

Review Article**Understanding Foreign Policy in the Context of Para-Diplomacy of India****Amrita Chaudhary¹****1. Associate Professor.****Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh**

Abstract: Para-diplomacy, or sub-national diplomacy, has emerged as a pivotal dimension of India's foreign policy, reflecting the growing significance of states and local governments in international relations. As the world witnesses a paradigm shift towards decentralized diplomacy, India's federal structure has allowed states to play an active role in shaping the country's foreign engagements. While states are increasingly empowered to pursue independent foreign relations, issues such as coordination with the central government, potential conflicts of interest, and variations in diplomatic capacity among states pose challenges. The paper delves into the historical context of para-diplomacy in India. By analyzing the motivations, mechanisms, and implications of para-diplomacy in India, this study sheds light on its impact on the overall conduct of Indian foreign policy. Additionally, it examines the challenges and opportunities that para-diplomacy presents for India, both domestically and internationally.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Sub-national, Globalization, Liberalization, Trade, Cultural identities.

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Introduction

Foreign policy deals with a country's external environment. It represents the substance of foreign relations of a state. A foreign policy is to be analysed from actual behaviour patterns of a states rather than exclusively from declared objectives or policy plans. Its object is to influence events or situations that are beyond the state boundary. The behaviour of each state affects the behaviour of others. Every state, with its national interests, tries to make maximum advantage of the actions of other states. Thus, primary purpose of foreign policy is to seek adjustments in the behaviour of other states in favour of oneself. The meaning of "foreign policy" is to decide on certain goals and make efforts to regulate the behaviour of others to achieve these goals. These goals can be achieved with the help of power. Thus, national interest and power are the most important components of a foreign policy. All states have some kind of relations with one another; they have to behave with one another in a particular manner. The framing of the foreign policy is, therefore, an essential activity of modern states. Foreign policy consists of the external behaviour of states.⁽¹⁾

India's civilizational values, its philosophy and culture and the history and the heritage of the past several centuries, all have contributed to the formation of an Indian over-view. Of courses, there are paradoxes

and puzzles in this long philosophical and intellectual heritage about the place and role of India in the world.⁽²⁾ Another most important factor that determines the foreign policy of a country is the geographical situation. The coastline of India is as important from the point of view of its defence and its land boundaries.⁽³⁾

The distribution of legislative powers between the Union and states in India is quite explicit. Article 246 of the Indian Constitution envisages a threefold distribution of legislative powers between the Centre and States, "with foreign affairs, diplomatic, consular and trade representation, participation in international conferences, entering into treaties, agreements and conventions with foreign countries, foreign jurisdiction and trade and commerce with foreign countries, import and export being the areas where only the Union Government is considered competent to legislate. In this context, the federalization of foreign policy is a development of significant import. First, due to the erosion of traditional boundaries owing to globalization, the Union government by itself is not fully equipped to meet the challenges posed by new political, economic and social forces. It is here that sub-national involvement in international affairs could help push forward India's stand on key issues. In a country as sizeable as India (a sub-continent), there is definitive need for decentralization of foreign policy implementation in select areas of diplomacy. Second,

it can be argued that states are often better equipped than the Central government to undertake diplomatic measures in areas of trade, commerce, foreign direct investment, education, cultural exchanges even also outsourcing of business."⁽⁴⁾

