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Factors of Realism and Idealism in Indian Foreign Policy

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ABSTRACT

Actors, Factors and Dynamics are the driving force of International Relations (IR). Ideologies often work as a beacon, shield or a guide for a nation while making of its foreign policy. Idealism and realism have been two most dominant ideologies of IR during 19th and 20th century. Both of them are continuously contesting to hegemonies each other since then. This research paper is an attempt to explain the continuity and explore the changes and examine the future implications of theory of idealism and realism on Indian foreign policy. The post independent Nehruvian Foreign Policy which was predominantly idealist with the pinch of realism in few instances like adopting mixed economic model and leadership of Non- Alignment Movement (NAM). The research work passes through Mrs. Indira Gandhi era, which was absolutely an era of realism in Indian foreign policy. Then Rajiv Gandhi government believed in a balance of both the ideas and maintained a status – quo. During 1990s despite of political turmoil foreign policy was guided with realism which opened Indian economy and doors of globalization. Economic considerations remained predominant factor to determine national interest. After 1998 the government under A. B. Vajpayee also followed realism as the guiding principal of foreign policy, which was continued by UPA government under Dr. Manmohan Singh till 2014. The change of regime in 2014 brought NDA government led by a strong and most popular leader Narendra Modi in power. He has made foreign policy and IR a vibrant policy area. Through his extensive outreach to nations, leaders and people he left inedible footprints of realism in Indian foreign policy. This paper has looked into role of realism and idealism as a guiding principal in Indian foreign policy in its core (SAARC), periphery (Asia) and intruder (America, AU, EU, Latin America etc.) areas. It culminates with a possibility of extensive research in this area in future.

Keywords— Realism, Idealism, Indian Foreign Policy, post-independence, South Asia, China, US

1. INTRODUCTION

‘National interest’ is the permanent factor in International Relations (IR) (Margenthau) and at the core of foreign policy think tank of a nation. The ideological and theoretical aspects of IR have been predominantly led by Western scholars and practitioners. It has ignored and marginalized the think tanks of developing nations. It was an impediment of alternative foreign policy frameworks during the cold - war era. But a sovereign nation state like India has to balance between the social commitments, domestic factors and identity in international community. The domestic strength of a nation makes it capable to effectively promote its interests and propagate its ideas at international level. Therefore, India did not copy paste western capitalist models in conduct of their foreign policy. Therefore, Indian foreign policy has evolved around the core ideals of ‘peaceful co- existence’. *‘India accords high importance to the notion of strategic autonomy in its foreign policy’* (Bhadrakumar, M. K: 2014). Thus, it is evident that foreign policy is one of most important part for any country to display its thinking and policies at the global level. Also how it plans to maintain its relations with other countries. Due to his keen interest in foreign policy, he laid down the foundations of the foreign policy in Independent India. That is why he is regarded as the ‘architect of Indian foreign policy’.

Before, venturing into analysis of the realism and idealism into Indian foreign policy let us understand the theoretical framework of the foreign policy. Siddharth Mallavarapu in his book, *‘theories of International Relations’* have posed it very well. He says, *‘an exponent of Waltzian realism in the Indian context is Rajesh Rajagopalan. His first book, ‘Second Strike’ advances a structural realist explanation of deterrence in South Asia and makes the case for the improbability of nuclear war between India and Pakistan (Rajagopalan: 2005).* The earliest sign of realism is found in Kautilya’s *‘Arthashastra’*. He is considered as the pioneer of realism and pragmatic approach in politics. Even in present context also the methods suggested in *Arthashastra* are very helpful to determine and conduct the foreign policy.

Liberalism believes in peaceful mutual coexistence of nations. They put great emphasis on multilateralism and institutional dispute resolution mechanisms. In this context, right since the beginning India has conducted its foreign policy and IR in a very liberal and idealist way. Its virtuous faith in *Panchsheel*, NAM and UNO were an outcome of Indian idealism. It should also be kept in mind that; Indian model of idealism was not at all a copy of western idealists like Kant and Grotius. Indian idealism was inspired by vedic virtue of, '*sarve bhawantu sukhinah., sarve santu niramaya:.*' (*may all be happy and healthy*), and '*Vasudhaiv kutumbkam:.*' (whole earth is but one family). It believed in peace and prosperity of everyone. Non- invasion has been main virtue. However, if there is an aggression on its territory or dignity, it always gave a bitter fight to its enemy.

