

Threads of Indian Foreign Policy Down The Ages

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www.ijrah.com || Vol. 3 No. 3 (2023): May Issue

Date of Submission: 04-04-2023

Date of Acceptance: 25-04-2023

Date of Publication: 05-05-2023

ABSTRACT

India has witnessed transformation and transition in foreign policy and diplomacy from Ancient Vedic Period till today. But the conceptualization of *Bharatvarsha* and later *India* has impacted formulation of foreign policy and diplomacy during the course of civilization of India. There was change in approach from war oriented policy to peace and trade oriented policy. This paper attempts to bring the journey of transition, transformation, innovation and ideation of foreign policy and diplomacy based on changing socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic dynamics of Indian civilizational discourse.

Keywords- Bharatvarsha, Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Vishnu Purana (2.3.1) defines India as the land lying north of the sea and south of the Himalayas - uttarain yat samudrasya Himadrescaiva daksinarh, varsam tad Bharatam. The origin of foreign relations in human affairs and the need for foreign policy to deal with them is as old as the organization of human life in groups. Still, foreign policy can seem somewhat esoteric to the uninitiated. Simply put, it is the policy of a country, conceived, designed and formulated to protect and advance its national interests in its external environment, in conducting relations with other countries, bilaterally and multilaterally. It is a direct reflection of the country's traditional values and overall national politics, its aspirations and self-concept.

II. FOREIGN POLICY IN ANCIENT INDIA

From the ancient Vedic period, evidence of Indian foreign policy can be traced back to around (1500-500?)BCE. Ancient Indian writings are replete with numerous examples of foreign policy. For example, in the Ramayana (between mid-7th century BCE and mid-6th century BCE??/ between 9582-5694 BCE??/),

Lord Rama sent Hanuman and Angada as his emissaries to King Ravana to persuade him to avoid war and destruction. Although king Ravana scornfully rejected these pleas and wanted to kill the envoy, he was prevented from doing so because envoys were untouchable according to established diplomatic practice.

In the Mahabharata (10th Century BCE?? / 9th and 8th centuries BCE ??/ between 5694-3102 BCE ?? / 1200-800 BCE??), Lord Krishna himself played the role of a mediator of last resort to avoid enmity between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The Mahabharata War was preceded by feverish diplomacy as both sides sent their envoys to form military alliances. The war itself was a Dharmayuddha (or war of righteousness) with well-established rules with chivalry and diplomatic contact between the two warring parties with a clear policy. The concepts of immunity and amnesty were well established and respected.

Manu-Smriti, is considered to be the first Indian code, which Maha-Rishi Manu observed around 1500 BC. Commenting on the various roles of the authorities in the state, Manu declared: "Let the King appoint ambassadors; an army depends on its commander; control of subjects (depends on the military); the rule of the kingdom upon the king; peace and war on ambassadors". An interesting and recurring concept in

Indian history was the Chakravarti Samrat (Universal Emperor) ruling from 304–232 BCE/ 268-232 BCE/ 270-232 BCE, under whose sovereignty or zone of protection, after wars, if necessary, the surrounding kings would acknowledge. It is quite similar to the modern Super-Power concept, with their pacts, doctrines and spheres of influence.

The Chola Empire (300 BC – 1279 AD) had a dynamic and innovative foreign policy. The Chola period was a time of amalgamation of naval power with diplomacy and trade. At the height of their power game, they dominated Sri Lanka, Maldives, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia along with surrounding areas. They used their Indian naval base to dominate South Asia as an area that was unheard of at that time.

Diplomatically, it was another fascinating story. The sphere of influence of the Cholas extended far beyond their military borders in South Asia. Their naval commanders also backed off as diplomats when needed. The Cholas had exceptionally friendly relations with their neighbours, including the Mauryan Empire. They collaborated with the Kingdom of Mysore to conquer Sri Lanka. They developed excellent diplomatic relations with China and Burma. The Chola King Rajendra Chola I sent three ambassadors to China, which the Chinese reciprocated by sending their own ambassadors, as told by Ban Gu in his *The Book of Han*. The relationship between the Cholas and the Chinese is supported by the discovery of Chinese coins in the centers of the Chola dynasty.

