

National Security Tactics of India and China: A Tri-Guna Theory Perception

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There are various approaches to understanding and explaining the dimensions of human nature. *Tri-guna* theory is an integral part of Indian philosophy that explains the three dimensions of human nature, *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*. These *gunas* act together and never exist in isolation. They interact and compete with each other resulting in the preponderance of one over the others. The degree of predominance of one *guna* determines the individual's personality type. Based on the above understanding, personalities are categorized into three, *sattvic*, *rajasic*, and *tamasic*. Thus, Indian philosophy has conceptualised and practised three forms of positive, neutral and negative characteristics of an individual in the form of *tri-guna*. It appears that the national security approaches are framed based on an assessment of threat perceptions. Though there are institutional mechanisms and set practices in the formulation of national security policy, it also reflects the traits of the individuals involved in the decision-making process. In other words, the personality of the officials involved in the decision-making is very significant in shaping the outcome. This paper is an attempt to understand the national security policy of India and China, which is rooted in their civilizational connection, cherished practices, and the decision-makers perceptions. The *tri-guna* theory helps us to comprehend and explain the perceptions of the decision-makers involved in the formulation of national security strategies.

Keywords: tri-guna, sattvic, rajasic, tamasic, Arthashastra, expansionism

India's national security approach can be qualified as a combination of realism and idealism. There are periods and issues in which India had adopted realism as well as idealism alternatively. This change in the approach to security is mainly due to the divergent perception of the decision-makers. The divergent perception of the decision-makers can be attributed to reflections of *tri-guna* in individuals and international politics can be better comprehended through the application of *tri-guna* theory. The actions of a particular state are the actions of the individuals involved in decision-making. Independent India had adopted a democratic system and followed a policy of strategic autonomy and initiated a foreign policy based on non-alignment and worked for world peace.

India's national security policy was shaped based on these two principles, realism and idealism. The ancient text, *Arthashastra*, has warranted any action by the ruler for the protection and promotion of national interests. *Arthashastra* deals with statecraft in ancient India and reflects a better understanding of basic human nature.

The author of *Arthashastra*, Kautilya, justified any action by the ruler based on political expediency (Boesche, 2017). And the basic doctrines of Buddhism are nonviolence and world peace (Bapat, 2009). The principles such as nonviolence and peace are also the long-cherished ideals of the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi. Thus, the strategic culture of India had been influenced by realism as exhorted in *Arthashastra* and idealism rooted in the Buddhist tenets such as nonviolence and peace. These two principles, realism and idealism, along with the individual personality traits of the decision-makers appear to have shaped India's national security strategies.

A peep into the history of free India reveals that there are periods when the democratically elected Indian rulers have adopted different methods for the protection and promotion of national interests- peace, security, and prosperity. They have adopted different means to achieve national goals. During the Nehruvian period (1947 – 1964) India's national security policy could be qualified as the Buddhist tradition of nonviolence and world peace ingrained in idealism. The above period was also based on the Gandhian ideals of nonviolence and peace. During this period the national security of India was compromised on several occasions, including the border issues with both Pakistan and China. The gravest threat to India's national security that occurred during this period was the Kashmir issue with Pakistan and the annexation of Tibet by Communist China and thereby the elimination of a buffer state between India and China in 1951 (Suresh, 2011). The particular stand taken by India on both issues at a very crucial juncture can be explained as idealism manifested in the Buddhist ideals of peace and nonviolence. It has been observed that the strategic grasp of India's political leadership at independence was weak, narrow, and often indifferent (Sardeshpande, 2020). The approach to national security could also be explained in terms of the nature of decision-makers or the personality traits of the individuals involved in decision-making.

The 1971 war with Pakistan and the birth of a new state in South Asia based on the principle of the right to self-determination of the people through coercive means explain the pragmatic approach narrated in *Arthashastra*. The threat from East Pakistan and the Bay of Bengal to India's national security has been eliminated with the creation of Bangladesh. Subsequent events showed that India's nonaligned tag was conveniently compromised on occasions that demand realism rather than idealism. Many scholars of international relations believe that the policy of nonalignment itself has been an incarnation of strategic autonomy rooted in realism. Nevertheless, it was the perception of leaders in power which ultimately had given a practical shape to the nonaligned tag (Suresh, 2012).

The 1974 peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE) based on India's contention that the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) was a discriminatory treaty also manifests India's firm resolve to enhance its national power through the development and deployment of nuclear weapons. This again was an important ingredient for pursuing strategic autonomy in a world driven by the manifestations of power politics. During the cold war period, India's tilt towards the former Soviet Union and less interaction with the US also was based on a policy rooted in political realism. The dichotomy in precepts and practices again manifests India's policy of strategic autonomy (Suresh, 2012).

