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## INDIA'S NEUTRALITY, AS JUDGED FROM HER PARTICIPATION IN UNITED NATIONS DEBATES

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This paper seeks to judge India's Neutrality in the light of her participation in U.N. debates. For purposes of manageability and convenience, attention has been confined only to two major questions of the day—the Question of Fundamental Rights and of Aggression.

### FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

In this instance, India's attitude to the question of apartheid on the one hand, and the Communist outrages in the field of Natural Rights, on the other hand, provide an interesting study in contrast. It will be no exaggeration if we say that right from the day India became an independent nation and a member of the United Nations, she has taken up the sternest possible attitude towards the apartheid policy of South Africa. Thus, in the very first year of her Independence, in the course of the Second session of the General Assembly, the Indian delegate made so violent an attack on apartheid that the Western powers found it necessary to request India to couch her resolution in polite language for fear of offending the susceptibilities of the other party. In reply one Indian representative observed "We are told to couch our invitations

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and requests in polite language. With these it is hoped that the United Nations will mollify the susceptibilities of our South African friends. Let me assure you that they will not be mollified. . . (that) any resolution passed by the General Assembly will not be carried out. . . it is best to throw away the Charter . . . if individual states are allowed year after year to say that they will not carry out the recommendations of the United Nations."

And, India since 1947, has continued her policy of the strictest condemnation of apartheid. In the Third Session in 1948, our delegate said, "India would not tolerate distinction which offends the dignity of the human persons", while in the Seventh Session in 1952, the Indian delegate described Africa's racial policy as "a menace to all that the U.N. stands for".

India's moral indignation at South Africa's policies sharply contrasts with her attitude towards the Communist outrages in the field of human rights. In 1949-50, the General Assembly discussed in three Sessions the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in E. Europe.

In the first instance, when the question, whether the item should at all be placed on the agenda, was mooted, many pro-Communist states began to question the competence of the U.N. to discuss the East European situation. Now, India which had so eagerly claimed competence in other matters of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms refrained from entering the debate.

In the following Session, Articles 55 and 56 were invoked and Resolution was tabled asking the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion. The Resolution was prefaced by the following "(The General Assembly) Expresses its continued interest in and increased concern at the grave accusations made against Bulgaria, Hungary and Rumania" and "Records its opinion that the refusal by the government of Bulgaria, Hungary and Rumania to co-operate in its efforts to examine the grave charges with regard to the observance of human rights and fundamental freedom, justifies this concern of the General Assembly." India, it is again significant to note, abstained along with Yugoslavia and other countries.

The fifth Session of the General Assembly was also devoted to discussing the suppression of human rights in Hungary. The American delegate Mr. Cohen, terminating a debate in which the shocking treatment of Cardinal Mindzenty in Hungary was the main centre of discussion, said "The United States was convinced that all governments, regardless

of ideology, must agree on the fundamental rights of all peoples if there was to be a beginning of international understanding. The suppression of those rights had a direct bearing on the freedom and independence of nations." India, again, at no stage, participated in the debate although in the case of South Africa, Mrs. Pandit had consistently reminded member-states that "peace could not be secured without observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms."

Similarly in the 9th Session of the General Assembly, India's behaviour at the time of discussion on the issue of Forced Labour in the Communist world showed markedly less concern over Fundamental Rights where it was a question of violation by Communist countries. In this instance, the Indian delegate not merely abstained but also opposed the Resolution. Our delegation made it clear that India was not supporting forced labour; India "condemned it (forced labour) in whatever form it might appear" but "regretted that the *Ad Hoc* Committee on Forced Labour has been unable to deal with the question more thoroughly. There were other types of Forced Labour which deserved to be condemned no less than those which the Committee has considered." Thus, in this case India not only abstained but also flared up over what it described as the misleading and deliberately calculated selectivity of the area of inquiry.

Little wonder that Western observers moan, "Turning to the long and bleak history of indignant Western complaints brought against Communist outrages in the field of human rights, one looks in vain for even a solitary example of the Indian delegation rallying to a call to stand and be counted."<sup>1</sup> Or "Over the years I have heard Krishna Menon deliver many speeches in the assembly. All too often, he was had unkind things to say about Western countries and Western colonialism. Yet, I do not recall that I ever heard him utter any real words of criticism against the Soviet Union or the Soviet brand of colonialism."<sup>2</sup>

### THE QUESTION OF AGGRESSION

A comparative study of India's attitude to the question of aggression shows the same tendency of adopting a double standard of judgment. India's attitude in the case of Dutch rule in Indonesia and Anglo-French invasion of Egypt, may, in this respect, be contrasted with her attitude to the question of Hungary and Korea.