The Cholas excelled in foreign trade and maritime activities, extending their influence overseas to China and Southeast Asia. Towards the end of the 9th century, South India developed extensive maritime and trading activities. Encouragement by the Chola court encouraged the expansion of Tamil trade associations such as the Ayyavole and Manigramam guilds into Southeast Asia and China.

China's Tang Dynasty, the Srivijaya Empire (7th-13th Century CE) under the Sailendras, and the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad were major trading partners. The dynasty must also have some credit for the creation of the world market. It played a significant role in connecting China's markets with the rest of the world. The market structure and economic policies of the Chola dynasty facilitated large-scale cross-regional trade than those enacted by China's Song dynasty. A record of the Chola states their rationale for engaging in foreign trade: "Attract the merchants from distant foreign lands who import elephants and good horses to you by giving them villages and decent dwellings in the city, giving them daily audience, gifts and allowing them . their profits. Then these articles will never reach your enemies."

Records of the Song dynasty record that an embassy from Chulian (Chola) reached the Chinese court in 1077 and that the Chulian king at the time, Kulothunga I, was named Ti-hua-kia-lo. This embassy was a commercial enterprise and was highly profitable

for visitors who returned with copper coins in exchange for items of tribute, including glass and spices. The motive behind Rajendra's expedition to Srivijaya was probably to protect the interests of the merchants.

During the Chandragupta Maurya era, Megasthenes was the Greek ambassador to India and wrote his description of the country in his book *Indica*. During the reign of the Indian King Bindusara (297-273 BCE), Delmachos was sent as an ambassador by the Syrian king Antiochus and Dinyosius as an ambassador by the Egyptian king Ptolemy (298 BC - 273 BC). During the Buddhist period and later, many rulers entrusted delicate and strategic missions to diplomatic representatives for the security of the state and for the maintenance of friendly relations. Emperor Ashoka (273 BC - 232 BC) established diplomatic and evangelical relations with the kings of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Cyrene and other countries. During the 7th century AD, diplomatic relations existed between the Indian king Pulkesin II. and the Persian Shah Khosru Parvez. There is evidence of diplomatic relations between the Indian King Harasha Vardhana and the Chinese imperial court.

Chanakya's *Arthshashtra*, the world's first comprehensive treatise on diplomatic practice, occupies a central place in any narrative of Indian diplomacy. Chanakya - also known as Kautilya - was the prime minister and mentor of Emperor Chandragupta, the founder of the Maurya dynasty that ruled Patliputra in the fourth century BCE. With Chanakya as his mentor, Chandragupta successfully overthrew the Nanda dynasty and banished the Greek footprint in northwest India. Although Chanakya's *Arthshashtra* or 'The Science of Material Gain', written around 300 BCE deals mainly with statecraft, nearly a fifth of it is devoted to the conduct of foreign policy and diplomacy. Surprisingly, much of his discourse is still relevant today, almost twenty-four centuries later.

Foreign relations flourished under Samudragupta, as is evident from the Allahabad inscription. It has been mentioned that some independent foreign countries actually entered into a relationship with Samudragupta. Foreign relations under Samudragupta were maintained with the Later Kusanas, Sakas and with Ceylon. This foreign relationship included *atmanivedanam* - their own persons for the service of the emperor, *kanyopdyanaddna* (gifts of maidens) and *Garutmad-anka-sva-visaya-bhukti-Msana-ydcana* - requests for charters bearing the seal of Garuda for the use of their own territories. Account includes alliance agreements and services. According to Chinese author Wang Hiuen-tse, King Sri Meghavarna of Ceylon sent two Buddhist monks to Bodh-Gaya, but the pilgrims had to face great inconvenience as there was no suitable accommodation. To remove this problem, the King of Ceylon sent an embassy to Samudragupta with gifts and asked him for permission to build a monastery for Ceylon pilgrims at Bodh Gaya. Permission was also granted immediately.

