

# **B.R.Ambedkar's Perspective Of Indian Foreign Policy: A Critique Of Nehruvian Model**

**Gowtham Devarapalli<sup>1</sup>, Dr. V Sreemannarayana Murthy<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Senior Research Fellow, Department of Political Science & Public Administration, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam.*

<sup>2</sup>*Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam.*

## **Abstract**

Foreign policy consists of self-interest strategies chosen by the state to safeguard its national interest. It is a plan of action employed by one nation with regard to its diplomatic dealings with other state and non-state actors. After independence, India under its first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru followed the self-aggrandizement model of foreign policy. He had introduced all his idealism into Indian foreign policy, assuming that India would be benefitted by playing an active role in international affairs. While most leaders both within and outside Congress party obliged and admired Nehru on foreign policy question, very few critiqued it to offer an alternative model. B R Ambedkar, a member of opposition accused Nehruvian foreign policy as formulated to resolve the issues of other countries rather than focusing on India's critical international issues. His vision on foreign policy stands diametrically opposite to that of Nehru's policy on the question of Second World War, UNO, non-Alignment, Third World activism, Communism, Western liberalism, the Eastern Bloc and the Western Bloc. It is the need of the hour to bring into light Ambedkar's perspective on Indian foreign policy in comparison with Nehru's model and to enquire the rationale of it; What would have been India's position, if it had followed Ambedkar's thought on Indian foreign policy? This paper critically examines the Indian foreign policy under Nehru and presents an alternative model of Indian foreign policy from the perspective of Ambedkar.

**Keywords:** Ambedkar, Nehru, Foreign policy, self-aggrandizement model, rational actor model, British, United States, Soviet Union, China, Panchsheel.

## **Introduction:**

The one hundred and ninety years of the British rule in India came to an end by 1947, with the successful transfer of power from the British bureaucratic elite to the Western educated upper caste urban elite of India. These activist political elites under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru dominated the political discourse of independent India. Every policy for new India, economic, industrial, agricultural, domestic and foreign was designed by them. Nehru was born into a wealthy Caste Hindu family in Allahabad. After his formal education in England, he started playing a

vital role in the Indian National Congress, with the help of his mentor M K Gandhi. After independence, he succeeded in becoming the first premier of India. Though his first cabinet of the all party government (1946-52) included stalwarts like Patel, Azad, Rajendra Prasad, Ambedkar and S P Mukherjee, he was the real power center of the government. With the help of his coterie<sup>1</sup> like Krishna Menon, R K Nehru and Subimal Dutt, he mostly formulated the policies without the consultation of the cabinet. Mostly these policies were placed before the cabinet for the mere approval. His hold over the Congress

and the Parliament enabled his authority over the cabinet. David Malone, the former Canadian Ambassador to India point outs that after the death of Patel and Ambedkar, Nehru had no opposition in the Cabinet and the Parliament.<sup>2</sup> Though persons like Patel played some role in the design of domestic policy, Nehru was all in all when it comes to foreign policy. He had an everlasting footprint on Indian foreign policy. He promoted a strong personal role for himself, which ultimately resulted in the creation of a weak institutional structure.<sup>3</sup> Indian foreign policy was in a way synonym to Nehru. The media, academia and civil society were hand in glove with the Nehruvian ideas of foreign policy till the Chinese aggression. His Gandhian idealism formed the basis for the formulation of the foreign policy. The basic elements of Indian foreign policy like the Panchasheel, the Non-Aligned Movement and close co-operation with the Communist World are of his credit. His animosity towards the Western World laid a wrong foundation path for a Third World country like India. History had proved that many of his foreign policy options were contrary to the needs of India.<sup>4</sup>

B R Ambedkar, a prominent political leader outside the Congress system, differed with Nehru on his foreign policy options. While most political parties, persons, media and academia stood with Nehru on foreign policy question, Ambedkar offered an alternative mode. As a liberal constitutionalist, he believed that it is good for a Third World country like India to maintain close partnership with the democratic Western led by the US. While most of the Indian political class viewed the Communist World with hope, he warned them that it is a wild fire which will burn anything and everything that come on its way. On Indian foreign policy and other international issues, his approach was diametrically opposite to that of Nehru.<sup>5</sup> In this background, an attempt has been made to analyze Ambedkar's perspective on

Indian foreign policy in comparison with that of Nehru's.

### **What is Foreign Policy?**

Foreign policy consists of self-interest strategies chosen by a state to safeguard its national interest. The rationality of national interest goals portends and governs the objectives of foreign policy of any state. There are many pertaining models of foreign policy. Any nation would employ the model which best suits it. Some of the models of foreign policy are the rational actor model, self-aggrandizement model, government bargaining model and political process model. In this present paper, we discussed in detail the concepts, merits and demerits of rational actor model and self-aggrandizement model.

