

Evolution of non aligned movement



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The Non-Aligned Movement has historically maintained a clear and unequivocal principled position against all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and any kind of religious intolerance.

In the latest Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Havana in September 2006[i], the heads of State or Government of the member states reaffirmed once again their condemnation of all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including the platforms and activities related thereto, which constitute serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and impede equal opportunity.

At the same time, they expressed dismay at instances of religious and cultural prejudices, misunderstanding, intolerance and discrimination on the basis of religion or beliefs, and called for the full respect of cultural and religious diversity.

If we flip back and ruminate on the pages of history, the Movement's opposition to all these manifestations can be clearly recalled. The Non-Aligned Movement also has always stressed its serious concern on the resurgence of contemporary forms of such abhorrent crimes in various parts of the world.

The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, 2001[ii] became a milestone in the struggle for equal human rights among all human beings. The effective implementation of the Durban's agreements poses a major challenge now throughout the world; furthermore, it is a debt owed to millions of victims of these abominable practices throughout history.

In the era that we live in, being witness to the worrisome re-emergence and consolidation of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in various parts of the world has become a pedestrian affair.

The establishment of associations and political parties, with a racist platform, the social exclusion and marginalisation of the indigenous peoples, minorities and migrants[iii], the proliferation of discriminatory migration laws and policies[iv], and the passing of anti-terrorist legislation that provide broad spaces to arbitrariness and the exercise of public authority on discriminatory and xenophobic basis, continue to be a matter of concern.

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) being an international organisation of states considering themselves not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc. The movement was largely the brainchild of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, president of Egypt Gamal Abdul Nasser and Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito. It was founded in Belgrade (1961); as of 2009, it has 118 members and 17 observer countries.[v]

The purpose of the organisation as stated in the Havana Declaration of 1979 is to ensure “ the national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of non-aligned countries” in their “ struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and all forms of foreign aggression, occupation, domination, interference or hegemony as well as against great power and bloc politics[vi].” They represent nearly two-thirds of the United Nations's members and comprise 55% of the world population, particularly countries considered to be developing or part of the third world[vii].

Since the end of the Cold War and the formal end of colonialism, the Non-aligned movement has been forced to redefine itself and reinvent its purpose in the current world system. A major question has been whether many of its foundational ideologies, principally national independence, territorial integrity, and the struggle against colonialism and imperialism, can be applied to contemporary issues.

The movement has emphasised its principles of multilateralism, equality, and mutual non-aggression in attempting to become a stronger voice for the global South[viii], and an instrument that can be utilised to promote the needs of member nations at the international level and strengthen their political leverage when negotiating with developed nations. In its efforts to advance Southern interests[ix], the movement has stressed the importance of cooperation and unity amongst member states[x], but as in the past, cohesion remains a problem since the size of the organisation and the divergence of agendas and allegiances present the ongoing potential for fragmentation.

While agreement on basic principles has been smooth, taking definitive action vis-à-vis particular international issues has been rare, with the movement preferring to assert its criticism or support rather than pass hard-line resolutions[xi].

The movement continues to see a role for itself, as in its view, the world's poorest nations remain exploited and marginalised, no longer by opposing superpowers, but rather in a uni-polar world[xii], and it is Western hegemony

and neo-colonialism that that the movement has really re-aligned itself against.

It opposes foreign occupation, interference in internal affairs, and aggressive unilateral measures, but it has also shifted to focus on the socio-economic challenges facing member states, especially the inequalities manifested by globalisation and the implications of neo-liberal policies. The non-aligned movement has identified economic underdevelopment, poverty, and social injustices as growing threats to peace and security.

It is in this context, that it would be apt to launch oneself onto a provocative and entertaining meditation on what can be called “ xenophilia- an affinity for strangers”, a very deep but rarely acknowledged aspect in human psychology.

It was at the heart of the Non-Aligned Movement, with whole nations taking pride in the trans-national friendships of their leaders, such as Nehru, Sukarno, and Nasser. It would be safe to add Mao Tse-tung to the list as well. Roads were named after leaders from other continents, a gesture not without meaning, as one can clearly argue the paucity of such a consideration in the naming of streets in London or New York.