Sub-national diplomacy is a relatively new concept, according to academics. Conventional approaches to studying international relations consider nations to be legitimate subjects since they are the only entities with sovereignty, enabling them to negotiate with other sovereign states. Para-diplomacy, or Para-diplomacy, refers to the growing phenomenon of sub-national entities engaging in international relations and diplomacy, bypassing traditional state-centric channels. The employment of sub-national persons and organizations to advance a state's interests internationally is known as "para-diplomacy". The "foreign policy capacity of sub-state entities, their participation, independent of their metropolitan state, in the international arena in pursuit of their own specific international interests" is what Stefan Wolff defines as para-diplomacy. According to Wolff, both the autonomous entities of normally unitary states and the states (or provinces and regions) of federations can benefit from para-diplomacy, a rising policy competence of sub-state entities. The independent character of sub-state entities seems to be a prerequisite for para-diplomacy. Five characteristics of autonomy are listed by Stefan Wolff: integrated mechanisms, legal entrenchment, and devolution of power, limited external relation powers, and the autonomous entity's unique demographic makeup. For sub-state entities to be independent and engage in para-diplomacy, all of these components must be present. Sub-national institutions may not always have the authority to manage foreign affairs, but they do have some ability to establish international relations. These organizations are given restricted authority to conduct international policy in areas where they possess the substantive authority to decide on their own, within the confines of their metropolitan state's current constitutional framework. While federalism is not a prerequisite for para-diplomacy, it is nevertheless a major factor that influences the development of para-diplomacy. The primary characteristic of federalism, namely the separation of powers between the federal government and its member states, gives state governments the chance to engage in para-diplomacy. "International activities intended to promote and protect local and international interests and prerogatives are more likely to be undertaken by sub-national actors, such as states and provinces that have a formal legal personality." Foreign policy matters concerning national security are within the exclusive jurisdiction

of a state's functions, since they are within the sovereign's purview. Sub-state institutions are not considered "legitimate international actors," even in federal states like Argentina and Spain, where their federal governments enjoy significant autonomy. India is in the same boat.

Globalization has played a significant role in the rise of para-diplomacy. Sub-national units (regions, states, provinces, and even cities) discover that the global system limits their functions and activities as the world economy grows more global and, consequently, more linked in many ways. Because of this, para-diplomacy can be applied to a variety of goals, such as creating a "decentralised dimension to international debates," "internationalizing domestic issues by bringing regional issues on the global stage, promoting trade, tourism, cultural ties, and even post-conflict reconciliation," and "local political activism seeking international support." Sub-national connections can also be used to encourage and draw in investments looking for a particular economic benefit in a region. There is also an economic rationale for para-diplomacy. Under a federal system, the Union's resources are constrained. In a democratic system where the destiny of ruling parties is determined by periodic elections, a proactive chief minister cannot afford to be complacent and merely rely on central help. Their goal is to advance their state by taking advantage of the globalized market economy.

This idea has been more well-known in recent years as nations search for new avenues to further their foreign policy objectives. This practice has gained prominence in recent decades as cities, regions, and other sub-national actors assert themselves in the global arena. Para-diplomacy reflects a shift in the dynamics of international relations, challenging the conventional understanding of diplomacy as solely a state prerogative.

India's foreign policy changed dramatically since gaining independence in 1947. During the cold war, India's early foreign policy revolved around non-alignment, which aimed to avoid formal ties with either the Eastern or Western blocs. India has been pursuing greater economic and security connections with the US and other major nations as part of a more practical foreign strategy over time. Developing and carrying out India's foreign policy is primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). It is in charge of overseeing India's diplomatic ties to other nations and global institutions. The network of Indian embassies and consulates overseas, which is in-charge of advancing India's objectives and fortifying its relations with other nations, provides support to the MEA. Indian foreign

policy seems to have scaled newer heights during the period of the current government headed by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. After Nehru, probably Modi would have been the only Prime Minister of India who has shown so much of interest and readiness to pursue a vigorous foreign policy. Not only has he used his foreign policy structures including his foreign minister to help execute his vision of an active role of India in the wider International community, he has taken upon himself the responsibility of visiting as many countries of the world as possible in pursuance of his policy of active engagement with all the countries.⁽⁵⁾ The trajectory of India's foreign policy has witnessed a significant evolution over the years with para-diplomacy emerging as a dynamic force in shaping the country's international engagements. The roots of Para-diplomacy in India can be traced back to the post-independence period when certain states began independently forging international ties with the permission of central government. The state of Gujarat has been a pioneer in leveraging para-diplomacy to foster economic partnerships. Vibrant Gujarat Summits and initiatives like "Gujarat Global Connect" highlight the state success in attracting foreign investments and promoting trade independently.