Account includes alliance contracts and services. Sandhivigraha, a high official mentioned in the Gupta inscriptions, indicates that the official was the minister of foreign affairs during the Gupta Empire.

At the time of the sovereignty of the Eugene tribe and the Kushana Empire (30-375 CE), the Hou Han-shu gives information only about the rulers of the Kadphises and refers to the failure of the Kushan army sent against the Chinese general Pan Ch'ao. The Chinese general's successful policy in Central Asia coincided with the Kushan conquest of northern India and led to a clash of interests with the political aspirations of Vima Kadphises (113-127 CE). According to Hou Han-shu, Kujula is said to have attacked An-hsi (Parthia) and occupied the territory of Kao-fu (Kabul). It is difficult to explain the presence of a Kushan prince at the Indo-Parthian court at Taxila, but it is clear that eventually Kujula Kadphises won back the provinces of Kapiśa and Kabul from the Indo-Parthians and then conquered the Indus provinces. Indo-Parthians, including Taxila, from the successors of Gondophares. Vima Kadphises seems to have taken advantage of the weakness of the Indo-Parthians and seized the whole of the Indus valley up to Sind.

At the height of their power under the Kanishkas, the Kushans did not seem interested in territorial gains at the expense of their neighbors the Parthians. Buddhist tradition refers to a war of Kanishka against the Parthians, and according to Ghirshman it may have occurred during the reign of Vologas III, probably caused by a Parthian attempt to recover some Iranian provinces captured by the Kushans from the Indo-Parthians. According to Dio Cassius, many embassies came to Augustus, and the Indians, who had previously declared a treaty of alliance, concluded it by presenting gifts, including tigers, animals that the Romans had seen for the first time.

Florus, written in the time of Trajan (98–117 AD), mentions the arrival of several embassies, mainly Indians, to Rome. The political connections seen in the dispatch of embassies seem to be linked to business contacts and business transactions related to the silk trade. Some of the copper coins of Kujula Kadphises (30-80 CE) have an obverse head exactly copied from the portraits on the Julio-Claudian silver denarii of Augustus and Tiberius, and depict the Kushan emperor seated on a curule chair, which appears on the reverse of the Roman coins of Claudius and May well represent a gift from the Roman emperor.

Roman aurei and denarii were widely used in Roman maritime trade with India, which traded in silks and spices. Pliny (Přirodopis XII.10.41) refers to a serious outflow of Roman coins exported to India. The gold coins introduced by the Vima Kadphises used the gold dinar, which copied the weight standard of the Roman gold aureus, and the impact of Greco-Roman art in Gandhara sheds light on the cultural and commercial relations between the Kushan Empire and the Roman world.

III. FOREIGN POLICY IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

During the medieval period of Indian history, diplomatic relations were maintained between states in the Indian subcontinent, as well as with states beyond. Afghan and Turkish rulers based in Delhi and elsewhere maintained diplomatic relations with the states of Central Asia, Persia, the Arab world, Asia Minor, Greece, the Levant, and even with states in Tibet and China. The kingdoms of southern India on the west coast maintained diplomatic relations with the states along the Arabian Sea coast and the Indian Ocean coast in Africa. Those on the east coast and south maintained relations with Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia; some of these countries were conquered and colonized by the kings of South India. During the Middle Ages, the overseas empires of the Chola and other South Indian dynasties had an economic foothold in Southeast Asia.