Contrary to popular acceptance, the real cosmopolitanism is to be found in the Third World, not the sophisticated West, despite its gamut of globe-trotting businessmen and tourists, touring the Holy Land or Pyramids, oblivious to the real lives of the locals[xiii].

The Non-Aligned Movement has had been quite successful at serving the cause of East-West understanding. Over the years, with the holding of meetings of leaders from all over the world, the deliberations and ministrations have seen the development of awareness of the aspirations, defeats and disappointments of colonized peoples as they figure out their place in the world.

The Movement has set itself the task these days of fighting the escalation of words and arms between East and West, particularly between Islam and West.

The maturation of the Movement in the recent past has been so profound, that the summit in Havana made headlines in the international media as a revived forum for nations that want to take an independent position in a one superpower world, even though it was subject to much scorn and ignorance by U. S. commentators.

The tone was set when two leading adversaries of the United States, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, had embraced each other.[xiv]

For a country like India, one of the founding nations of the movement, we would be reluctant to embrace anti-Americanism, but still it would be understandable to endorse the impulse to stand independent of the United States.[xv]

What the Non-Aligned Movement now, and always has, expected of its member nations is to withdraw them from hanging onto the coattails of

Washington, neither does it demand of them to spew invectives at the US. However some NAM countries have clearly disregarded that and have afforded themselves to be anti-American.

Thus one can argue that some member nations with their strong anti-American rhetoric, have bared their fangs out, throwing all winds of logic out of the window.

They have thus, consciously disregarded the binding principles and values embodied in the agreement towards creation of the Movement, as such a rising appeal for an anti-US front is self -defeating while being reconciled with the core-principle of staying independent or ‘ non-aligned’.

If we were to just sample some of the sound bytes emerging from Havana. Cuba’s acting president Raul Castro, brother of the ailing Fidel Castro, said in his inaugural address to the NAM summit: ” When there is no longer a Cold War, the United States spends one billion dollars a year in weapons and soldiers and it squanders a similar amount in commercial publicity. To think that a social and economic order that has proven unsustainable could be maintained by force is simply an absurd idea”. He was enthusiastically backed by Iran’s Mahmoud Ahmedinejad and Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez.

FOREGROUND

If we are to delve into the inspiration behind the ascent of such a Movement, where disparate cultures and civilizations separated by thousands of miles, was successful, the one aspect that stands out was the general impression that the East had lost out to the West.

In the Cold War environment of the 1950's and 60's the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa found themselves facing a decision about alignment with one or the other of the two camps, a process vigorously encouraged by the superpowers and their allies. Non-alignment provided an alternative, an instrument for non-involvement:

“ The concept of no-alignment as envisaged by the founders- Nehru, Nasser and Tito-was to serve the purpose of a safety valve for the smaller nations against pressures from the big powers and as a profilaxis against being drawn into the politics of Cold War”.[xvi]

Indeed for India, and a majority of Afro-Asian nations emerging from years of colonialism, the idea of remaining outside the influence of two super-powers through non-alignment was seen as the best option: a message from the Third World of their wish to remain free and immune from superpower Cold War rivalry.

But it held more than that for Nehru for whom “ non-alignment was not conceived merely as a response to the military blocs or the Cold War, but as a global egalitarian movement to restructure the existing inequitable world in all its aspects; political, social and economic....”[xvii]

The choice of non-alignment in the wake of freedom, was an obvious one, even an unavoidable one. The two men most responsible for India's external relations, Nehru and Krishna Menon, moulded the doctrine into a global weapon to protect itself and others against past injustice and inequitable practices.

Ramachandran defines the multi-dimensional thrust of their policy fulcrum:

Nehru and Menon together turned non-alignment into an effective world movement against colonialism, imperialism, racialism and the governing menace of military alliances[xviii].

POLICIES, TERMS AND MEANINGS

As useful to a better understanding of India's policy, pivotal to its external relations, the use of the terms 'neutrality' and 'neutralism' to mean the same thing as 'non alignment', demands clarification, because, from India's perspective, the differences in meaning between neutralism and non-alignment is an important one. Besides, the Western political commentators often used the word neutral to mean non-aligned.