The Five Pillars of Modi's foreign policy

Since we are living in an interdependent world, India strongly believes in the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, i.e. the world is one family. India promotes the global humanitarian values of harmony and peace in the contemporary global world. In April 2015, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has explained the five pillars of Indian Foreign Policy from the concept of Panchamrit (Five Sacred Foods) in April 2015. The five pillars of India's Foreign Policy are (i) engagement, dialogue (Samvad), (ii) cultural and civilizational linkages (Sanskriti evam Sabhyata) (iii) global and regional security (Suraksha) (iv) dignity, honour (Samman) (v) shared prosperity (Samridhi).

Para-diplomacy involves the direct engagement of sub-national entities, such as local governments, provinces, and cities, in international affairs. Traditionally, international relations have been the exclusive domain of nation-states, with diplomacy conducted at the central government level. However, Para-diplomacy challenges this paradigm by enabling sub-national actors to establish direct relationships with their counterparts across borders. This trend became more pronounced as India underwent economic liberalization and decentralization, empowering states to engage directly with the International community.

While examining the essence of para-diplomacy, Canadian scholar, Panayotis Soldatos called it "a result of a crisis at the level of the nation-state's systemic process and foreign-policy performance", as well as a process of reacting to and attempting to remedy this crisis, the 'many voices' phenomenon in foreign policy (here, called 'segregation') appears most often within advanced industrial federations in which individual federal governments and federated states compete for foreign policy roles.⁽⁶⁾ Soldatos further argued that "a coordinated, decentralized process in foreign policy is present when federal government join forces with the sub-national unit, coordinates or monitors sub-national international initiatives and manages to harmonize the various trans-sovereign activities with its own policies". First introduced by Soldatos, the concept of "para-diplomacy" was then developed by US scholar, Ivo Duchacek. Duchacek echoed Soldatos and argued segmentation of policies and actors seems natural to all democratic federal systems and especially to their foreign-policy making.⁽⁷⁾

After coming to power in May 2014, PM Modi announced his desire to integrate and enlist the cooperation of state governments in the foreign policy-making process. The MEA instituted some significant institutional changes, including the creation in October 2014 of a 'State Division' headed by a Joint-Secretary level official. The aim of the State Division is to "serve as the Ministry's single avenue for outreach to states" and to coordinate with states and Union Territories for further facilitation of their efforts to promote their exports and tourism and attract more overseas investments and expertise. The state division aims to achieve state and UTs by sharing with them MEAs experience and expertise through training and capacity-building in areas relating to trade, investment, cultural and other such areas. Over the past few years, India's subnational diplomatic efforts have increased dramatically. Early in 2015, one month prior to PM Modi's official visit to China, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) requested that Chandrababu Naidu, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, lead a prominent delegation to China in April. PM Modi brought Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, with him on his official delegation to Bangladesh in June 2015.

Driving Forces of Para-Diplomacy

The 1990s saw a substantial increase in globalization and economic liberalization, which contributed to the rise in popularity of para-diplomacy. In order to guarantee that the federating sub-units had a reasonable amount of autonomy, the Indian Constitution's designers included a strong unitary

component into the fundamental law in the wake of Partition. Thus, a federal structure with a unitary bias was anticipated and made possible by the Indian Constitution. The Indian Constitution foresaw a threefold division of legislative powers between the Union and the states due to the power differential between them (Article 246). Only the Union government has the authority to enact laws in the following areas: international relations; trade, diplomatic, and consular representation; participation in international conferences; signing and executing treaties, agreements, and conventions with other nations; foreign jurisdiction; trade and commerce with other nations; and import and export. In the early decades after independence, when the India National Congress party controlled both the federal government and the state governments, this constitutional bias proved effective. Under such circumstances, the Congress Party's hegemony in Indian politics served to limit conflicts between the centre and the state. In India, the Union and the states have well defined roles in terms of legislative authority. According to Article 246 of the Indian Constitution, the legislative powers of the Centre and the states will be divided threefold: "The areas where only the Union government is considered competent to legislate are foreign affairs, diplomatic, consular, and trade representation; participation in international conferences; entering into treaties, agreements, and conventions with foreign countries; foreign jurisdiction; and trade and commerce with foreign countries, import and export." The federalization of foreign policy is an important step in this perspective. First, the Union administration is ill-prepared to handle the difficulties presented by emerging political, economic, and social forces on its own because of the globalization-induced dissolution of conventional borders. This is where sub-national engagement in global politics could support India's position on important issues. There is no question that certain aspects of diplomacy in a nation the size of India (a subcontinent) require decentralized implementation of foreign policy. Second, it may be said that states are frequently more qualified than national governments to carry out diplomatic initiatives in the fields of business outsourcing, education, and foreign direct investment (FDI), trade, and commerce.