The rational actor model is based on the rational choice theory. It assumes that individuals make preferences among the available choices before them after a careful study. This process involves goal setting, ranking, consideration of options, assessment of consequences and profit-maximization. The top most priority of the actor is to fulfill the desired goal. The state is the primary unit of analysis. In this model, the state is a monolithic unitary actor, capable of making rational decisions based on preference ranking and value maximization. The decision making authority, mostly the chief executive of the state is believed to be a person with rationale, making an optimal choice based on calculated expected benefits.

In self-aggrandizement model, the chief executive makes all the decisions by himself/herself mostly without rationale. The executive acts on behalf of his interest and prejudices. The domestic environment, external environment and public opinion are not taken into account before making decisions. Many leaders employ it to make themselves more important and powerful. Sometimes it may be an act of

pride. The leader would be very confident about his mental abilities and charisma. Sigmund Freud argues that the desire for self-development stems from narcissistic desires, a tendency to self-aggrandizement and superiority over others.<sup>6</sup> Theoretically these models are employed by nations, but it is the persons who work as the executives to make decisions on behalf of their nations. So ultimately it is the individuals who make foreign policy. While the Western democracies mostly opted for rational actor model with some elements of self-aggrandizement, most of the Third World nations employed self-aggrandizement model with very few elements of rational action model.

Foreign policy is a plan of action employed by a nation with regard to its diplomatic dealings with other nations and other non-state actors. It consists of self-interested strategies chosen by the state to safeguard its national interest and to achieve its objectives. Each and every nation, whether big or small, rich or poor, must have a policy to deal with the rest of the world. If any nation has no foreign policy, it simply means that it prefers to live segregated in isolation. It is the proper planning of policy which leads a nation successfully in this globalized world. Internally, this includes policies like poverty alleviation, improving living standards, creation of employment, growth in per capita etc.; externally, it simply means protecting the nation's interest abroad, i.e. foreign policy. Foreign policy can't be determined by any one factor or factors, but it is the result of the interplay of a large number of factors that affect the formulation of policy in different ways under different circumstances.<sup>7</sup> The making of foreign Policy of any nation involves a number of stages. They are;

- i. Assessment of the international and diplomatic political environment
- ii. Goal setting
- iii. Determination of policy options
- iv. Formal decision making

v. Implementation of chosen policy option

### **Evolution of Indian Foreign Policy:**

Before the transfer of power, British India's foreign affairs fell under the purview of the British Secretary of State. The British Indian foreign policy was determined by the British Government at London through consultations between the Governments of United Kingdom and British India. Though the foreign policy of British India was designed to protect the interest of the British Empire, it was not against Indian interests, as propagated. What London needed in India was a strong central government, obedient to it, yet capable of keeping the provincial administration in line with metropolitan purpose.<sup>8</sup> Through intended to protect the British imperial interests, the British Indian Government had to develop its own regional foreign policy, distinct from and sometimes in strain with British foreign policy emanating from London. For this purpose, the British Indian administration had to create an exclusive department. After the Battle of Buxar in 1764, the external affairs of the British Indian dominions were entrusted with the Secret and Political Department. In 1843, the Foreign Department was founded to look after the external affairs.

The Government of India Act 1858, created the Indian Political Service to liaise between the Indian Government and various Princely states like Hyderabad, Baroda, Mysore, Travancore, and Jammu and Kashmir; and Protectorate states like Afghanistan, Yemen, Persia, Baluchistan, Bhutan and Sikkim. These officers were assigned the duty to ensure that the allegiances of the princely states did not switch to rival powers of Britain.<sup>9</sup> In one way they were the unofficial ambassadors of the British Indian, serving as the residents and agents to the neighboring Princely states and Protectorate states. After the First World War, British India administration started exhibiting some autonomy in external affairs.

The first such attempt was made at the Paris Peace Conference, which signed the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, after which British India was admitted as a founding member of the League of Nations. Domestically in 1925, a small unit was created within the Indian National Congress to address the international issues and to publicize its independence movement.<sup>10</sup> In 1936, the Department of External Affairs was created. After the Second World War with the transfer of power inevitable, India was made the founding member of the United Nations. Just before the formal transfer of power, a separate External Affairs Ministry and Commonwealth Relations was created in 1946. In 1948, it was renamed as the External Affairs Ministry. Prime Minister Nehru served concurrently as the External Affairs Minister of India till his death in 1964.