While the concept of India's non-alignment may have defied a precise interpretation, neutrality it certainly was not. Nehru, for one, was at pains to correct the misunderstanding in the West that India's foreign policy was synonymous with neutrality. He explains the distinction with this interpretation of neutrality.

.... it means a person who sits on the fence and who cannot decide between right and wrong. India is certainly not neutral.... She believes in non-alignment because she feels that the only way to achieve peace is to extend the climate of peace and to prevent the Cold War from spreading into other parts of the world.[xix]

Author R Thakur extends the Nehru metaphor with his comment that, ‘ they saw themselves not so much as fence-sitters as believers in the need to uproot the fence.’[xx]

Obviously non-alignment was more than a mere moral compass, it was an active foreign policy that involved India in international conflict resolution and the attainment of peace. It was a multi-faceted foreign policy instrument which gave India freedom to choose when, where and how it would involve itself in international questions while protecting its own security.

During the debate in the Lok Sabha on Korea, Nehru referred to neutrality:

..... when you say you are neutral that is a policy of not doing anything...The whole essence of our policy is independence of any action, that is to say that at any moment we decide for ourselves what is best in our interests and in the interest of world peace...[xxi]

BANDUNG: A THIRD WORLD VOICE

NAM, which effectively represents the Third World giving it an Afro-Asian character, can be traced to the 1955 Bandung Conference which brought together leaders from Asia and Africa representing twenty-five countries; prominent among them were Nehru of India, Chou En Lai of China, Tito of Yugoslavia, Nasser of Egypt, Sukarno of Indonesia, and U Nu of Burma.

Given the heterogeneous nature of the Bandung grouping, finding a single unifying criterion for determining membership of NAM, on which to formulate objectives was no mean task. One writer describes this dilemma for the Bandung Conference organizers, (an informal group comprising India,

Pakistan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Burma, referred to as the Colombo Powers): ‘ Ideologies and military alliances have now so cut across frontiers of geography and skin that even to agree on Agenda was no easy undertaking[xxii].’

The relevance of non-alignment to India’s relationship with the West in the 1950’s, the bloc seen by India as obsessed with the containment of Communism, and as a consequence, actively involved in drawing Asia’s newly independent states to support the strategic goals of the Western camp, becomes more apparent when the aims of the Bandung conference are examined.

To promote goodwill and cooperation among the nations of Asia and Africa..... to consider social, economic, and cultural problems,.....to consider problems of special interest....(such as) racialism, colonialism.... to view the position of Asia and Africa ad their peoples in the world today and the contribution they can make to the promotion of world peace and co-operation[xxiii].

The Bandung Conference crysallised Nehru’s plea for political and economic equity to generate a Third World Voice. It created an awareness in the Third World of their entitlement to a greater say in, and a fairer share of, the world system, ‘ an augur of a future protest against the subordinate status of the developing countries in the international system[xxiv].’

Indian writer C. S. Jha saw the Bandung declaration as having affected global interaction, providing the newly independent countries with a model to guide their post-colonial futures. He describes the historic Bandung affirmation as <https://assignbuster.com/evolution-of-non-aligned-movement/>

having ‘ powerfully influenced the subsequent course of international relations and became the code of the nations that emerged from colonial domination after 1955[xxv].’

For India, it was as exciting as 1947 and independence. The stature of Prime Minister Nehru[xxvi], who played an initiatory role in bringing the non-aligned philosophy to fruition, rose in the Third World in the aftermath of this preliminary gathering of Afro-Asian states. Nehru’s modest post-conference assessment of the Bandung gathering was that ‘ it may develop into something which holds together.’ In the Lok Sabha however, he was more expansive:

While the achievements and the significance of the meeting at Bandung have been great and epoch-making, it would be a misreading of history to regard Bandung as though it was an isolated occurrence and not part of a greater movement of human history[xxvii].

This all helps demonstrate Nehru’s unflinching commitment to world peace, the process of decolonisation, racial equality and fairer global economic equity, none of which figured in the West’s security driven, alliance diplomacy. This also helps to explain the West’s failure to persuade many of the newly independent countries, (which sought refuge in NAM after the rigours of colonialism), to align themselves with the Western camp.

