



## Evolution of India's Diplomacy

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ABSTRACT

India's diplomacy has constantly evolved with time. It is however deeply rooted in Indian tradition and history which have been moralistic and idealistic. The Indian National Movement played a major role in shaping India's diplomacy. In the post-independence era India started with Nonalignment and moralistic approach to international relations. The defeat in 1962 war forced India to realize importance of military power. Later India also made course correction in its economic policy in 1991 by liberalizing its economy. India's diplomacy therefore has constantly evolved to achieve its national interests.

### KEYWORDS

Diplomacy, Nonalignment, Nuclear Tests, Liberalization

### Introduction

India has a long diplomatic history. The oldest written records as deciphered, the Vedas, the religious mythological texts, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Kautilya's Arthashastra, the Buddhist literature; all these highlight, the Indian diplomatic tradition which have never ceased to evolve, supplying ideas and methods to cope with the persistent diplomatic problem of its time. Indian diplomatic tradition has set its own contours of practical methods of diplomatic activity and theoretical ideas based on religion, politics, humanity, world peace and realpolitik.

India had been a melting pot of races, cultures, customs, religions, beliefs and ideas. Apart from aboriginal Negroids, Dravidians and Aryans; "over the centuries, India witnessed the mingling of Greeks, Scythians, and Parthians; Mongols, Huns and Chinese; and an assortment of mercenary warriors of Central Asia, Iran, Turkey and even Ethiopia" (Tharoor, 2006, p.11).

Historically the Indians have lived in a republic under elected Kings and Ministers. Several republic existed in the ancient times underlying the fact that the ancient Indians understood the concept of state. It was Bhisma in the Mahabharata (c. 1000 BC) who established the doctrine that the state is the result of man's natural desire to live in peace and security without fear from foreign encroachment (Mathur & Kamath, 1996, p.4). The existence of the states itself indicate that there was also interstate relationship among the republics. The conduct of diplomacy and its theories have never been new to the Indian rulers.

India which in its present form is a multicultural, multireligious, multi-ethnic entity, follow secular values. These multicultural and secular values enhance India's prestige in the world. The world which has witnessed two World Wars and later the cold war; is still fighting the extremism caused by religious fundamentalism. There is a severe problem of adjustment between different cultures, religious, and economies. In this scenario, India has a natural edge for fulfilling its long drawn ambition of raising its global prestige and making its presence felt.

### Legacy of National Movement

Much of foreign policy of independent India can be traced back to the thoughts and ideas of the Indian National Movement. Foreign policy is an important determinant of diplomacy. While diplomacy is the actual conduct of relations between states, foreign policy is that principal idea, thought and objective which guides the action of diplomats and national leaders.

The Indian National Congress (INC) which stirred the national

movement played a pivotal role in shaping India's foreign policy. One single individual who played a pivotal role in shaping India's foreign policy was Jawaharlal Nehru. Summing up Nehru's speech in a broadcast from New Delhi on 7 September 1946, Mathur & Kamath (1996) say that the basic principles guiding India's foreign relations as outlined by Nehru, included "end of colonialism, and racialism, independence of Africa and Asian countries, independence from power blocs, support for the United Nations, striving for world peace and cooperation, security through Commonwealth membership, friendly relations with all countries, and closer ties with China and Asian neighbours" (Mathur & Kamath, 1996, p.126; Nehru, 1961, p.1-3).

Throughout the national movement the Indians were active in deliberations on foreign policy. During British rule the Indians had an identity of being recognized as Indians; a non-sovereign entity but a nation in existence and a country in making. The British government dragged India into First World War in 1914 despite Indian opposition. However, later the British government allowed India to participate in war conferences. India actively took part in deliberations of League of Nations which was set up in 1919. India participated in the San Francisco conference in 1945 at the end of the Second World War and become a founding member of the United Nations. India also became a member of International Labour Organization and International Court of Justice. India also participated in summer Olympics of 1900, 1920, 1924, 1928, 1932 and 1936. India's participation in international forums as non-sovereign country before it gained independence was due to India's vigorous national movement and ability to share global burden despite its own servitude.