1.1 Definitions

'Foreign Policy' as a term has been defined by a number of scholars. George Modelski defines it is, '*the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behavior of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment. Foreign policy throws light on the ways states attempt to change, and succeed in changing the behavior of other states* (Bojang, 2016).'

According to Padelford and Lincoln, '*a state's foreign policy is totality of its dealings with the external environment. Foreign Policy is the overall result of the process by which a state translates its broadly conceived goals and interests into specific courses of action in order to achieve its objectives and preserve its interests* (Held et al., 1999).'

Thus, foreign policy is a system of activities or courses of action that actually helps a state not only to deal with other countries but also to maintain its interest at the global level. A successful foreign policy is one that succeeds in changing the behavior of other states to fulfill its objectives and without force.

1.2 Nature

Practice of foreign policy begins with the formation of sovereign nation-state. The concept of nation- state emerged with the treaty of Westphalia concluded in 1648, which led to end the 30 long year's war between small European states. Later on two world wars in 19th century become stronger. These nation states were sovereign i.e. no other country could now interrupt in its functioning. This made states autonomous. States could now maintain its relations with neighboring countries. This meant that now nations needed to plan and maintain relations with other countries keeping their interest and objectives in mind. This planning came to be called as 'Foreign Policy'. So, now nation states could maintain political, economic, cultural relations with one another.

1.3 Ancient Strings of Indian Foreign Policy

In Indian context, Foreign Policy making was practiced under the rule of *Chandragupta Maurya*. *Chanakya* spoke a great deal of it in his book of Statecraft '*Arthashastra*'. *Megasthenes* the Greek ambassador was residing in the court of *Chandragupta Maurya* so that good relations can be maintained with the Greeks. In George Modelski's research paper in 1964 '*Kautilya : Foreign Policy and International system in the ancient Hindu World*' has analysed the Foreign Policy perspective given by Chanakya. Here he talks about the '*mandala*' theory or also called as Circle of states. According to Modelski, 'it could be described in modern times as model of loose bi-centric international system, the concept of friend and enemy are examined'.

Later during Ashoka's reign his conversion to peace and non-violence is embedded deep into India's independent Foreign Policy. He was the first ruler to have utilised the idea of 'soft power diplomacy' by establishing cultural and religious relations with neighboring states. His son *Mahendra* and *Sanghmitra* went to Cylon (Srilanka) with a branch of '*bodhivruksh*' (under which Buddha had attained knowledge. He also sent several Buddhist monks to East Asian countries. Later on Indian rulers had good business relations with Persia and European countries during medieval era. This soft power diplomacy helped Indian rulers to extend their political influences beyond their boundaries without actual war. Though in the ancient and medieval times Foreign Policy was different for West and East but today it's altogether quite similar and with the advent of globalization the interconnectedness between nations has just widened and deepened. Thus on the one hand the diplomacy and foreign policy of Chanakya (371 BC - 288BC) and Chandragupta Maurya was realist (we should regard Chanakya as the Father of classical realism. It is so because Thucydides - 472 BC - 400 BC, was more concerned with scientific history, than politics and diplomacy) and Ashoka's policies were idealist, loaded with Buddhist idealism.

In order to understand the Foreign Policy of any country it's important to know the approach it takes. Here, to understand Indian Foreign policy especially during Nehruvian era, we will be referring to two major approaches of International Relations Theory (IRT). Thus, it is inevitable to study International Relations in the light of its relevant and prevalent theories. Paul has rightly put it, 'In the absence of theories, disciplines cease to be disciplines' (Paul 2009: 130 -131). Therefore, it is essential to understand the theoretical paradigms of Realism and Idealism in foreign policy. They are regarded as the 'bedrock' of International Relations (IR). Idealism and Realism are two main theories of International Relations. Apart from these, there are a number of other approaches too like Social constructivists, Marxist and Poststructuralist etc. which provides a base to analysis of issues, actors, factors and dynamics of IR.