Several factors contribute to the rise of Para-diplomacy. Globalization has facilitated increased connectivity and interaction among sub-national entities, fostering cross-border collaborations and networks. It has led to increased interconnectedness, allowing sub-national entities to directly engage with the international community.⁽⁸⁾ It has led to an increased flow of goods; services and capital across

borders. Sub-national entities engage in para-diplomacy to attract foreign investments, promote exports and tap into global markets independently. Economic considerations also play a crucial role, as regions seek foreign investment, trade opportunities, and economic partnerships independently of their national governments. Cultural exchange, tourism promotion, and environmental cooperation further drive sub-national entities to engage in Para-diplomacy.

Modi Government and new dimensions in foreign policy

One characteristic of Indian foreign policy that set it apart was non-alignment, or avoiding power politics. India had a great desire to stop foreign nations from restricting its own freedom for manoeuvre because it was a weak postcolonial state. In order to guarantee the "independence" of Indian foreign policy, the non-alignment strategy was implemented. However, to provide foreign politicians as many options as possible in the post-Cold War era, when the Non-Aligned Movement was deemed dead and aligning with the USA became fashionable, India employed a tactic known as "strategic autonomy." At the regional level, the new policy improved India's "capacity to pursue its interests with minimal reference to other major powers" while also encouraging India to "emphasize on an institutionalized, classic multilateralism" on a global scale. Thus, India maintained its "to manoeuvre at the international stage" by embracing the strategic autonomy approach, essentially giving up the non-alignment policy. Nevertheless, India's attempt at strategic autonomy proved unsuccessful, and in the late 1990s, a new approach known as "strategic partnerships" or "strategic connectedness" was embraced. The shift in foreign policy strategy resulted in a multi-alignment move in Indian foreign policy. In 1998, the Vajpayee government signed India's first strategic cooperation agreement with France, laying the groundwork for future partnerships. India followed the policy, aligning itself with "revisionist" states like China and Russia but also standing with status quo countries like the USA, France, and Japan. It was in line with "established powers" like France and the United Kingdom, but it was also quick to side with "rising powers" like South Africa, Germany, and Brazil.

It is seeking acceptance in the current international order, trying to persuade the established/status quo powers to grant it access to cutting-edge technology to enable it to elevate its status, and participating in alternative institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) Bank. Consequently,

the "age of multi-alignment" is replacing the "age of strategic autonomy" in Indian foreign policy as a result of strategic alliances. The policy orientation of the Modi government is consistent with that of its predecessors in the absence of fundamental change. The West has been given precedence, particularly the USA and Israel. But the additional rigor has been brought about by the prime minister's personal interest. President Barack Obama was invited by the new government to India's Republic Day celebration. The growing relationship between the two states is evidenced by the prime minister's four trips to the US and seven meetings with the US president in only two years. These discussions led to an extension of US support for India's application to join the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). India's bid to join the NSG was unsuccessful, although it was successful in joining the latter. The Modi administration has also inked agreements for strategic partnerships with Rwanda, the Seychelles, Mongolia, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates, carrying on the custom of forming such partnerships. The USA and India have been forced to work together by the rise of China. Consequently, the Modi government has inked an agreement that will regulate "the use of each other's land, air, and naval bases for repair and resupply," continuing a process that began in the post-Cold War era and was reinforced by the Singh government through the signing of the Indo-US civil nuclear deal. India's president and prime minister visited Israel as a state delegation for the first time since diplomatic ties were established in 1991. Meanwhile, more established allies like Russia have gotten comparatively less attention.

