Modern Politics (Vol V), (London and New York : Routledge, 2009) p.389 |