Stephen Walt said, '*we need theories to make sense of the blizzard of information that bombards us daily* (Walts, 1998).'

For Realist an event would mean something else while for an idealist it would be different to some extent, as no theory is similar. Theories, that emerged to solve the shortcomings of their predecessors with different perspectives and actors.

1.4 Predominant approaches of Foreign Policy:

The approach of a nation's foreign policy largely depends upon the nature of political regime it has i.e. A democratic nation will abide by the international laws and conventions more than, a non-democratic one. Like India, UAS, Japan, Brazil, South Africa,

abides by international laws more than, Saudi Arab, North Korea, Sudan so on and so forth. Each one of them have a different type of political system, therefore their approach towards international community appears different. But the 'national interest' (Morganthau) still remains a common currency. However, it is persuaded through varied theoretical approaches emanating from theories of liberalism, Authoritarianism, Idealism, Marxism, Realism, Nationalism, Expansionism, Constructivism and Feminism etc. The nations use them in making of their foreign policies and practicing diplomacy. Amongst these, realism is the most preferred and acceptable approach in IR. Idealism seems to be under rated currency to protect the national interest. Though, idealism provides a lot of moral footings to the weaker states against the strong states. In this paper we will understand idealism and realism as two main approaches of foreign policy which exist in Indian school of thoughts also.

1.4.1 Idealism: Idealist were the one who belonged to the inter war period i.e. 1919 to 1939. It was the time between after the end of world war - I and prior to start of world world- II. Idealist believed in the positivity of human nature. They were very much optimistic of it. They had a strong belief in world peace and that too by strengthening international institutions. For them more than power politics it was development of means to reduce poverty, eliminate hunger, end war, and most importantly get rid of violence for maintaining strong relations between countries. In simple terms, idealistic were too optimistic of the moral methods as a way to end war. They weren't concerned about competition between nations and the power politics or even security dilemma. They just saw one side of the coin and not the other which represented human quest for gaining more and more power.

Dr. Herz (as cited in Wright Q, 1952) explains, political idealism, as the type of political thinking 'which does not recognize the problems arising from the security and power dilemma' or 'takes notice of them only in a perfunctory way, and concentrates its interest upon rational conditions or rational solutions.' Long and Hobson (1991), gives an interesting definition that, 'Idealism is the label commonly attached to the well-wishing, optimistic rationalists, particularly of the inter-war period, who believed that progress in human relations is attainable through the application of human reason and that underlying human interaction is a basic harmony of interests'. We see the traits of idealism in some famous personalities like Woodrow Wilson (his 14 point programme), Mahatma Gandhi, Richard Cobben, Jawaharlal Nehru, Nelson Mandela etc. They totally rejected the realist perspective but then reason for the start of WW-II was something they couldn't answer. It made them Utopians and their left over space was taken over by the 'Realist'.

1.4.2 Realism: Realism is considered to be one of the strongest pillars of IRT. In simple terms it connotes to making decisions and responses on the by taking actual situation into account. It has multiple facets while in application. The need of realism arrived due to failure of 'idealist' thinkers to explain the political changes and behaviour of nation states after 19th and 20th century. According to Siddharth Mallavarapu, 'these include classical realism, neo-realism or structural realism, defensive and offensive realism and neo- classical realism' (Mallavarapu: 2015, 8). The theory of realism emanates and is inspired by classical realists like Thucydides, Thomas Hobbes, Niccolo Machiavelli who laid down the foundations of this stream of thoughts. Besides that, modern realists like William Wohlforth, E. H. Carr and Reinhold Niebuhr explored the real politics during first half of 20th century and after world war- II scholars Hans Morgenthau, George Kennen and Raymond Aron interpreted the world politics from American point of view, which focused more upon promoting open market economy.