Post-Cold War Setting

The post-cold war, international politics once again provided India with an opportunity to calibrate its external policy, as the nonaligned policy had lost its relevance, especially in the context of the end of superpower rivalry and competition in world politics, the rationale for the emergence of such policy. The advent of the accelerated pace of the globalization process prompted India to initiate economic reforms and subsequent national security priorities' reorientation. The emergence of non-traditional security threats as the most important challenge to national security prompted India to restructure its national security policy. The 1998 nuclear explosion and India's self-defence initiative through the declaration as to the sixth nuclear weapon power once again manifest the pragmatic approach rather than idealism towards national security considerations. It appears the above decision was in tune with the belief that self-reliance in the economic and military domain is the sine qua non for pursuing strategic autonomy rooted in India's age-old strategic culture. Pakistan's clandestine warfare against India through cross-border terrorism and the overt, as well as covert nexus between Pakistan based international terror network and the totalitarian regime in China against India, are the gravest threat to India's national security (Subramanyam, 1990) It appears that such threat perception has prompted India to align with major players in the Indo - Pacific region, such as the US, Australia, and Japan. Again the 'Act East Policy' in pursuance of the 'Look East Policy' indicates that the post-cold war human security and national security considerations are proportionately intertwined in its security considerations.

India's national security policy is based on its firm belief that domestic strength rooted in economic and military self-reliance is the sine qua non for ensuring national security. In pursuance of this policy, initiatives such as 'Make in India', Sagarmala (Blue Economy initiative), and Athmanibhar Bharath are implemented. On the external front, the efforts to military self-reliance are conditioned by the threat posed to its security by the expansionist policy of the Communist regime in China (Suresh, 2020). In addition, India's policy initiatives such as SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region) have been considered a multilateral effort in the Indian Ocean region through concerted efforts of peace-loving democratic nations towards development. Unlike Communist China, the major objectives of India's multilateral efforts are towards mutual and shared benefits. This again reflects India's civilizational connect and belief that the entire humanity is one. Also reflects the personal traits or *tri-guna* of the present political leadership, especially the reflection of *sattva guna* or positive attitude.

Expansionist Policy of the People's Republic of China

The foundation of China's expansionist policy can be traced to its strategic culture reflected in the ancient text the 'Art of War' by Sun Tzu, a treatise on war strategy and expansionism. Unlike India, the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) was laid on a bloody war fought along with mainland China and forceful annexation of hitherto independent neighbouring states and also through a cultural purge affected during the cultural revolution (1966 – 1976) in China. Communist China's behaviour towards Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), and Xinxiang (Uighurs) as well as its immediate neighbours along the South China

Sea and the East China Sea further manifests expansionist policy persuaded by Beijing. At present China is facing the gravest threat from the international comity of nations due to initially concealing the spread of Wuhan originated pandemic Covid-19 in China. After the spread of the pandemic, China pursued an aggressive policy against the western bloc nations and India. This particular behaviour of China can be better explained as a policy initiative based on Sun Tzu's precept of 'appear weak when you are strong, and appear strong when you are weak' (Sawyer & Tzu, 1996). The Chinese policy of expansionism can also be better explained through the application of the *tri-guna* theory. It appears that the dominance of *tamasic guna* or negative personal traits reflected in the decision-makers of the PRC prompted them to follow an aggressive policy in the domestic and external sphere.

India-China Conflicts: Clashes of Civilisation

The India-China hostilities can also be viewed as the clashes of two ancient civilizations which were based on two divergent perspectives and practices related to culture. The PRC ideology has been rooted in the principle of 'power comes out of the barrel of gun' or violence and the Indian culture and practice have been based on peace at the individual, societal, and nation-state levels based on the precept of *Vasudaivakudumbakam* (the entire humanity as one family). The Chinese culture is based on the teachings of Su Tzu's 'art of war' and through communist principles such as the use of state power and violence, on the contrary, the Indian culture is rooted in welfare-administration envisaged in the ancient text *Arthashastra* and the preaching of Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi which envisions ahimsa or nonviolence and world peace. Thus, there exists a diversity between these two ancient cultural entities. Therefore, there is no platform for this contradictory culture to live under cordial relations. However, the existence of a buffer state between India and China till the annexation of Buddhist Tibet by China in 1950, maintained peace in the Himalayan region. India had no border with China except through Tibet. The clashes of civilisation are further augmented by the personal traits of the communist leadership in their quest for global dominance through aggressive external policy.

Another major difference between India and China is the nature of their political system. India is the largest functional democracy in the world and China's political system is totalitarian. The freedom of the people is curtailed in China whereas in India people enjoy all freedom including the right to choose their government through a fair and transparent periodic election. In China, on the contrary, there is a one-party system and people have no choice but to select the decision-makers. Though China's economy is liberal and market-oriented, its political system is authoritarian. The contradiction in the nature of the economic system and political system put pressure on authorities. Therefore, they resort to pursuing an expansionist policy and incorporating this component in their national security policy and follow expansionism as an instrument of foreign and security policy. India, on the contrary, follows the policy of pacific settlement of disputes through bilateral and multilateral negotiations. (Rangarajan, 2020)

Conclusion

Though there are internationally accepted norms that regulate the behaviour of nations for a peaceful world, there are nations that blatantly violate these principles

and practice expansionism as an instrument of state policy. Even now nations spend more on armament and arms race, towards the preparation of war. In the absence of a supranational agency to regulate the behaviour of nations, the modern nation-states are still in the Hobbesian state of nature. In such a situation the annals from the past show that the policy of appeasement is not an effective policy to confront an expansionist nation. The behaviour of nation-states can be better understood by analysing it through the application of *tri-guna* theory as it explains the subtleties in human nature.