Relations with the Caliphate played an important role in the foreign relations of the Delhi Sultans. The rise of the Mongols under Chengiz Khan in Central Asia was an important development, and the foreign policy of the early Turkish sultans was guided by these developments in Central Asia. Sultan Iltutmish of Delhi became alarmed when the Mongols entered Hindustan for the fugitive Khwarazm prince Jalaluddin Manqbari. Iltutmish seemed to be guarding his foreign policy, mindful of the Mongol danger looming on India's horizon. He was a far-sighted ruler who acted with great diplomacy and thus averted the Mongol danger during his lifetime. Minhaj-us-Siraj in his *Tabaqat-i-Nasri* says that it was Sultan Iltutmish who held the banner of Islam high when all other Muslim powers were exterminated by the Mongols.

After Iltutmish's death, however, this position could not continue, and Mongol invasions became a formidable problem throughout the early Turkish period. The regular and unpleasant incursions of the Mongols into the Sultanate of Delhi destroyed the peace and prosperity of the country and greatly disturbed its inhabitants. With the accession of Balban to the throne of the Sultanate of Delhi, we find a policy of resistance developing against the Mongols. Balban openly admits that if it were not for the Mongols, he would have pursued an expansionist policy. During Balban's time, trade and commerce continued to develop with Arab countries.

With the arrival of the Khaljis, the politics of resistance is further strengthened. Sultan Allauddin Khalji's relations with the powers of Central Asia and Persia took on completely different dimensions. The greatest pressure on the independent Sultanate of Delhi came during the early years of Allauddin Khalji's reign (1296-1316 AD). His reign particularly witnessed Mongol invasions from the Chaghtai Khanate in Central Asia, during which the enemy twice reached the outskirts of Delhi, but after 1307 AD the Mongol threat

suddenly receded and only once subsequently, they seem to have reached the same proportions during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq. The rise of the Tughluqs marks a departure from Khalji politics in certain respects and an elaboration of it in others.

Muhammad Bin Tughluq (1324-1351 CE) adopted a foreign policy that had far-reaching consequences. The cornerstone of his policy was the establishment of friendly relations with neighboring countries, especially with the Mongol powers of Central Asia and Persia. He believed in the use of military force in case the objective could not be achieved by peaceful means. His knowledge of political developments beyond India's borders is reflected in his Darachil and Khurasan expeditions and his token currency scheme.

During the reign of Firuz Shah Tughluq, a reaction began against the policies of Muhammad Bin Tughluq. As a result, he renounced the policies of his predecessor and did not want to maintain diplomatic relations with foreign powers. To summarize the foreign relations of the Delhi Sultans, it would not be an exaggeration to say that except for Muhammad Bin Tughluq, all the other Sultans followed a very cautious policy towards their neighboring powers, i.e. the Mongols of Central Asia and the Ilkhans of Persia. Their relationship with these powers determined their theory of kingship, restrained their expansionist policies, shaped their economic policies and had far-reaching consequences for the administrative structure of the Delhi Sultanate.

The basic foreign policy of the Mughals was based on the defense of India, which was further strengthened by diplomatic means. Despite the fact that there were (temporary) setbacks on the Kandhar issue; friendship with Persia was the main idea of the Mughals. Mughal foreign policy was influenced by their interactions with the three great powers of the time: the Uzbek Empire of Central Asia, the Safavid Empire of Persia (Iran), and the Ottoman Empire of Turkey. The Mughals originated in Central Asia. They were driven out by Uzbeks who considered themselves Sunni Muslims. The Shia Muslims, the Safavid rulers of Persia, considered themselves the supreme and true successors of the Prophet Muhammad. The Muslim rulers of Turkey claimed to be the true representatives of the Caliph of Baghdad. They identified themselves as Sunni Muslims.

