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HINDUTVA, POPULISM AND TRAJECTORY OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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“There is some self-interest behind every friendship. There is no friendship without self-interests. This is a bitter Truth”

— Chanakya

ABSTRACT

Almost every democratic country in the world is influenced with the populism to woo the voters and win elections. Among them India is also a party of this populist practices. This article endeavoured to analyse the India's foreign policy in the current regime of Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) under the leadership of India's current Prime minister Narendra Modi. Modi government is always adorned with the title of populist government and as a government favouring Hindutva ideologies and promoting Hindutva. This article will analyse Modi's foreign policy which is said to be influenced by the Hindutva ideology. This article will envisage whether the Modi's foreign policy is really a populist foreign policy. it will analyse the role of the religion in shaping the foreign policy of India under the influence of Hindutva and also seek to answer assertive role of Hindutva realist in shaping India's foreign policy.

Keywords: Populism, Foreign Policy, Hindutva, Religion, Politics.

Introduction

Overview

After the India's independence, the behaviour of the country is quite vivid and worth to be explored with the glass of the scholarly exploration in terms of foreign policy analysis. We all wot this fact that India espoused Non-aligned movement during the cold war, with growing influence of India at the global platform, it demanded a permanent position in the UN. These transition in the Indian foreign policy posited the scholars to make an in-depth analysis of discourse adopted by India which seems to be momentarily influence by the philosophy of Kautilya. Kautilya a Brahmin by caste also known as “Chanakya and Vishnugupta” was famous Indian philosopher and strategic thinker responsible for the decline of Nanda Dynasty and enthronement of the Chandragupta Maurya at its place.¹ Indian foreign policy even today is greatly influenced by the Kautilya's philosophies of foreign policy.

The Modi government, which is eulogised for being populist government by many scholars, rise to power, warrants some inquisitions into the guiding parameters of his foreign policy. This article seeks to gauge the multifaceted approach adopted by the Modi government to shape his foreign policy decisions. His nationalist agenda is primarily based on diplomatic approach, public opinion, emotion and religion. This plays an important role in forging alliance with foreign partners. Modi's diverse leadership style and nationalist politics set him apart from his predecessors, leading to inquisitiveness and speculation about the foreign policy implication in coming times. In this era of increasingly insecurities and populist politics, India has acclaimed as a forceful ontological security provider under the leadership of Narendra Modi. Under the leadership of Modi country has turned towards a more proactive foreign policy.

Impact of Religion in Flourishing Foreign Policy

Here, I will construe the interaction of foreign policy with ideology and religion. The orientation towards the specific culture and religion of a country is tantamount to its foreign policy and its procedure of selecting allies and foes.ⁱⁱ In simple words, we can say foreign policy is affected by the religion and culture. This can theoretically function in two distinct ways; through the practise of realpolitik, premised on common heritage, a country may choose to forge alliance with other country leading to cooperation and peaceful foreign policies. On the contrary realpolitik could be used to emphasize in creating a fundamental distinction between the religion and ideological beliefs. The states may use to go for aggressive and non-cooperative approach. Leadership style and attention could be affected by these beliefs, i.e., evaluating the dogma or pragmatism in the policy or assessing the vitality of specific historical events.

The strong suspicion of international organisation amidst conservative encourages some to introduce religiously charged attack thus, incriminate religion as a motivation of the administration as well. In the environment of social crisis and political tension, the worldview of national leader becomes even more vital. The attack on the US soil on September 11, 2001 causing wreck on pentagon building, one of the premier centres of defence and World trade centre embarked one of the most traumatic and devastating events in the history of US. This cataclysmic effect on US soil leads to invasion of Afghanistan as the immediate course of action. The country



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whose fundamentalism Muslim government, the Taliban provides safe heaven to mastermind of US terror attack of 2001, Osama Bin Ladin and his militant organisation Al Qaeda. US adopted the pre-emptive measure on striking Afghanistan. This pre-emption and unilateralism seem to fluctuate from the foreign policy norms developed in 20th century.

Modi's ideological and religious beliefs reflected in his foreign policy is a matter of debate in the pertinent literature. Some scholars have construed that Modi's domestic policy is widely influenced by the Hindutva movement but at the level of foreign policy, he is neither a Hindutva ideologue and nor adherent to liberal economic.ⁱⁱⁱ On the contrary, some scholars believes that his foreign policy decision is premised on the religious and ideological inclination.^{iv} The first line of argument is similar to his predecessors in the sense that like his predecessors he focused on the values of promoting universal brotherhood, emphasizing on enriching economy, enhancing the military capability by modernising military. Modi's commitment to foreign policy is evident in his practices of religious diplomacy to foster ties with the countries.