Though there is marked advancement in science and technology, no major change is visible in the attitude and behaviour of the people. The development in the field of S&T has resulted in improving the living standards to a higher level, and the material comforts in life have improved manifold. However, human beings are generally a stubborn species, ingrained in their ways and there are no signs of fundamental transformation in their individual and collective behaviour so far from the days of Kautilya. Since there is no remarkable transformation in basic human nature, the ideas put forth in *Arthashastra* are relevant today in understanding the undercurrents in the modern nation-state system. Thus, India's national security depends largely on its ability to assess friends' and foes' security approaches and respond to them effectively. The noble ideals such as peace and cooperation are worth preaching, however, it is of little value to a nation that practices expansionism as an instrument of its foreign and security policy. The *tri-guna* theory reflects the influence of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* in the behavioural pattern of decision-makers, who act on behalf of nation-states and whose decisions are the choices of the nation-states.

An appraisal of the national security approach of India shows that the strategic culture rooted in the ancient text *Arthashastra* has influenced the decision-makers, especially to focus on both human security and national security concerns on an equal footing. The influence of Buddhist tenets is also reflected in the formulation of a non-aligned foreign and security policy. However, the evaluation of an existing situation reflected in the internal and external sphere by decision-makers also plays an important role in framing the security policy. Similarly, the character of the decision-makers also gets reflected in the behaviour of nations.

In the initial years of independent India, especially during Jawaharlal Nehru's period, India's security policy was marked by an appeasement approach towards expansionist China, though he was aware of the imminent threat from Communist China culminating in the India – China war of 1962. As pointed out by the former Foreign Secretary Shri Krishnan Srinivasan that Nehru saw China as a partner to create a new post-colonial world and his aspirations for a global role linked to a big power neglected India's national and security priorities at a great cost. (Srinivasan, 2020) An assertive policy was pursued during Indira Gandhi's period, especially the threat emanated from East Pakistan to India's security was eliminated through the creation of a new nation, Bangladesh. The 1974 nuclear explosion, further demonstrates the pursuance of an assertive policy to challenge the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which India considers a discriminatory treaty to address the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons and denial of rights of non-nuclear-weapon states, in a nuclear weapon era, the right to self-defence as envisaged in article 51 of the UN Charter. In 1998, India's self-declaration as a nuclear weapon power further manifested India's quest for maintaining the balance of power in the

South Asian region, especially in the context of an unresolved border problem with nuclear weapon power China.

The post-cold war policy of engagement with external powers instead of elimination in the Indian Ocean region had given a new orientation to the hitherto nonaligned labels. The India-US civilian nuclear agreement further cements its relationship with the US and also shows a strategic move to strengthen the solidarity of democratic nations to uphold a rules-based international order. The accelerated pace of India-US strategic and defence engagements, especially under the Narendra Modi government provided a new platform to the democratic nations to share their security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region, as the area is infected with the expansionist policy of China.

The spread of the global pandemic COVID-19 virus, which originated in Wuhan, China, points towards the imperatives of greater transparency in international relations. The suppression of facts, especially related to health issues, has harmed human life in a highly globalized world. Therefore, greater transparency in international relations is the sine qua non for the very survival of humankind. Here again, a convergence of democratic nations' solidarity to more open and transparent interstate relations is visible.

The totalitarian regime in China follows the policy of expansionism as an instrument of its state policy and considers that such a policy ensures its national security. The attitude of the PRC towards TAR, Taiwan, and Hong Kong and treatment of minorities including the Uighurs in Xinjiang province, its aggressive moves in the South China Sea and the East China Sea further manifest China's expansionist strategy to ensure its national security. The recent intrusion of China along the Mc Mahon line, the border between India and TAR, shows the offensive moves of Beijing.

The threat emanating from an expansionist China to the national security of India has been strengthened with the incursion of China into Galwan Valley. However, the timely action by the Indian government and the support it receives from major players, the US and EU, point towards the emergence of a new power configuration at the international level. Any solidification of an international order bereft of totalitarian states and supporters of an international terror network, would not only enhance India's national security but also elevates its international role in the emerging global order. The major threat to India's national security emanates from totalitarianism and cross-border terrorism and the nexus between them. Since the *tri-guna* theory is rooted in understanding the dynamics of human nature it helps us to comprehend the dynamics in the national security strategies of India and China. It also explains why China follows an aggressive security strategy and expansionism as an instrument of security policy, and India on the contrary adopted a conciliatory approach and follows *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* as the basic principle of its security policy. The sattvic or positive personality traits are well-reflected in the actions of the Indian decision-makers, like pacific settlement of disputes and contributions towards world peace. And India is the largest functional democracy in the world that ensures fundamental rights to all. On the contrary, the PRC decision-makers follow tamasic or negative traits as they practice expansionism as an instrument of their security policy and there is no transparency in the administration under one-party rule. In the domestic sphere, the PRC government through authoritarian rule the democratic aspirations of the people are suppressed.

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