India's China PERSPECTIVE

Author with Deng Xiaoping, 1981

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Foreword

I first got to know Subramanian Swamy as a result of the suspension of democratic procedures during the Emergency imposed by Premier Indira Gandhi in the mid-1970s. Swamy was a Member of the Lok Sabha who opposed the Emergency and had to flee to avoid arrest. He became a Scarlet Pimpernel-type figure, making unannounced appearances in the capital, sometimes even in the environs of the parliament building, always evading capture, irritating the premier by his denunciations of her in the foreign media. With the end of the Emergency, Swamy resumed his political career and eventually achieved cabinet rank.

My friendship with Swamy grew not as a result of my amateur interest in Indian politics, however, but from our shared professional interest in China. In his own field of economics, Swamy for many years ploughed a lonely furrow, and only now are other China experts beginning to accept the cogency of his views. It is a feature of his considerable intelligence that he thinks hard about intellectual problems and once he believes he understands what the empirical evidence reveals, he will embrace those conclusions however strong the opposition.

Foreign relations is a field very different from economics. Index numbers and equations do not give one the answers. But as a politician, Swamy has spent a great deal of time on India's foreign relations, often taking unpopular stands on thorny issues. He was ahead of the game, for instance, on the desirability of India establishing relations with Israel. It remains to be seen if the analysis and the policy conclusions in this new work find general acceptance.

Swamy is concerned to demonstrate that Sino-Indian relations were, for centuries, nothing but friendly. They came to grief over the border and Tibet. It is certainly the case that Tibet is a central issue in Sino-Indian relations. It is also almost certainly true that China harbours deep suspicions as to India's real feelings about Tibet. Swamy argues for India's total 'transparency' on Tibet, steering between the Scylla of throwing the

Dalai Lama out and the Charybdis of support for Tibetan independence. Whether China would be convinced of the sincerity of such transparency before a settlement of the Sino-Indian border to Beijing's satisfaction is another matter. Aksai Chin still looms large, with neither side having yet shown any disposition to give way.

Swamy advocates that India should make a 'compact' with China for the 21st century and not participate in the containment of China. What this means in concrete terms he leaves for a subsequent volume. But the geopolitical strategy underlying his fierce nationalism seems clear: in the increasingly globalised world of WTO, dominated by a single super power, an entente between New Delhi and Beijing would be a powerful bulwark against what the Chinese would consider the hegemonic proclivities of Washington and its allies.

Strangely, for all his trenchant criticism of Jawaharlal Nehru, Swamy's vision resembles that entertained by India's first premier in the heyday of 'hindi-chini bhai-bhai.' Although Swamy has none of the illusions which clouded judgements in the early 1950s, it is still uncertain that, even stripped of the euphoria, that vision is any more valid today. Beijing's leaders accept that at least the U.S. is of equal status to China, and in the hope of building up their bargaining position with the Americans, they are forging an entente with the other country they once acknowledged as their equal, their onetime ally Russia.

For China truly to acknowledge equivalence and mutual dependence with India—as opposed to the time-honoured and well-worn platitudes and courtesies of VVIP visits—would require, in my view, a considerable change in the mindset of China's leaders. Perhaps that may be possible with the imminent retirement of Jiang Zemin and the present generation of leaders, but the concept of China's superiority is deeply imbedded in the Chinese psyche and unlikely to disappear any time soon. Swamy will work with his customary energy to prove this judgement excessively pessimistic. I wish him well and look forward to the complementary volume which will lay out how his aims are to be achieved.

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Preface

In India the perspective on China today is paradoxically at one end, one of an aggressive and expansionist threat, and at the other extreme, that of China as a sister ancient civilization. This contradictory perspective causes wild swings in moods in Indian public perception influenced by reports in the media of Chinese 'unfriendliness' and perfidy, and alternatively of 'warm gestures' bordering in euphoria, causing unstable cyclic movements in policy towards China, which has sown confusion in China as well and thus destabilized our relations with that country.

In this study I propose to argue that the first requirement of an effective Indian policy towards China is to build a national consensus on how we define our complex of interests vis-a-vis China, in a world that has dramatically changed since 1962, the year of humiliating border conflict with China.

China's negative perceptions of India is articulated by that 1962 armed conflict: That it was the result of Indian unreasonableness; that India wanted to inherit the ill gotten concessions obtained by British Imperialists from a weak China; that India is not reconciled to the situation in Tibet notwithstanding recognizing Tibet as an autonomous region of China; that India is seeking domination of South Asia; and that India is deliberately using the "myth" of a Chinese threat to find a pretext for its nuclear pursuit in defiance of the formed international opinion on disarmament, and to instead become a global power thus with the patronage of the US, which is seen as increasingly turning to developing options to contain China.