Hindutva and Symbol of Power

Expectation about Modi are frequently associated to his espousal of Hindutva. In international politics and foreign policy, religion plays an important role and are widely studied. However, in India, it lacks an intensive exploration of Hinduism and its effect on Indian foreign policy. The branding of BJP as a Hindu nationalist party by the critics and impartial observers tends to tarnish its image in the realm of foreign policy. What exactly are the foreign policy approaches to those who espouse Hindutva? A closer examine reveals that Hindutva related thought about India and the world to be rather much intricate. The typical world-view of Hindutva adherents emanate from the persuasion that India equated with Hindus, having been under Muslim and Christian authority for millennium must be strengthen through mustering of power and development of a marital status and societal cohesion.^v Beyond this there are many other stances of thinking. One of them is offensive realism. The principle that world is reckoned by perennial conflict, state to secure itself must endeavour to sustain expanding until it accomplished universal empire. According to great Indian strategic philosopher Chanakya (c. 371-283 BCE), in this world of persistent conflict strong sovereign should seeks "Sarva-bhauma or world empire" and exert power to this end.^{vi}

Contemporary conception of Hindutva's expansion is confined to recovery of Akhand Bharat or Greater India. Analyst in contemporary time tend to emphasised on the Hindu nationalist predilection for applying material power for islamophobia and generally hard line stands towards rivals. There is another view from which Hindu nationalism is much contained. Chanakya said that uncontrolled expansion could be counterproductive and that excepting the threat of decline, peace would be desirable to war.^{vii} The focus on dharma as a very core principle entrenched in virtually all classical Hindu writing give a pause. Modi emphasized the vital need of power asserting that historical weakness of India and colonization call for need to retain independence today; peace and strength should go together; and India's response to Chinese and Pakistanis provocation should be befitting. He also reckoned that we live in an inter-dependent world, world is a family and India stands for the Vishwa-Bandhutva or world brotherhood and peace. Being acquaintance with India's glorious heritage, he endeavours to play a leading role in the world again. BJP national executive headed by Modi articulated "Panchamrit" that is five masts of India's foreign policy: Honour and Dignity (Samman), Engagement and Dialogue (Samvad), Shared Prosperity (Samridhhi), Regional and Global Security (Suraksha) and Cultural and Civilizational linkage (Sanskriti evam Sabhyata).^{viii} If we look at this, we will not find any aggressive or muscular foreign policy as many accused Modi under his leadership. Modi government was accused for altering Panchsheel with Panchamrit (reckoned by critic as aggressive policy).

Another criticism of Modi government is alleged to be "Islamophobia" displayed by its harsh stands against Pakistan. This muscular approach by Modi is not confined to BJP party only but it goes back to predecessor governments by Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi, and Rajiv Gandhi. The aggressive nature was flaunted by the Mrs Gandhi, when she deliberately meddled with Pakistan in the year 1971. On the contrary, Vajpayee government in 1999 fought a limited conflict with Pakistan. This course of action was mandatory because of Pakistan trespassing into Indian territory in Kashmir. Irrespective of any government whether Hindu or non-Hindu this course of action was completely justified. It is absolutely right that Modi's stance towards Pakistan and China have reflected muscular approach.^{ix} In comparison to his predecessor Modi ignored Chinese concern while reviving joint naval exercises with Japan and United State. Under the pressure of Chinese government Manmohan Singh government had discontinued these exercises which was revived by Modi government. We can't say that this course of action was aggressive. Modi has forged relation with Japan and US to counter the Chinese aggression in South Asia and Indian Ocean. Modi government tried to build good relation with Pakistan by his travelling to Pakistan in 2015. He has also given befitting reply to Pathankot strike in 2016 and Uri that September 2016 through surgical strikes.



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Unlike congress government Modi government has not shown a propensity of intervention. Looking all this, we cannot say that Modi government meant to be government of Hindus. In sum there is no evidence which portrays the use of force emanating from Modi's identification with Hindutva.

Modi's Foreign Policy with Hindutva's Realism

Under the prime minister Narendra Modi leadership, the attempt has been made to examine the role of Hindutva as the guiding philosophical framework for BJP foreign policy orientation. Since Modi rose to power in 2014, his government is viewed from the glass of Hindutva. One argument was that his government from the incipient stages pushed Hindutva-inspired policies. Another view argued that he is using majoritarian political value of Hindutva for pragmatism purposes. During his second term his government decision to abrogate article 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution and the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) is shown as the example. Modi's visit to Hindu and Buddhist temples as part of his foreign itinerary has helped to foster a sense of belonging among the Indian community residing on foreign soil. This has also helped to forge a good relation with the concerned country. The Indian diaspora living abroad act as pressure group in forming ties with the countries. This becomes possible due to Modi's initiative of meeting with people on foreign soil. This led to lit the light of belongingness and affection regarding the native country India among the Indian diaspora. This very soft features of Hindutva lead to gain international respectability. Modi government has marginalised English and forwarded Hindi as the diplomatic communication. This helped India to send the message of decolonized of the mind of Indians to the world by adopting their own language. Hindutva's realism believes in capability building in the field of economy, technology, soft diplomacy and military capability. India is constantly moving towards self-reliance in all measure field like manufacturing military arsenal or technological advancements.