But the foreign policy of Akbar was dynamic. When the Uzbek chief Shaibani Khan was defeated by the Safavids in 1510, Babur was able to control Samarqand for a short time. However, the Uzbeks quickly retaliated by defeating the Safavids, and Babur lost control. During this time he received help from the Safavids, creating a tradition of mutual friendship between the two empires. When Sher Shah Suri expelled Humayun from India, he was given refuge by Shah Tahmasp of Persia. In 1572 Abdullah Khan Uzbek captured Balkh and sent an embassy to Akbar's court seeking a Sunni-Sunni alliance against Persia. However,

Akbar reprimanded him and told him that sectarianism was not a justifiable reason for conquest. Meanwhile, despite the fact that the Uzbeks had conquered Balkh, which had been controlled by the Timurids until 1585, he had no desire to engage in conflict with them as it threatened Mughal positions in Kabul and Kandhar.

If we summarize the Islamic foreign policy, more or less the foreign policy of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire were the same because they had only one motto. It was a religious expansion with an institutionalized process of mass execution and genocide of Hindus and other minority communities like Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, tribals in Bharatvarsha.

Interestingly, the Vijayanagara Empire also had a foreign policy with special emphasis on foreign trade. Foreign trade in the Kingdom of Vijayanagar saw great progress in terms of lands and trade items. A number of foreign visitors including Arabs, Chinese and Europeans described the activities of South Indian merchants and their trade with foreign countries. Historical evidence in the form of inscriptions provides direct evidence of foreign trade carried on by foreign traders in the Tamil country. Among the most instructive of these inscriptions are those of Tirukkalukunram and Sadiravasaganpattinam (Sadras), both in Chingleput district, which belong to the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

Foreign trade flourished from the Chola period onwards between South India and the countries of the East and West. This was in line with the socio-economic changes taking place in contemporary South India. During the heyday of Chola rule during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the trade guilds of Manigramam and Ayyavole were very active. However, some change seems to have taken place in the second half of the 12th century; the merchants merged with a group of landowners who were becoming powerful private landowners and were organized as Chitrameli-Periyannadu. This new tendency intensified in Tamil Nadu during the thirteenth century when the Periyannattars and Nattavars became very prominent as Chola rule disintegrated and political anarchy ensued. However, the thirteenth century witnessed the growth in importance of artisans who were later organized into the Valangai and Idangai Groups. Designs and industries such as weaving and oil pressing were now developed.

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries marked a significant period of transition during which the socio-economics of South India underwent important changes. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, there were many conflicts in Tamil Nadu society between two classes - the invading Vijayanagara administrators and large landowners on the one hand, and the artisans and cultivators on the other. However, with the introduction of Nayaka rule in the second half of the fifteenth century, this kind of social conflict was no longer mentioned in the inscriptions. European traders started their activities from the 16th century when the Nayaka

rule was established in the Tamil country, introducing a new factor in the South Indian economy. Inscriptions recorded a brisk trade in fabrics and aromatic goods during this period. Horses continued to be imported. Thus, during the Nayaka reign, the social formation created in the earlier centuries seems to have become dominant.

Among the major consumers of foreign goods were the many great temples of the south in these districts. Apart from the temples, royal palace and Nayak households, foreign goods were also traded in many important places. As the Tirukkalkunram inscriptions indicate, many markets must have been established in these temple towns to serve the pilgrim trade. The rise of such markets must have stimulated the growth of foreign trade and vice versa. It was seen that the foreign traders contributed towards the repair and maintenance of the temples in the place where they resided. Their contribution was decided by the Uruvars (representative residents of the city) and the corporate trading bodies called Paradesigal (merchants coming from outside) and Nanadesigal (merchants of many directions). Usually, the amount due was a set amount of money that could be obtained by selling commodities such as pearls, cloth, oil, and goods from various countries that were taxable by the government.

The fall of the Vijayanagara Empire and the political interference of the European powers during the seventeenth century, together with the tremendous expansion of foreign trade, seem to have again brought about a change in South Indian society, leading to the destruction or alteration of the formation established in the sixteenth century.