As the new millennium begins, there is however a substantial economic gap between China and India, but if as this study concludes, India were to concentrate on produc-

ing a significantly accelerated growth in agriculture, information technology, services, and exports during the next two decades, the gap with China can be quickly bridged because of the current plateauing of Chinese growth rates. Clearly, India will have to make strenuous efforts fiscally, to raise the rate of investment to reach or cross 30 per cent, as a minimum condition for commencing on closing the China-India gap. The task of course is within reach and it is a target for which the Indian people would be willing to make a sacrifice. "Catching up with China" is a worthwhile slogan for India's new millennium, along with a national commitment to growth at 10 per cent per year. Both goals are feasible and attainable, within India's grasp and at striking distance. The only question is whether the policy is upto it, or will it sink further into the communal and fundamentalist morass that it is already knee deep in.

Whether or not India becomes a global power in the 21st century depends on India alone that would require in the country a combination of political unity, economic growth, social cohesion, credible military capability and shrewd diplomacy. It is not a status anybody can then deny India. But by the same token, no power is going to confer that status on India until then. Thus, if in the years ahead, India fails to attain global status, it will be due to its domestic and diplomatic failures, and not due to any international perfidy or lack of patronage. Such a global status would have a multiplier effect if India is also able to harmonize its interest with China and live in peace with the neighbour. The question is how such an harmonization can come about.

India thus has to define its perspective on China with clarity and transparency: Does India want a compact with China in the twenty-first century (Choice I), or does India want to participate in the growing prospect to contain China (Choice II)?

A China-India compact, of nearly 36 per cent of the world's population, would not only alter the strategic map of the world, but offer unique economic opportunities for

joint ventures under the WTO disciplines especially in textiles, services and information technology. A China-India joint supervision of the Malacca Straits would impact on nearly 75 per cent of the world's commercial sea traffic. Such a compact has thus multi-dimensional possibilities, but it is not easy to effect it. It is however not impossible. It depends on the astuteness of leadership to be able to understand and accommodate the China perspectives, and calibrated without of course, alarming the world's sole super power, the USA.

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Chapter 1

The Historical Perspective

I

It is generally accepted that contacts between India and China began as early as 400 B.C. although there is as yet no definite record to establish this. However, K.M. Panikkar [25] has written extensively on the subject, and we have drawn heavily on his materials in this chapter. Trade and commerce as also cultural contacts flourished between the two countries via the Silk Road. The most significant aspect of the ancient contacts was the establishment of Buddhism in China. The Chinese had responded with great enthusiasm to the arrival of Buddhist missionaries and thereafter initiated a wave to bring Indian Buddhist monks and scholars to help teach, explain and to establish Buddhism firmly in China. During the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., a second wave of Buddhist Indian monks as missionaries to China, created a counter wave of Chinese Buddhists to India for advanced training. Kumarajiva and Bodhidharma, who went from India to China, and Fa Hsien and Yuan Chuang, who came from China to India, are four familiar names who greatly enriched the knowledge and understanding of their countries of origin to their hosts. Bodhidharma taught Dhyana Buddhism and Wu Shih martial arts in Shao Lin, which Japan later adopted via China as Zen Buddhism and Karate. The dominance and firm grip that Buddhism came to acquire in China was of course the result of a long-lasting

process of considerable interaction and exchange with India spread over centuries, which benefited both countries in many ways. The Chinese were responsible for preserving many valuable Sanskrit works of the Gupta and post-Gupta period, as recent excavations in Xinjiang have revealed, by organising Chinese translations of them and printing them for posterity. Indian monks, apart from the development of religion and philosophy, promoted the advancement of phonology, astronomy, medicine, chemistry and physical exercise in China.

The decline of Buddhism in India, as also due to the rise of Confuscius ethic and Tao School in China, led to a weakening of contacts between China and India, after the tenth century. Over next two centuries, trade and commerce between India and China also declined on account of a number of economic and political developments and, gradually, whatever little residual contacts existed, faded with the advent of the colonial and imperialist era in Asia. From 1840 onwards, when most of India had come under British control, the British recruited a large number of Indians to carry out soldiering and guard duties to serve their interests in China. However, during the course of the Taiping Rebellion, which lasted from 1850 to 1864, many Indian soldiers had been captured by the Taipings in battle and were converted to their cause but also some did join the Chinese voluntarily. Almost seven decades later, this phenomenon was to be repeated when Indian soldiers and policemen in China, motivated by the struggle against imperialism, once again turned their arms against the British. This turnaround in their political loyalties and their radicalisation came about with the work of the Ghadar Party in China, and indeed, in retrospect, the Ghadar movement should figure in the history of India-China interaction as a notable chapter of "revolutionary comradeship".