While Hindutva definitely have the capacity to foster divisive and strong security and foreign policymaking. Instead of this Modi government adopted softer approach with the neighbouring countries. When he became the prime-minister in the year 2014 he invited leaders of the SARC countries for his oath ceremonies. He espoused the notion of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam to fill the gap between the India and the world. This initiative has helped India to foster better ties with other countries and to strengthen the economic and military cooperation.^x India has built close relation between all major powers. The relationship with Japan and US has worked as the deterrence for the Chinese government. Prime minister Modi has become much vibrant and more visible and outspoken and more travelled than any of his predecessor. His approach to contact several countries which had not been visited by any Indian prime-minister has helped India to come strong at the global platform. His government decision to reach Indian Ocean Rim association proved fruitful in making strong relation with Seychelles and Mauritius.

Conversely, the India-US relationship has seen a strengthening cooperation. India signed LEMOA (Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement) in 2016. Its aim was to facilitate logistic support and military services between two countries. Following year in 2018 India and US signed another agreement (COMCASA) known as Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement. The purpose of COMCASA to facilitate both countries military to access advanced defence system. This has built a great showcase of strong strategic partnership. On the other front the relation with the Russia by the many scholars has shown as deteriorating but I will draw attention to the fact that both India and Russia need each other and their interest are coterminous. As the crisis of Ukraine has entered a critical phase. Most of the European power is trying to douse the flame or to prepare themselves over looming war condition. US has recently called for the meeting of the United Nation Security Council. Russian president traveling to Beijing shore to brief its resolute stand on Ukraine. In such a climate of war situation, India has dodged the strategic ensnarement. In the UNSC meet India along with Kenya and Gabon has abstained the coalition led by US against Russia. India's absent from the UNSC meeting seems to be limitation of its closeness to US. India's statement that it urges both the nation to come with a peaceful resolution on the issue over Ukraine embark a delicate balance between US and Russia. India's stand on Ukraine issue is welcomed by the Russia.^{xi}

Besides these both Russian and Indian governments have identified the lack of economic traction. Modi government in 2019 granted \$1 billion line of credit for projects in Russian far east to promote private sector to foster economic traction.^{xii} Indian are also looking for strengthening defence ties to enhance economic ties through joint ventures in India. Russia is keen to participate in India's make in India programme. Like US Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, India will soon sign the RELOS (Reciprocal Exchange of Logistic Agreement) with Russia. With these agreements both sides will have access to designated military facilities for refuelling and replenishment.^{xiii}

By going through this tactic of prime minister Modi I don't think Indian foreign policy has transformed itself completely becoming a new Hindutva guided foreign policy. Modi did try to assimilate the foreign policy with Indian values by asserting civilizational and religious ties with south and southeast Asia and by focusing on especially Indian diaspora to foster good ties with



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foreign nations. India today is closer to Muslim country like Saudi Arabia and UAE are actually reflectors of India's new foreign policy pragmatism under Modi leadership.

Is Modi's Foreign Policy a Populist?

Since assuming office in 2014, India under prime minister Narendra Modi has transformed itself into the major strategic player with highly operative foreign policy. Modi departure from the age-old policy of Non-Alignment to Engagement is conducive for fostering good ties with great and middle-sized powers. Under his government's effort India has strengthen the ties with the United States and its strategy to counter China in Indo-pacific region. His muscular politics against Chinese intrusion in Doklam is an example of India's growing strength. Modi has successfully faced down country's arch rivals China and Pakistan. There was attack in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir led by the Pakistanis terrorist group in 2019. Modi government retaliated in measured fashion showing his strength while preventing escalation. With growing nexus between China and Pakistan has led the India's worries to escalate. Chinese are causing headache to the country. The government under Modi has taken cognizance of the fact and as result, it has started beefing up military infrastructure, including bridge, roads and airfield. This is accompanied by logistic to deploy additional troops quickly if required.