Prior to the settlement of the Indonesia question in favour of

independence from the Netherlands, India in the United Nations condemned "the outrageous behaviour" of the Dutch and wanted the U.N. to meet it with the "greatest of promptness and vigour." In 1949 Nehru even accused some of the Western powers with "tacit approval or acceptance of this aggression" and indignantly charged that "the U.N. had been flouted and its expressed will set at naught."

The same moral wrath was showered on the West when in 1956, after the Israeli invasion of Egypt, the British and French intervened. The Indian representative, Arthur Lal speaking before the emergency session of the General Assembly in November 1956, described the Anglo-French intervention as "a manifestation of the law of the jungle." "A mockery was being made of the Charter," said Arthur Lal, "and the organs of the U.N. were being affronted by aggression and invasion." A week later Krishna Menon participated in the debate to say, "Without any superlatives. . . we regard the action of Israel as an invasion of Egyptian territory, and the introduction of the forces of the United Kingdom and France as an aggression without qualification."

These and other instances show that India has never hesitated to condemn aggression from the Western quarter. Her delegation has time and again described "Imperialism as permanent aggression." All this is something of which India may legitimately be proud. But it does not seem that India has kept her record even as between the Western bloc and the Communists, for every time a question of Communist aggression came before the General Assembly, India either abstained or took up a comparatively more moderate position.

Thus take the case of Korea. Here was a case of unprovoked aggression, by North Korea on South Korea. The U.N. had to act. In Acheson's words Korea had become "the supreme test of collective security." Nehru recognised this. He admitted the fact of aggression when in August 1950 he outlined India's attitude to the Korean problem as follows: "Our policy is first, of course, that aggression has taken place by North Korea over South Korea. That is a wrong act that has to be condemned, that has to be resisted. Secondly, that so far as possible the war should not spread beyond Korea. And thirdly, that we should explore the means of ending this war."

But what is surprising is that after having conceded the fact of aggression, India's role in the U.N. seemed more concerned with placating the Communist bloc than with condemning the aggression. This India did by linking up the Korean war with the larger "China question." The Indian delegation kept on insisting, much to the irritation of the

Western powers, that the problems of aggression and the war in Korea could be solved only by giving Communist China her rightful place in the U.N. and according her due and necessary recognition.

To this insistence, the American delegate's reply was clear and logical. The decision to seat China in the U.N. is one which must be reached by the U.N. on its own merits. In fact, the position America took up was that this was certainly not the ripe time for taking any such decision; for the solution to so vital a question should not be dictated by "an unlawful aggression, or by any other conduct which subjects the U.N. to coercion or duress."<sup>3</sup>

But India persisted in seeing sinister designs in American moves. It almost seemed to India as if the United States and Kuomintang China were in league seeking to re-open the Chinese Civil war and settle once and for all, the vital states in the Great Power rivalry. What, was, however, of considerable annoyance to the West and other observers was India's refusal to accept American assurance to the contrary and her ever-ready willingness to accept whatever China said at its face value. Thus, in the Fifth Session, the Indian delegate stated that according to the information the Indian Prime Minister had received, the Peking Government was eager to have negotiations for the settlement of the Korean question. The American representative in the Committee I meeting of the same session stated in reply, "The U.S.A. has the greatest respect for India and for the sincerity of the representative of India;" but contended that he could not agree "that the further communication Peking had addressed to the Indian ambassador. . . changed the situation very much." Nevertheless, India continued to oppose the move to brand China or North Korea as the aggressor. India's policy in this respect was laid down by the Prime Minister in 1951 thus: "A proposal has been made in the U.N. to name China the aggressor and it is possibly being discussed today. This proposal cannot lead to peace. It can only lead to intensification of conflicts and it might perhaps close the door to an attempt at solution by negotiations." To this approach of the Indian delegation, the American representative, Mr. Austin, had the following to say in reply "Let us ask ourselves with honesty and candour whether the United Nations should put itself in a position of supplicant to a transgressor and make further appeals to him. In the view of. . . the U.S. Government the U.N. has already delayed in naming the aggressor."