Furthermore, to add to their woes, the West, spearheaded by South Africa and supported by the likes of Australia, Spain, relentlessly followed the state policy of racialism in the form of Apartheid.

Thus, India eventually became not only ' the pioneer of modern Asian nationalism'[xxviii], through its success in winning independence from Britain, but also, by remaining in the Commonwealth as a Republic, it ' established the bona fides of the new Commonwealth, based less on blood than on will[xxix], ' it enabled many other Afro-Asian states to follow suit, undeterred by the experience of racialism and colonialism.

The Apartheid policies were not only at odds with the Commonwealth ideal of equality of its members, but also strenuously opposed by India's Nehru who was constrained to comment that ' if there is no solution to this problem very soon, the whole of Africa may be ablaze[xxx].'

The declaration of Commonwealth principles, to which member nations were signatories at the Singapore Conference, was an important starting point. It states, inter alia:

We recognise racial prejudice as a dangerous sickness threatening the healthy development of the human race and racial discrimination as an unmitigated evil of society. Each of us will vigorously combat this evil within our own nation. No country will afford to regimes which practice racial discrimination assistance which in its own judgement directly contributes to the pursuit or consolidation of this evil policy[xxxi].

CONCLUSION

Probably, the most horrifying event following 9/11 is the extraordinary resurgence of imperialism as witnessed in the unfolding catastrophe in Iraq. Relations are being broken off, with the empire of the West splitting from the Third World, inciting xenophobia.

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European imperialism presented the choice between resistance and submission; cooperation was not an option. Europe unleashed violence on a scale unprecedented on those shores of Asia, Africa, as it did in the Americas. The peaceful trade of Muslims, Jews and Hindus in the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf that lasted 500 years was ended overnight, and Portuguese hegemony lasted until the arrival of the Dutch and then the British and then the Americans.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was no 'proof of the vindication of capitalism' as conventional wisdom would have it today, but rather 'the last 15 years show that untrammelled capitalism leads to war and empire. The uncontested reign of one system should bring peace, but we see the opposite, with dozens of wars. There was more agreement when the UN was founded.

[xxxii]'

We are at a very different moment in history now, when the words Non-Aligned seem somehow empty and discredited; today the movement is often dismissed not just as a political failure, but as a minor footnote to the great power rivalries of the Cold War. It is true of course, that the movement had many shortcomings and met with many failures. Yet it is also worth remembering that the Non-Aligned Movement as such was merely the institutional aspect of something that was much broader, wider and more powerful: this, as has been said before, was the post-war ethos of decolonization, which was a political impulse that had deep historical roots and powerful cultural resonances.

In the field of culture, among other things, it represented an attempt to restore and recommence the exchanges and conversations that had been interrupted by the long centuries of European imperial dominance. It was, in this sense, the necessary and vital counterpart of the nationalist idiom of anti-colonial resistance.

In the West, Third World nationalism is often presented as an ideology of xenophobia and parochialism. But the truth is that many of these movements of resistance tried very hard, within their limited means, to create a universalism of their own. In that period, any citizen of the Third World will recall how powerfully they were animated by an emotion that is rarely named: xenophilia, the love of the other, the affinity for strangers - a feeling that lives very deep in the human heart, but whose very existence is rarely acknowledged.

Even in the 19th century, the high noon of Empire, people from Africa, Asia and elsewhere, sought each other out, wrote letters to each other, and stayed in each other's homes while travelling. Lately, a great number of memoirs and autobiographies have been published that attest to the depth and strength of these ties. It was no accident therefore that Mahatma Gandhi chose to stop in Egypt, in order to see Sa'ad Zaghloul before proceeding to the Round Table Conference in London.

Yet it would be idle to pretend that solutions could be found by looking backwards in time. That was a certain historical moment and it has passed.

Except that this time we must correct the mistake that lay at the heart of that older anti-colonial impulse - which is that we must not only include the

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West within this spectrum of desire, we must also acknowledge that both the West and we ourselves have been irreversibly changed by our encounter with each other. We must recognize that in the West, as in Asia, Africa and elsewhere, there are great numbers of people who, by force of circumstance, have become xenophiles, in the deepest sense, of acknowledging that in matters of language, culture and civilization, their heritage, like ours, is fragmented, fissured and incomplete.