Modi has made India's foreign policy more proactive. His emphasis on policies like; India first, giving importance to the neighbourhood countries despite the odd, allowing Indian diaspora to feel the sense of belongingness for the native country India and strengthening cultural ties is not a populist policy. This policy has helped India to play a vital role in interplay of domestic and foreign policy making. The mobilisation of Hindu diaspora through an emphasis of cultural ties help to build the India's soft power. So, in this I can say the mobilization of Indian diaspora on his foreign visit is not for the purpose of drawing electorate in the country instead it is strengthening India's vibrant foreign policy. this assertive approach on cultural and heritage is not Hindu nationalism but it is Indian nationalism. This could be seen in the form of India's exceptional place among the great powers.^{xiv}

On Economic Front

A staggering common line of attack on prime minister Narendra Modi is that he has lurked the Indian economy in the middle and has embraced populism. Unquestionably Modi government has disappointed by privatising state-owned enterprises and by ascending tariffs and expanded welfare scheme. However, tariff and state-owned business is not only parameter to judge Modi's approach. In a country like India whose vast majority are poor people, welfare programs articulated to full-fill bare essentials while putting overall government expenditure and deficit in check can barely be referred as populist. I am not denying the fact that India's growth on the ladder of economic front is progressive since Modi's 2014 election, but the steady and continuous growth bonded with welfare protection have brought decline in the status of poverty for last forty years. This pace has made both the polity and economy more resilient.

Now, consider privatisation which became a gossip point in the late twenty's century. In those time it was said by the New Washington as state losing grasp over business, curtailing trade hindrances and promoting fiscal disciplines. At that time India's public sector enterprises were big summing around one-third of GDP from the non-agriculture sector. Thirty years later, India's public-sector enterprises are still big but they have curtailed in influence as it comprises 14 percent of total non-agricultural Gross Domestic Product. It is certain that there is clearly room for reform, it is not clear that emphasising a lot political energy will good for incremental returns. If we look India in last several decades it is obvious that India has altered it course from the relatively closed economy to open economy. India's trade report stands at 41percent.^{xv} It is measured by taking account of the imports and exports trade to GDP. Modi government recent decision to exceed imports tariff on few goods has been categorised by many, including Arvind Panagariya, as a regressive. Here the point to be noted is that India runs third largest merchandise trade deficit in absolute dollar terms accompany by US and UK. This recent step of tariff increase is partly repercussion to this widening void.

Economist would suggest that the right way to bring economy back at platform is to encourage export not to merely control import but the steady and sluggish growth around the world coterminous with globalisation and offshore has destined a plateau, mounting trade tension causing hurdles in raising exports quickly. And now, the question of welfare in a democratic country like India's where the indignant people come out to vote in large numbers, no administration can afford to set aside the concerns that fuel populist impulses. In my opinion viewing populism as antithetical is a serious flaw. Reforms can't be sustained if it doesn't reach to masses. Similarly, no populist policy can be endured without economic prosperity. The Achilles' heel of any welfare system, particularly in progressing country is incapability. The Modi government has endeavoured to mitigate this weakness. The introduction of new technology with emphasis on making India a digital nation by bringing Aadhar a universal biometric identity card coupled with direct transfers to beneficiaries, government has succeeded in curtailing theft and better targeted beneficiaries. Thus, despite proliferation of welfare schemes government has succeed in maintain cost nearly same by balancing the deficit.



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Outlook

Domestic politics include constant squabbling with the plebs and bone crushing electioneering while the foreign policy involves knocking heads with Presidents, Prime ministers and Kings of the different countries around the globe. Modi was boycotted by the west for several years. In response as the chief minister of Gujrat, he turned his eyes with hope towards the East. He made several visits to Japan and China, in return these countries invested in making his state Gujrat a vibrant economy in India. It is of much surprised that those who refers his state progress as development populism have done nothing by sitting at home and avoiding travelling abroad to build ties for their respective state and rig up the investment. Today's situation of war is looming over the world over growing tension between Ukraine and Russia. The backing of NATO and US to Ukraine has exceeded the chance of world war. India's relation with Russia as commented by many scholars to be dwindling is seeming to be myth. owing to India's smart play of foreign policy, in a surprised move a stunning declaration is made by TS Trimurti Indian permanent representative to United Nation stating that "Russia security concerns in Ukraine must be addressed" if we interpret these words then it signals that NATO and US shouldn't expand into Ukraine. This statement by India has been appreciated by Russia. Here we can also see how India has even managed to maintain its policy of non-Alignment. During Nehru and Mrs Gandhi regime, India practised non-Alignment but it was in Soviet side, after that India lurched towards America then Quad came to focus but America strangled Quad by procuring nuclear submarine to Australia. Modi taking personal affront bought S-400 and Putin has even promised to avail India with S-500 which can guide India against Chinese Hypersonic Missiles.

Modi Accused with playing Hindutva politics seems to be futile as India's relation with the Muslim countries with UAE and Saudi Arabia are promising. Instead of being Muslim countries they have a defence co-operation with India. India still doesn't have permanent council seat in UN but today under Modi it stands resplendent in the world. Modi has maintained friendship with Saudi Arabia, Israel and UAE which has stood by India firmly. He has seen double-dealing of US and realised that Russia is our time-tested partner and there is no point of leaving Russia. This reflects Modi's pragmatism in India's foreign policy.

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