But after the end of cold war (1991) and disintegration of USSR, scholars like John Mearshiemer, Stephen Walt, Charles Glaser, Randall Schweller, Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama have attempted to explain the 21st century world politics from neo - realist and post - structural point of view. Thus '**realpolitik**' is more concern with 'power politics' and 'economic gain'. They wish to achieve it through 'diplomacy, geo- strategic advantages, alliances and counter alliances and sometimes war as an extreme option.

The theory of 'realism' become more strong after failure of 'idealism' to find logically explanations of, 'why the two world wars happened?. Idealist also failed to explain, when everyone believed there would be peace, 'why a competition between two superpowers USA and USSR started?'. Whereas, the realist were able to give a valid explanation of wars, obstacles to international peace and that wars happen because of the power struggle among self-interested states. It's evolution could be bifurcated into '**Classical Realism**' and '**Neo Realism**'. Both have slight differences but large agreement on the principle, that the state is the main actor and it is supreme. For classical realist like **Hans Morgenthau**, it is the selfish and self-interested human nature that craves for power and leads to chaos globally. This in turn is the reason for inevitability of war. '*Morgenthau was never tired of repeating his main proposition that 'international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power', and that 'whatever the ultimate aims of the international politics, power is always the immediate aim*' (Baylis et al., 2017).

One the other hand, Neo Realist like **Stephen Waltz** blame not human nature but the structure of international system. Though at the domestic level there are arrangements to manage chaos but at the international level there is anarchy. According to Waltz, '*power is a means to an end and that end is security*' (Baylis et al., 2017). He tries to explain that, it is the security of state that matters and not gaining more and more power. Thus it is always busy in exploring the paths of maximisation of the security of state. There is also another strand of neo -realists who believe in **offensive** and **defensive** methods of foreign policy. From the above explanation we understand that **national interest**, **national security** and **national power** are keywords that explains the phenomenon called realism in making of foreign policy.

2. SHAPING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY AFTER INDEPENDENCE

India got Independence in 1947 from 200-year-old British rule. Our freedom struggle had an imprint of Gandhian principles of 'non-violent *satyagraha* (*persistence fro truth which derives from Buddhist and ancient Indian moral value system*) and Indian National Congress which came into existence in 1885 played a major role in it. Gandhiji always preached the concept of '**purity**

of means' over ends. As Nojeim, (2005) explained it, 'use power not to defeat opponents but to win their hearts and minds through a loving, albeit forceful, process of nonviolent conversion based on purity of means'. It led to infusion of idealism into Indian foreign policy in post-independence.

The foundations of the Indian foreign policy evolved with ideals of non-violence and world peace. Pt. Nehru did that in the best way he could by preaching peace and non-violence keeping in mind the role of international organizations too. But the most interesting part is that Jawaharlal Nehru never let his idealism go until Sino- Indian war 1962. Though, national interest was always in his mind. But he always gave benefit of doubt to adversaries risking the national interest. Nehru in a speech in the legislative assembly famously said, 'Whatever policy we may lay down, the art of conducting the foreign affairs of a country lies in finding out what is most advantageous to the country' (*Government of India speeches, 1947-64 : 28*). Even Gandhiji had seen Nehru's strong interest in international politics as, Gandhiji, 'had made us accustomed to looking at everything in the international light instead of the parochial' (Tendulkar, 1954).

2.1 Era of 1947 – 1966 idealism overloaded

As far as Indian foreign policy is concerned it is a balanced blend of 'idealism and realism' with periodic tilting weight to either side due to role of political leadership. The balance was tilted towards idealism during Nehru era. Adoption of 'panchsheel', declining a permanent seat in UN Security Council and passing it to China, raising voice for ban of nuclear weapons (NPT), Non - Alignment Movement (NAM), engaging UNO and international community in Kashmir dispute were some of the examples of his pro idealist foreign policy. Though, Pt. Nehru was a great thinker on foreign policy during his time, but his love of peace, humanism and universal Indian values always inclined him to idealism. However, this line of thought is challenged by C. Raja Mohan. For him 'this is especially true of the study of India's international relations, where Nehru's foreign policy is near unanimously characterized as "idealist". This simplistic assessment is based on utterly inadequate empirical work on Nehru's engagement with the world (Mohan, 2013).' Further, he adds that, 'Nehru also had a strong realist tendency in his worldview that was reflected most acutely in his approach to security cooperation with the neighbors' (Mohan, 2014). VP Dutt in 'India's Foreign Policy since independence' has disregarded any idealist or moralist contribution of Nehru in the Foreign Policy.