Indian religion and culture, particularly Bollywood, Buddhism, and Indian food, have long been embraced by people all over the world. However, they were not viewed as a benefit of foreign policy for a very long time. The Vajpayee government began introducing "democracy into India's international engagement" for the first time. The Prime Minister and the government are actively engaged in fostering and extending India's influence overseas under Modi. In contrast to the Singh government, which declined to support the World Sanskrit Forum in Bangkok, Modi takes part in religious, cultural, and historical events. Unlike Singh, Modi thinks that "the world wouldn't look at us if we kept criticizing ourselves." As a result, in March 2016, he took part in the World Cultural Festival held in New Delhi by the Art of Living Foundation, characterizing it as the cultural equivalent of the Kumbh Mela. He also took part in the World Sufi Forum, which was hosted by the Mashaikh Board and the All India Ulama, in the same month.

Benefits of Para-Diplomacy

Economic Development: Economic globalization fosters interdependence among nations to cultivate international relationships for economic growth. Sub-national entities engage in Para-diplomacy to attract foreign direct investment, promote trade, and create economic partnerships, contributing to local economic development. States like Maharashtra (Mumbai) and West Bengal (Kolkata) use para-diplomacy to forge partnerships with international film industries, promoting Indian cinema globally and boosting economic development.

Cultural Exchange: Para-diplomacy allows regions to showcase their unique cultural identity on the global stage, fostering international understanding and cooperation through cultural exchange programs. Various Indian States actively pursue cultural diplomacy as part of their para-diplomacy efforts. States like Rajasthan, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, for example, organize cultural festivals, art exhibitions and heritage events to project a distinctive cultural identity on the global stage. Visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2018 and signing of Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of India and the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China on Strengthening the Exchange and Cooperation between Cultural Institutions was a part of Para-diplomacy. Para-diplomacy enhances cultural and soft power. It not only fosters mutual understanding but also strengthens the nation's cultural influence, contributing to its soft power and global reputation.

Environmental Cooperation: Sub-national entities often collaborate with international counterparts to address shared environmental challenges, such as climate change, pollution, and resource management.

Innovation and Knowledge Transfer: Para-diplomacy facilitates the exchange of knowledge and expertise between regions, fostering innovation and technological advancements through research and development collaborations.

Challenges of Para-Diplomacy

Legal and Constitutional Constraints: The legal and constitutional framework in India gives the central government the authority to conduct foreign affairs. When states or cities independently engage in para-diplomacy, it can raise legal questions and challenges. For example, if a state government signs a cultural exchange agreement without the central government's approval, it may face legal challenges regarding the validity and implementation of the agreement.

Coordination with Central Government: One challenge is coordinating the activities of states or cities with the central government's foreign policy objectives. For instance, if a state government enters into trade agreements with a foreign country that contradict India's national trade policies or strategic interests, it can create discord and confusion in India's overall foreign relations.

Inequality among Sub-national Entities: Larger and more economically developed regions may have more resources to engage in Para-diplomacy, exacerbating global inequalities and limiting the participation of smaller or less affluent entities.

Competing Interests among States: States in India have diverse economic and political interests. For instance, a coastal state may prioritize maritime trade partnerships, while a landlocked state may focus on cross-border trade agreements. Balancing these competing interests and ensuring that they contribute to India's overall foreign policy goals can be challenging.

Resource Allocation: Para-diplomacy requires resources, including funding and expertise. States or cities with limited resources may struggle to effectively engage in international relations. For example, a state government may lack the financial resources to sustain diplomatic missions or trade delegations abroad, limiting its ability to promote its interests on the global stage.