The exploitation and domination by the imperialist and colonial powers that India and China experienced, and their struggles against them, did not however bring the two

countries together because even though in 1947, India won her freedom from the British, and in 1949 the Communist Party of China (CPC) had won the civil war and came to power in the newly proclaimed People's Republic of China, the world in which India awoke "to life and freedom" and China achieved "liberation" post World War II was already sharply divided into two ideologically opposed blocs: the socialist bloc led by the USSR and the democratic anti-Communist bloc led by the United States. Whereas the People's Republic of China was unambiguously aligned with the former Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India was troubled by the bipolar world order, and equivocated, while ultimately tilting or leaning to the former, in the crucial hours of moral emergencies such as in Hungary in 1956. His daughter, Mrs. Indira Gandhi followed the same policy of tilt without being a camp-follower of the USSR. In Czechoslovakia 1968, Mrs Gandhi capitulated as her father had in Hungary, and three years later in 1971 signed the Indo-Soviet Treaty which required India to consult the USSR prior to reacting to any threat, and to render assistance if the latter's interests were threatened as it was in 1979 when China attacked Soviet ally Vietnam. In the meantime by 1960, China had broken with the USSR.

II

Sociologists use the term "Sanskritization" to mean the acceptance and assimilation by society of ideas, institution and morals which were originally articulated in Sanskrit literature in India, i.e., the "cultural borrowing" of the whole complex of inter-relationship between man with himself and with the rest of the world, as well as the concept of the soul and its reincarnation.

China was "Sanskritized" thus for over 2000 years, and we have that on the authority of the President of Beijing University and eminent historian Professor Hu Shih. Hu however did not look upon this "cultural domination" with

favour. In his address [62, p. 247] to Harvard University in 1936 he said: "With the new aids of modern science and technology, and of the new social and historical sciences, we are confident that we may yet achieve a rapid liberation from the two thousand years of cultural domination (by India)." Considering that modern China had emerged out of a communist revolution, now as a proud globally influential power, it should surprise no one that China wishes to underplay her past 'Sanskritization', to seek to make it to be a non-topic.

III

In order to understand the extent of past Sanskritization of China, we need to be clear about two things: First, it was Mahayana Buddhism that went to China, and the basic doctrines and principles of Mahayana were in Sanskrit, and not in Pali. Second, the date of Buddha's *nirvana* is not 483 B.C. as Western writers claim, and which date Indian historians are prone to recycle. It was much earlier, and judged by Tibetan records, probably as old as 2000 B.C. It is curious that Indian historians seem completely oblivious of Fa Hsien's account on the subject. Fa Hsien's account was translated into French in 1836 by Abel-Remusat, into English by Beal (1869), Giles (1877, 1923), Legge (1886), and Li Yung lin's (1957), the semi-official Chinese translation. All except the last are poor translations. The most commonly used is James Legge (1886), but the translation contains as much of Legge as Fa Hsien's account. His footnotes are especially bad. The Li translation was made in Beijing in 1957, but suffers in being quite stylised, and reflects the modern Chinese desire to underplay the extent of Sanskritization of China. For instance, the title of Fa Hsien's work is translated as: *Fa Hsien's Record of the Buddhistic Countries.* The original Chinese reads: *An Account of the Sramana Fa-hsien of His Travels to India.* 'Sramana' is a Sanskrit word meaning holy priest. The original account

describes Fa Hsien as being distressed by the lack of understanding in China of Buddhist principles, and so decided to go to India to obtain documents to further the understanding of Mahayana Buddhism in China. The 1957 Li translation says "Fa Hsien was distressed to observe that not all the canons of the Monastic Rules was obtainable in China". For this reason, this translation says: "Fa Hsien and his friends went to India to obtain these rules and regulations." That is, Fa Hsien did not go to attain better spiritual understanding, but to obtain documents, just as one would go to a library. Such underplaying is understandable especially since even modern Indians find the Hu Shih's perception incredible.