But, most important view about Nehru's policy came from Kennedy, A. (not JFK) in 'Nehru's Foreign Policy: Idealism and Realism conjoined', he 'maintains that realism and idealism are not wholly incompatible and that Nehru's foreign policy was an attempt to reconcile the two' (Kennedy, 2015: 7, 23). Kennedy calls his policy idealist due to Nehru's strong belief to transform the international order and even institutions on morality and ethics. But in doing so also make sure that Indian interests are secured. Thus, his idealism gets a realist edge.

The students of foreign policy should keep one thing in mind, that during Nehruvian era foreign ministry was with Pt. Nehru throughout. The bureaucrats had limited intervention in the matters and policies because of towering personality and keen interest of Pt. Nehru in this area. However, the role of bureaucrats kept on increasing after from Indira Gandhi regime onwards. Prominent civil servants like K.M. Pannikar, KPS Menon Sr., KR Narayanan, K. Suramaniam, G. Parthasarathy, JN Dixit and Brajesh Mishra, among others were known for their bold outlook and sharp understanding of world affairs. They were able to influence the political leadership to a great extent. The lack of exposure to international relations and world politics has been main cause of handing over foreign policy matters to the full time professional bureaucracy. It is seen till today, that bureaucracy works as an arch stone of the nation in international affairs.

2.2 Era of 1967 – 1990, shifts from idealism to realism:

After Pt. Nehru the balance got tilted towards realism after 1970. Indira Gandhi's foreign policy was inspired by the idea of might, aggressive response, alliances and counter alliances. Her, stand against American arrogance, friendship with USSR, open support to freedom movement of Bangladesh, steps to make country self-reliant in food (green revolution and operation flood), Nationalization of banks were some of the most realist measures. She would always surprise the world with her swift change of mind. The Nuclear test in Pokharan on 18th May, 1974 was one such bold realist instance. The code of this test was 'smiling Buddha' which enthralled many. India signed an agreement of 20 years friendship with USSR. Many criticized India for drifting away from NAM. However, India did not align with Soviet as a cold war partner. Thus she was able to practice this real politik according to the need of time.

Thereafter, the influence of idealism kept on declining against the rising impact of realism on Indian foreign policy think tank. The brief stint of Rajiv Gandhi government was also very realist towards the changing world scenario. Without annoying any major powers like USSR and USA he tried to promote peace and prosperity in South Asia. Though his efforts to buy peace for Sri Lanka failed which later on resulted into his own assassination by LTTE led by Prabhakaran.

2.3 Era of 1991- 2014, reformative realism:

After him Prime Minister PV Narsimha Rao and his finance minister Dr. Manmohan Singh (later become PM himself) also persuaded a very realistic version of foreign policy. It was a great leap forward from 'mixed economy model' to 'liberal market economy'. It opened Indian doors to the world in a reciprocal manner. India nurtured its dreams of becoming nuclear power. Therefore, it never signed the treaty that banned the horizontal expansion of nuclear technology. It was known as Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Later on National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee fulfilled India's much awaited aspiration of testing its nuclear bomb under mission 'operation shakti'. He was another visionary leader with humanist approach (inspired by philosophy of 'integral humanism' of Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyay) extended hands of friendship with Pakistan. India tested its

nuclear bomb in 1998 and declared itself to be the sixth nuclear power in the world. Though, there had been lot of pressure and sanctions against India but it did not relent to any. It made its stand very clear that, 'India is committed to no first use' policy and its nuclear programme aims at maintaining equilibrium in South and South-East Asian region. After a few days Pakistan had also tested its nuclear bomb citing India being the reason for the same. PM Vajpayee had undertaken Lahore bus journey, but when Pakistan back-stabbed in Kargil he fought it so well to see Pakistan defeated. Moreover, despite of adverse economic, political and strategic pressure; the foreign policy of India was quite realist, vocal and independent.