During the Maratha Empire, Nana Phadnavis, who was the Foreign Minister of the Maratha Confederacy, played a key role in keeping the Maratha Confederacy together amid internal dissension and the growing power of the British East India Company. Nan's administrative, diplomatic and financial skills brought prosperity to the Maratha Empire and his management of external affairs kept the Maratha Empire free from the onslaught of the British East India Company. He demonstrated his best warrior skills in various battles won by the Maratha forces against the Nizam of Hyderabad, Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan of Mysore and the English army. He was called "Maratha Machiavelli" by Europeans and "Maratha Chanakya" by Indians.

IV. FOREIGN POLICY IN MODERN INDIA

On 13 September 1783, the East India Company's board of directors at Fort William passed a resolution to create a department to help "relieve the pressure" on the Warren Hastings administration in the conduct of its "secret and political affairs". These were difficult times for the East India Company, which barely saved face against the Maratha Empire in the First

Anglo-Maratha War, losing to Hyder Ali in the south. The British Parliament was about to pass the Pitts Act of 1784, which would further limit the independent powers of the East India Company. This department expanded its reach into diplomacy to eventually become the IFS.

In 1843 the British were powerful. Only Punjab remained to be conquered. By then, however, the East India Company had become a shadow of its past through a series of Charter Acts. The British felt it necessary to restructure the foreign department for better management, so Governor General Ellenborough made administrative reforms and created four departments: Foreign, Home, Finance and Military. In September 1946, India came close to independence. Therefore, a different name and a different structure were needed for the newly created country. The Indian Foreign Service was created for India's diplomatic, consular and commercial missions overseas.

After independence in 1947 and the declaration of a republic in 1950, Indian diplomacy resumed the function of a sovereign state. Structures such as the Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian Foreign Service were established and a large number of diplomatic missions abroad were established. Independently, India's foreign policy took shape along with its diplomatic content and style. India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) was established in 1948. From its inception until its demise in 1964, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru held the portfolio of India's Minister of External Affairs (EAM) and directed the country's foreign policy during its formative period. It was not until 1964 that an independent minister with cabinet rank was appointed. The Indian Foreign Service or IFS is a civil service cadre staffed by the Ministry of External Affairs - both in India and abroad. The first batch of IFS was recruited in 1948 and since then candidates are recruited every year through the Combined Civil Services Examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission in New Delhi. Still, the Indian Foreign Service is a well-sought career for those looking for an adventurous and non-fiction professional life.

India witnessed the Nehruvian Himalayan blunder of handing out the bid of the United States of America and the Soviet Union for permanent membership in the UN Security Council. He continued to support the People's Republic of China for permanent membership in the UN Security Council. This was one of the landslides in Indian foreign policy.

Article 51 and Article 253 of the Constitution of India emphasized laying the foundations of modern Indian foreign policy. Promoting international peace and security and legislation to implement international agreements has helped India in the long run, enabling radical and revolutionary changes in foreign policy with a transposition of power dynamics. The Extradition Act of 1962, the Atomic Energy Act of 1962, the Border Security Act of 1968, the Information Technology Act of 2000, the National Security Act of 1980, and the

Chemical Weapons Convention Act of 2000 made it possible to strengthen our foreign policy both militarily and politically. The Gujral Doctrine opened the perception of "Neighbourhood First" politics for the first time in India. The present Indian government is successfully proposing a dynamic foreign policy where devotion, humanity, neutrality, universalism, nationalism and patriotism find their place. The 'Go West' and 'Go East' policies enabled India to rise to its greatest heights.

V. CONCLUSION

There has been constant ideation, innovation and cooperation down the ages of Indian foreign policy. Innumerable MOUs (Memorandum of Understanding) and Treaties with various nations and institutions capitalized "India First" policy in the Indian foreign policy. Massive increase in forex reserves have also enabling India to emerge as a superpower. Thus, from the very beginning India has taken the path of inclusiveness, openness and centrality approach in dealing with world affairs.

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