Now, when did Buddhism first reach China? The Fa Hsien version records: "The monks asked Fa Hsien [after they had crossed the Indus] if he knew when the law of Buddha first travelled to the East". Fa Hsien replied: "I asked the various people [of those eastern countries] and they all agree that it was introduced long ago. After Maitreya [Bodhisatva] image was set up by them, Indian *sramanas* continuously crossed this river bringing scriptures and disciplines. The image was set up about 300 years after Buddha attained *Nirvana*, during the time of King Ping of the Chou Dynasty. So we may say that the spread of the Great Religion dates from the time of that image."

From this statement of Fa Hsien we may derive two historical statements of fundamental importance: First, Buddha attained *Nirvana* about 300 hundred years prior to reign of King Ping of the Chou Dynasty. Even by Western chronology of Chinese historical events, King Ping's reign was between 770 B.C to 720 B.C. Taking therefore 750 B.C. as the date of Maitreya's image, this places Buddha's *Nirvana* at about 1050 B.C. However, Ping's reign could well be earlier. The dates in vogue today have been assigned by Western historians, and they could have got the chronology of Chinese history as wrong as that of Indian history. Second, going by Fa Hsien's account, Buddhism entered China much before than we had thought earlier, i.e., sometime before 750 B.C.

There is thus much scope for further research here, especially in regard to the relation between Asoka and the Chinese Kings. Also, we can now, on Fa Hsien's account, discount the theory that Confucious and Buddha were contemporaries.

It is also interesting to see how Western historians have reacted to Fa Hsien's account. For example, Max Muller who had got Indian chronology all wrong, wrote a review: "Buddhism and Buddhist Pilgrims" [in the *(London) Times* dated April 17 & 20, 1857] and in this review he placed Buddha's *Nirvana* at around 500 B.C. What is surprising is that he makes almost no mention of Fa Hsien in this regard in his entire article. He was certainly aware of the translation of Abel-Remusat as he indicates towards the end of his article. Legge's version is on the other hand *non-sequitor*:

> "As King Ping's reign lasted from B.C. 750 to 719, this would place the death of Buddha in the eleventh century B.C. . . . But If Rhys David be correct, as I think he is, in fixing the date of Buddha's death within a few years of 412 B.C. . .then the Buddha was very considerably the junior Confucius." [*A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1886), p. 28].

During the last 50 years western writers on Sino-Indian history have developed the following view on Fa Hsien, perhaps to discredit him: *First*, they hold that Fa Hsien may have been a devout monk, but that his historical sense was poor. To support this, they point out that Fa Hsien does not even once mention Vikramaditya, or Chandragupta. Given that Vikramaditya represents the peak of Hindu revival during whose time Fa Hsien was reportedly in India, should he not have mentioned him even once? *There is a rebuttal for this.* Second, they say, when Fa Hsien says it was 300 years after Buddha's *Nirvana* that Maitreya's image was built, it does not mean much. Since Fa Hsien is very vague on other matters. It could just as well be just 3 years! These arguments do not hold water, because Fa Hsien's account is

full of accurate description of topography, the hospitality of the people etc. It is true that he made not a single mention of Chandragupta, but that is easy to understand *because Chandragupta, to put it simply, did not live then.* His reign was around 300 B.C.. Western historians have determined Chandragupta's reign in AD *circa* 400, on the arbitrary assumption that "Sandrocottos" of Megasthenes is Chandragupta Maurya. But this arbitrary determination of Western historians is under challenge today. In my view, the Western view is wrong, and that Megasthenes' Sandrocottos was instead Gupta Chandragupta, not Maurya. The second argument also leaves much to be desired. It merely points out that these people have not read Fa Hsien. He is quite precise as the following passage in his narration shows:

> "While in this world, he (Buddha) spent 45 years expounding the Law, teaching and edifying the people, those without peace he gave peace, those without salvation he gave salvation. When he fulfilled his mission, he attained Nirvana. Since his Nirvana, 1497 years ago, the Eye of the World has been closed and all the living creatures have never ceased to grieve."

There is no doubt that the Sino-Indian contact has been at least more than 3000 years, mostly friendly, and for a long period culturally unidirectional from India to China. In 1949, we should have charted a course of mutually beneficial relations based on these forty centuries old contacts, and not allowed the relatively more recently formed nations such as the USA and the now defunct USSR to mould it to serve their own strategic interests of and to disrupt this historic Asian compact. Together, China and India constitute even today 36 per cent of the world's population.

It would thus be appropriate to first understand the sequence and depth of Sino-Indian relations in the historical perspective. Few scholars have attempted that. For all his