### **Dichotomy between Nehru and Ambedkar**

The Second World War was followed by the disintegration of the European colonial Empires like the British and the French. When it came to the British Indian Empire, the one hundred and ninety years rule resulted in the birth of a new elite class from the upper caste urban males.<sup>11</sup> This English educated elite class was quick in capturing the political power in India. These classes which designed and implemented the policies of independent India had their own prejudices against the Western world. In this process, they were carried away blindly by the ideology race between the Eastern and the Western World. Their leadership qualities, behavioral traits and above all their needs for personal political survival and consolidation of power inevitably influenced the formulation and implementation of Indian foreign policy.<sup>12</sup> Instead of employing the rational actor model, in which decisions were based on preference ranking and value maximization, India under Prime Minister Nehru adopted the self-aggrandizement model, in which the leader acts

on his personnel interest. Nehru who was also India's first foreign minister was a man made of a unique combination of Socialism and Liberalism.<sup>13</sup> Though he admired the Western liberalism, he had developed many apprehensions and prejudices on the Western democracy and capitalism. He had extended his hand for friendship to Communist World, like Russia and China. It automatically made Nehru and his India, a foe of the United States led Western World.<sup>14</sup>

Contrary to Nehru, Ambedkar argued that the vital problem before the newly independent free nations of the world is the expansion of Communism.<sup>15</sup> As most of the free nations are joining some blocks for preserving themselves, he argued that 'We want peace, nobody want war. The only question is what the price is for this. At what price we are purchasing this peace?'<sup>16</sup> He accused Nehruvian foreign policy that its keynote was to solve the problems of the other countries and not to solve its own problems.<sup>17</sup> Ambedkar was from a military family from Maharashtra. Battling all his life with casteism, he excelled in education as it was his only hope for betterment of life. After achieving two doctoral degrees from the Columbia University and the London School of Economics and Political Science under the University of London, he pledged into politics for the emancipation of his fellow suffers of caste system. Though his primary purpose remained their emancipation, as a trained economist and political scientist, he offered many alternative models in politics, economics and foreign relations. However the most under-researched area of Ambedkar remains his thought on international affairs and Indian foreign policy. Hailing from a family of military background, he had inherited some thoughts on defense policy and military strategy both from his maternal as well as paternal side.<sup>18</sup> When most of the political leadership of India, particularly from the Congress opposed the Second World War, he termed it as a public war and argued that the post

war world would be more liberal and democratic, which would benefit India. He questioned those proposing passive resistance, by pointing out that war can't be removed by merely refusing to fight when attacked. He argued that to abolish war you must win war and establish just peace.<sup>19</sup> As a member of the Viceroy Executive Council during war years, he was appointed into the Defence Advisory Committee, in which he played an active role. After the transfer of power, he was appointed as the Minister of Law in the All Party National Government headed by Nehru. After serving as the much publicized Chairperson of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, which framed India its Constitution, he directed his energies for passing the Hindu Code Bill aimed to emancipate women in patriarchal Hindu society. After failing to get the bill passed, he resigned from the Nehru cabinet citing the utopian foreign policy adopted by Nehru as one of the reasons.<sup>20</sup> While Nehru enjoyed overwhelming support both in the Congress and the Parliament for his foreign policy objectives, Ambedkar was one of the very few to oppose his policy.

When the Congress leaders were making themselves busy against the alleged American imperialism that was growing, Ambedkar was the one who viewed that a close partnership with the US would benefit India, a Third World country immensely. While Nehru was championing the anti-imperial campaign primarily directed against the US, Ambedkar was pragmatic enough not to get carried away. The TIME Magazine remarked that 'Dr Ambedkar is the first important Indian official who had attacked Nehru openly for being too friendly to Red China and not friendly enough to the US'.<sup>21</sup> His foresight on the upcoming world order proved right with the fall of Berlin Wall. In one way Ambedkar can be listed as the first Americanophile in independent India. According to some political scientists, India had wasted fifty long years of Indo-American association.<sup>22</sup>

In the manifesto of his political party the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) for the first General elections of 1951-51, he dedicated a column titled 'Problems of Foreign Policy'. The manifesto clearly stated that policy employed by Nehru was not acceptable to the SCF, and suggested to solve the Kashmir problem permanently. He warned that Kashmir would remain a moral burden on Indians if remained unsolved.<sup>23</sup> The stand of Nehru on getting the permanent membership in the Security Council for India often irritated Ambedkar. He wished for a permanent membership in the Security Council for India in 1951, making him the first person in India who considered that India had a legitimate and rightful place in the international order.<sup>24</sup> Nehru himself declared that India had become the fourth or fifth most important country in the United Nation. He played a lobbying role for the Communist China at the UN, to include it as a member nation. When both the Western and Eastern Bloc leaders proposed him to take up a permanent Security Council seat for India, Nehru rejected. He went on saying that some people in the US had offered him that India may replace China (Taiwan) in Security Council.<sup>25</sup> He argued that instead of offering a permanent seat for India in the Security Council, it is better to give membership in the UN for Communist China. He suspected that this is a conspiracy to sow the seeds of enmity between two great friends, India and China by the West.