### Post Independence Diplomacy

Jawaharlal Nehru stirred India's foreign policy after independence. It was Nehru who was most concerned for brand India after independence. Jawaharlal Nehru wanted to raise India's image at the global level and he often thought that India was right in its place to lead the world. The world which was still recovering from the vast destruction of the Second World War was completely divided and shattered. Two power blocs, the American and the Soviets emerged under the two set of ideology of liberal capitalism and communism.

India after independence became a member of the Commonwealth of Nations of which the British ruler is head. Nehru was quite pragmatic in his approach towards international relations. Nehru agreed with Gandhi that independence is an ideal first to be won and then forgotten for the higher ideal of cooperation and brotherhood (Moares, 2007, p.444). Therefore India continues to be the member of the Commonwealth till date.

The Commonwealth however had its own limitations and weaknesses. It could not shield India from the Cold War politics. Under this strenuous circumstances India under Nehru championed the policy of Nonalignment. Nonalignment was a multifaceted foreign policy instrument which gave India the freedom to choose when, where and how it would involve itself in international questions at the same time protects its own security (Kuruppu, 2004, p.216). Nonalignment was neither a policy of boycott of the power blocs nor bandwagoning them; instead having a friendly relation with power blocs so as to receive aid from them and therefore by not participating in any war it was instrumental in maintaining global peace.

India's diplomacy came to critical test in 1962 when one of the nonaligned countries, China, attacked India and crushed the unprepared Indian army while annexing large part of Indian territory. Also in the dispute on Kashmir with Pakistan, India could not get any help from the Commonwealth of Nations. India was also disillusioned by the approach taken by the great powers in the United Nations. India realized its weaknesses and learned hard lessons of realpolitik. Therefore the post 1962 Indian diplomacy made a deviation in favour of gaining power.

### Phase of Deviation

While India was introspecting on the cause of defeat and about future course of diplomacy, China went ahead and conducted its first nuclear explosion in 1964, making India extremely vulnerable. China's nuclear explosion and its relationship with Pakistan produced a nonbearable threat to India. Finding India in a weak position Pakistan attacked India in 1965. The world community did not interfere. The Indians fought bravely and while Pakistan was on a verge of collapse Soviet Russia interfered and peace treaty at Tashkent was signed in 1966.

On the issue of nuclear weapons India since time of Nehru had taken a high moral ground. India signed the 1963 Partial Nuclear Test-Ban treaty, which countries like France and China refused to sign. Nehru's successor Lal Bahadur Shastri even asked the nonaligned countries in 1964 Cairo conference to send a mission to China to dissuade it from producing nuclear weapons: only to be rebuffed (Mathur & Kamath, 1996, p.134).

After the death of Shastri in 1966 the mantle of leadership passed on to the new generation, Indira Gandhi, the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru. Under her leadership India, strengthened its army and expedited the work on nuclear technology. India kept away from unwanted cold war politics and started to give importance to bilateral issues with its neighbours. So when Pakistani started to massacre people in Bangladesh in 1970 Indira Gandhi pointed out "How could we ignore a conflict which took place on our very border and overflowed into our own territory?" (Gandhi, 1972, p.70). As a consequence India interfered and liberated Bangladesh in 1971.

This happened with the active use of diplomacy at the international level. While Pakistan was supported and aided by United States, India was successful in forging a friendship treaty with Soviet Russia in 1971. This way India prevented any possible backlash from any superpower. In 1972 Shimla agreement India allowed Henry Kissinger's interference which improved its relations with United States (Mathur & Kamath, 1996, p.136). As a result of this there was revival of economic aid to India which was previously discontinued (Ibid).

### India Goes Nuclear

India's signing of the 1963 Partial Test-Ban treaty did not make any improvement in its security environment. On the other hand India was continuously being pressurized by the international community to sign the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which India has always termed discriminatory. The world went ahead to sign the NPT in 1968 while India refused. India however said that it has the right to conduct nuclear test and use it for peaceful purpose. India also pledged

not to proliferate nuclear weapons.