Dr. Manmohan Singh led UPA government ruled for a decade (2004 - 2014). During this period India came closer to USA by signing important deals like Civil Nuclear supply, Next Steps to Strategic Partnership (NSSP) and so on. It also took keen interest in engaging the European Union (EU) nations by promoting trade and commerce and cooperation in science and technology. 'Look East Policy' had been the most successful policy of India. It brought ASEAN nations closer to India for trade and economic cooperation. It developed a great deal pressure on China in the Arabian Sea. However, the economic reforms and vast consumer base has made India attractive place for US companies and Chinese products for sale. India kept on opening its borders for trade and commerce with neighboring countries like Nathu-la pass was open almost after 44 years. India signed SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Agreement) on January 6, 2004 in the 12th SAARC summit. China and USA started to prefer India over Pakistan. But the Chinese initiative of 'one belt one road' (OBOR) has once again become a ground of contentions between China and India. Both the countries are horn locked in Ladakh and Doklam. Chinese army has been continuously infiltrating the line of actual control (LAC). All of the above indicates a complete shift towards realism in Indian thoughts.

2.4 Modi Era: from bureaucracy to bold leader:

National Security, Engagement and Investment (Ranjan Kumar: 2014) has been the pivot of the foreign policy led by PM Narendra Modi. He has led a definite world view and attracted global attention towards India. It has been playing its cards so well, due to which, India is the only authentic political voice of south Asia. It is only country that can maintain the 'balance of power in Asia' against aggressive China. After coming to power within 6 months' time he had whirlwind tours and meetings with the leaders and heads of the nations that matters the most to Indian interest. Beginning with the invitation to the heads of all the south Asian countries (SAARC) during his first oath taking ceremony in May 2014. After that, he explored the possibilities of promoting cooperation and trade with Japan, China, Australia and smaller East Asian nations.

He focused on BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) to promote the interest of the developing economies at global forums. Visits and summits with the leaders of the small nations like Vietnam, Laos, Fiji, Bhutan, Nepal has been an indication that India gives importance to every nation, irrespective of their size or power. The realism of Modi era has expanded Indian potentials and credibility at global platforms like UNO. Recently it got elected as a non-permanent member of the security council with 184 votes (out of 193). PM Modi has also been able to successfully befriend the countries like Saudi Arabia and UAE. Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) prefer India as a invitee over the objections of Pakistan which is a member of the organization. India has successfully isolated Pakistan on global platforms over the issues of Terrorism. The basic framework of foreign policy persuaded by Modi government can be structured into 'Core' 'Periphery and 'Intruders' model. The concept of core-periphery was developed by United Nations Economic commission for Latin America (UNECLA) to look into 'dependency theory. Rajeshwari P. Rajagopalan appreciates in the diplomat (4th Jan. 2020), 'Modi was able to undertake significant strategic outreach to the United States, Japan and Australia. The revival of QUAD is a great indicator of the pragmatism in India's diplomacy today'. Recently India has got support from major global powers like US, Russia, France, Germany, Australia and Japan over Indo-China border conflict in Laddakh region. India was successful in mounting the diplomatic, military and economic pressure over China to retrieve its military base from LAC points. It became possible by following the realist traits of foreign policy.

3. CONCLUSION

Thus Indian foreign policy after independence started with Idealism and landed in pure realism. The Nehruvian era was idealist with a little space for realism. It was influenced by Gandhian and Socialist world view. But Indira Gandhi era turned into a completely realist approach with slight inclination towards Idealism. However, after the end of cold-war and liberalization of Indian economy, the foreign policy approach of Indian government has shifted to realist world view and promotion of national interest even at the cost of others. Today India reaps its benefits in terms of its growing influence in International Relations and with major world powers. During the era of PM Narendra Modi India is trying to respond to the emerging situation by keeping national interest into mind. His strong leadership and government with strong majority enables India to become a superpower walking the path of realism in foreign policy and conduct of diplomacy. The idea of engaging Indian soft power diplomacy, i.e. cultural and social diversities, demographic dividends can be the game changer in making India a global power.

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