Risk of Diplomatic Incidents: Para-diplomacy carries the risk of diplomatic incidents or misunderstandings. For instance, if a state government makes statements or takes actions that are perceived negatively by a foreign government, it can strain diplomatic relations and affect India's overall foreign policy objectives.

Capacity Building and Training: Building the capacity of state governments and local authorities to engage in para-diplomacy requires training and expertise. For example, states may need training in international negotiations, cultural diplomacy, and understanding global trade regulations to effectively represent India's interests abroad.

Implications for Global Governance

Para-diplomacy challenges the traditional hierarchical structure of international relations, necessitating a re-evaluation of global governance mechanisms. As sub-national entities become more influential in shaping international affairs, there is a need for inclusive frameworks that accommodate their participation while maintaining state sovereignty. Strengthening international cooperation

and fostering dialogue between national and sub-national actors can contribute to more effective and equitable global governance. More and more interaction of the states in the context of conduct of foreign affairs too would lead to cooperative and competitive federalism as envisioned by PM Modiji.

In India, para-diplomacy is still in its infancy. Nonetheless, it is evident that the present administration is eager to support state governments in cultivating para-diplomatic ties. To replicate Sao Paulo and Macau's achievements, it will take some time and possibly the emergence of dynamic state-level leadership. However, a number of states, including Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, have already made significant progress in this area. The MEA has created a "States Division," but in order to reap the benefits of pursuing sub-national diplomacy, the government needs to formulate policies more effectively and set clearer guidelines. Paradiplomacy is not an end in itself. It also cannot be a way to improve federalism or center-state relations. Paradiplomacy, or sub-unit diplomacy, is crucial in situations when the necessity of dependency serves as the primary motivator like chairman of the Advisory Commission of Intergovernmental Relations, Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt said in the fall of 1983 that "states will probably have to assert themselves as never before in modern times." The message is very clear: we will no longer be helped by national governments. Thus, even while para-diplomacy has led to the "globalization of localism," as some academics have termed it, this decentralization of foreign policy may make it possible for Indian states, or federating units, to effectively carry out the following:

- (i) Promote their interests abroad while keeping in mind the interests of the country as a whole;
- (ii) Assist the federal government in delegating costs and mobilizing resources for the formulation of foreign policy; and
- (iii) Seek out areas of overlap.

With the exception of a few policy conflicts like those that exist between the Union and Tamil Nadu about Sri Lanka and between West Bengal and the Bangladeshi government over the Teesta accord, para-diplomacy is an established mechanism that will only become more powerful in the years to come. Sub-national diplomacy is a practice that goes beyond regional issues. The two fundamental narratives that the Union must create continue to be defining an economic trajectory toward developmental goals and balancing the interests of

various parties involved. The Union may be able to advance India's diplomatic objectives by playing a two-level game, avoiding offending state-level issues, and keeping the interests of all parties and negotiators in mind. The Union government should take into consideration the possibility of enhancing international prospects through town twinning and foreign investments in order to assist in shaping India's diplomatic trajectory through para-diplomatic connections. In light of India's future global demands, which are firmly rooted in the country's current economic reforms and liberalization, it is critical that the country's leadership fortify its political position by creating room for a more inclusive federal system. Including public-private partnerships in international projects while considering the political landscape of the region can serve as a springboard for more ambitious para-diplomacy initiatives.

To conclude, para-diplomacy represents a dynamic and indispensable dimension of contemporary international relations, offering a multitude of advantages for nations navigating the complex global landscape. Para-diplomacy represents a transformative shift in the landscape of international relations, allowing sub-national entities to play a more active role in shaping global affairs. The decentralization of foreign policy decision-making not only fosters regional autonomy but also ensures a more nuanced and responsive approach to diverse challenges. It encourages innovation, competitiveness and the cultivation of soft power, thereby enhancing a nation's overall standing in the international community. While it brings about numerous opportunities for economic development, cultural exchange, and environmental cooperation, the challenges of legal ambiguity, coordination issues, and potential inequalities must be addressed. As the world continues to evolve, recognizing and adapting to the dynamics of Para-diplomacy will be essential for building a more inclusive and effective global governance system.

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