India found the global nuclear regime as highly discriminatory. Its security remained vulnerable. While China was regularly modernizing its weaponry and army, India was embroiled with its neighbours. India also did not want to have a western nuclear umbrella or join any military bloc as it was against her much cherished principle of Nonalignment. The only way left for India was to build indigenously developed nuclear device which was only to be used to deter any kind of aggression.

Therefore on 18 May 1974 India detonated its first atomic device in the deserts of Rajasthan in the place called Pokhran. The nuclear test catapulted India from a position of weakness to the position of strength. It boosted India's image in the international fora and lifted the people's morale in the domestic level.

The World Community however reacted on unexpected lines. India's plead for non-discriminatory nuclear policy was never taken up. Much to the chagrin of India, in 1975, as a direct reaction to India's nuclear test, leading western exporters agreed on creation of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in order to establish binding export control mechanisms on sensitive technology and fissile material (Frey, 2006, p.166). Creation of NSG sealed India's fate on any kind of international nuclear cooperation as it prohibit nuclear exchanges between countries those which are not under full safeguard of IAEA.

### Shift in Diplomacy

India realized that though it has attained nuclear weapon technology it was still a minor player in the global affairs. India was still a poor country and its economy was not internationally competitive. The military was not strong enough. India could not dictate terms to the world neither influence policy decisions in the United Nations or the policies of any of the super powers.

Nuclear test however gave much needed security assurance that it will not be attacked and its deterrent was credible. With a new found confidence India shifted its focus from international affairs to domestic affairs. The era of 1970's and 1980's became the period of eradication of poverty. The issues of development, hunger, population and health care became prominent. 1970's also saw political upheaval in domestic politics as Indira Gandhi imposed national emergency.

During 1980's India's diplomatic parleys remain restricted to improving its relations with its neighbour. India was not vocal on international issues as it had been during the peak of Nonaligned years. However India continued to oppose the discriminatory nuclear test ban treaties. Even its nuclear policy became Pakistan centric. Frey (2006) says that in a move to counter Pakistan's 1985 diplomatic success, in May 1988 Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi presented India's own, much more ambitious plan for nuclear disarmament to the UN General Assembly, suggesting a global elimination of all nuclear weapons in three steps by 2010 (Frey, 2006, p.170).

One significant event of India's diplomacy in 1980's was the thaw in relations between India and China after Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visit to China in 1988. A severed relation between two Asian giants was not in advantage of any of the country as it created suspicion in the South Asia region.

However, as the 1990 approached, India's economic condition deteriorated due to domestic instable politics and global security scenario due to the looming dangers of Gulf War. As the situation aggravated the balance of payment crisis became very severe. The balance of payment crisis brought India into a brink of default in 1991 for the first time after its independence.

To save India from economic collapse the new government under Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao announced series of measures in 1991 which ushered India into a new era of

liberalization. In this endeavour Narasimha Rao was helped by his finance minister Manmohan Singh, who later became the Prime Minister.

Since 1991 from Narasimha Rao onwards, successive Indian governments however headed by different political parties with different Prime Ministers like Atal Bihari Vajpayee, H D Deve Gowda, Inder Kumar Gujral, Manmohan Singh and the present incumbent Narendra Modi; never deviated from the policy of liberalization.

The successive governments used diplomacy to achieve national interests. The Vajpayee government went ahead to conduct series of nuclear tests in 1998. Later the same government defeated Pakistan in the Kargil War in 1999. The sanctions imposed by United States and other countries were lifted with effective use of diplomacy. The Manmohan Singh government in a significant step initiated Indo-US nuclear deal in 2005. The present Modi government is effectively using diplomacy to achieve national interest of economic development, military security and energy security.

### Conclusion

The present Indian diplomacy shows a complex nature due to its historical past and belief in different shades of ideologies and practices. The moral, idealistic and socialist aspect of Indian diplomacy has not been lost in India's pursuit of neoliberal objectives. In the contemporary times the way India is conducting its diplomacy with the world community, only proves that it is following a mix of traditional historical sensibilities draped in the new found necessities of neoliberal economies.

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