A final illustration of India's "neutral" behaviour in the U.N. is her reaction to Soviet intervention in Hungary in November 1956. The

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 Hungarian tragedy provoked several nations to condemn the Soviet intervention as "brutal aggression," "a flagrant violation of all laws of decency" etc. etc. As the American representative, Mr. Lodge said, "But the facts of Soviet behaviour now revealed whether the USSR really showed respect for fundamental human rights and the purposes and principles of the Charter. . . the basic and fundamental right of self-determination which so many members had endorsed time and again, was in grave danger. If we fail to act, it will constitute a betrayal of the people of Hungary, who have appealed for aid." The question at stake was simple: Here were the Hungarian people, who sick of Communist rule, desired to replace it by the rule of some other national party. USSR having a direct interest in the retention of the rule of the Communist Party over Hungary intervened to uphold the Communist regime. This, to all practical purposes constituted a denial of the right of self-determination to the people of Hungary. On the floor of the General Assembly three key resolutions were tabled with a view to condemning the Soviet suppression of the revolt. Each was passed by a substantial majority, but each was opposed by the Soviet Bloc and India abstained;

- (a) On November 4, 1956, on a resolution calling upon the USSR to desist from attack against the people of Hungary and to withdraw its forces.
- (b) On December 12, 1956, on a Resolution condemning Soviet action in depriving Hungary of its freedom and independence.
- (c) On January 10, 1957, on a Resolution calling for establishing a Committee of five nations to investigate conditions in Hungary.

What was India's defence on the floor of the General Assembly for abstaining from voting on these three resolutions? Krishna Menon, leader of the Indian delegation argued "while India is not neutral where human freedom is concerned," nevertheless, "we cannot in any circumstances disregard the sovereign rights of members." The same argument was repeated, when on November 9, Cuba, Ireland, Peru, Pakistan and Italy, moved a Resolution calling for a withdrawal of Soviet forces from Hungary and demanded that "free elections be held in Hungary under U.N. auspices, as soon as law and order have been restored." Opposing the resolution, in the second emergency session,

Menon said, "My delegation cannot subscribe, at any time, to phraseology or proposals before the Assembly which disregards the sovereignty of states represented here. For example, we cannot say that a sovereign member of the Assembly can be called upon to submit its election and everything else to the U.N. without its agreement. Therefore, any approach we make as though this were a colonial country which is not represented here at the U.N., is not in accordance with the facts or law of the position."

Two reasons seem to have motivated the Indian delegation to take up the position it did. Firstly, the attitude of treating the Hungarian episode as "a civil conflict." Secondly, India's fear that if the right of self-determination were granted to the people of Hungary, Pakistan may demand the same right in the case of Kashmir. India's position in brief, may be explained in terms of self-interest. And India would perhaps have done best to make this position of hers clear. But she needlessly brought on herself the wrath of Western powers by taking up the role of the moral preacher. As a moral preacher she could not afford to be profoundly shocked at violations of human rights and freedom by the Western powers and seek to apply a different standard of judgment for similar violations of the Charter by the Soviet bloc countries. This is not to deny that after November 14, India began to reveal greater realism on the question of Hungary but the fact stands that India's response was belated and not as condemnatory of Soviet violation as was her habit to be when the western countries were charged with similar violations of the Charter.

Thus India's attitude as judged from her behaviour in the U.N. does indicate a Soviet bloc bias. It is difficult to find out the exact causes for India's abovementioned behaviour. It is due to naivete, opportunism and lack of understanding? All the three charges have been levelled against India. In some cases India's behaviour has been motivated and rightly so by consideration of national self-interest as in the case of her opposition to Pakistan and others' demand for "free elections" in Hungary. In general way it is also correct to attribute India's behaviour to her ignorance of Communist realities. Like most Afro-Asian countries, India has experienced western domination and the scars of western colonialism still remain. On the other hand, India, has had no opportunity of being an eye witness to the Soviet brand of colonialism. Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria are far away places and what happens there has no immediate impact on her people or on her national objectives. Why then get involved in cold war issues?

Then again, in part at least, India's behaviour can be explained in terms of her deep seated belief that the USA and the West want to use the U.N. to keep the cold war alive. Thus, in case of Hungary, India, rightly or wrongly, seemed to believe the Western efforts were not designed to alleviate conditions in Hungary but to elicit further disapproval of the Soviet Union.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Berkes and Bedi, *The Diplomacy of India*, p. 45, Stanford University Press, 1958.
2. L.W. Martin, *Neutrality and Non-Alignment*, p. 140, Praeger, New York, 1962.
3. Vide the Nehru—Acheson correspondence.