When Nehru tried to befriend India with the Communist East and distance itself from the democratic West, Ambedkar questioned him by asking 'If you want Parliamentary democracy, then you should be friendly with those who have Parliamentary Governments and are trying to protect it against the Communist attacks. If you do not want it, let us join with Stalinist Russia and Red China tomorrow and make friends with them.'<sup>26</sup> But despite his warnings, Nehru signed the Panchsheel Agreement with China in 1954. Ambedkar came down heavily on the government

in the Parliament and remarked that if Mao had any faith in Panchsheel, he certainly would have treated the Buddhists of his country in a very different way. There is no room for Panchsheel in politics; at least in a Communist dictatorship like China'.<sup>27</sup>

In 1947 itself, Ambedkar dared to call Russian Communism a fraud, when it was almost blasphemy. His realistic approach to social matters, his belief in pragmatic flexible democratic system never allowed him to take Marxist theory seriously. Above all, he never considered Communism as a medicine for Indian ills. He warned that the expansion of Communism was the biggest threat that the world was facing. In a Parliamentary debate in 1954, he declared that Russian Communism is a wild fire and it would consume everything that comes on its way.<sup>28</sup> When Nehru started showing a pro-Russian tilt, he contrarily argued India should join South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) led by the US. In this context, he remarked that SEATO was not for committing aggression on any country and its purpose is to prevent aggression on free countries.<sup>29</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Ambedkar was the only important Indian politician to oppose the Nehruvian pro-Eastern bloc foreign policy during the early independence days. He argued that India should work along with the democratic West to fortify its position in the new world. It was only after the Indo-Sino skirmishes in late 1950s, Nehru's policy came under scanner and criticism by other politicians and media. But by that time India had already lost fifteen valuable years and the foundations of Indian foreign policy were already laid. It is not easy for any country to make U-turn on foreign policy. However, the foreign policy of India underwent a paradigm shift after the fall of the Berlin Wall. With the rise of a unipolar multi-satellite world, India was forced to redesign its policy on the West and had to shed out the

utopian ideas like the non-alignment. It had to forge new friendship with the Western world, particularly the United States, as desired by Ambedkar. India, which preached for an equal and a utopian just world, was now busy in finding its own place. India's position in this 21<sup>st</sup> century world would have been at its best, if the natural alliance between the world's oldest democracy, the US and the world's largest democracy, India as presumed by Ambedkar took shape immediately after independence. India would have reached the 'Take Off' stage of growth very much earlier, which may have helped it in tackling the problems like mass poverty. Taking all these into account, we can conclude that Ambedkar's perspective on Indian foreign policy would have benefitted India immensely.

### **References**

1. Guha, Ramachandra., *Makers of Modern Asia*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014
2. Malone, David., *Does the Elephant Dance?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011
3. Shah S K., *Indian Foreign Policy: Past, Present and Ties with the World*, New Delhi: Alpha Publications, 2017
4. *The National Interest Magazine* dated 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2015.
5. *The Indian Express* dated 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2009.
6. *The Success Makers., I Love Myself*, Morrisville: Lulu Press, 2017, P- 177
7. Bandyopadhyaya, J., *The Making of Indian Foreign Policy*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2016
8. Malone, M., Raja Mohan, C. and Raghavan, S., (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015, P-51

9. Brobst, P., *The Future of the Great Game: Sir Olaf Caroe, India's independence, and the defence of Asia*, Akron: University of Akron Press, 2005, P-XV
10. From the Ministry of External Affairs Official Website
11. Robert Bruce T. McCully., *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1940, P-177-78
12. Bandyopadhyaya, J., op.cit
13. Maheshwari Neerja., *Economic Policy of Jawaharlal Nehru*, New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1997
14. The New York Times dated 28<sup>th</sup> May, 1964.
15. Kuber W N., *Ambedkar: A Critical Study*. New Delhi: South Asian Books, 1992
16. ibid
17. The Rajya Sabha debate on 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1954.
18. Longer V., *The Defense and Foreign Policies in India*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1988
19. Kuber W N., op.cit.
20. Moon, Vasant (ed.), *BAWS, Volume-14(2)*, 1979, P-1321
21. The TIME Magazine dated 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1951.
22. Khanna V N., *Foreign Policy of India*, Noida: Vikas Publication House, 2010
23. 'Election manifesto of SCF' in *The Times of India* dated 3 October 1951
24. ibid
25. Gopal, S,(ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Second Series*, New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, Vol-29, 1984, P-231
26. Keer, Dhananjay., *Dr Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1994, P-453
27. Mehrotra L L., *India's Tibet Policy: An Appraisal and Options*, New Delhi: Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Centre, 1997
28. Moon, Vasant, (ed.), *BAWS, Volume-15*, 1979, P-879
29. Moon, op.cit., P-881