

Internationalism, Soft power and India's Vaccine Maitri

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Abstract

Internationalism as a concept means promoting cooperation and understanding among nation-states and avoiding conflict. In modern times India, after gaining Independence, has followed the concept of Internationalism and supported not only the formation of international organisations to promote international peace and cooperation but also advocated the policy of Internationalism in its foreign policy. The greatest threat to the idea of Internationalism is from the concept of nationalism because it prevents modern nation-states from cooperating with each other. In this interconnected world, most of the global problems, such as climate change, terrorism, human trafficking, poverty, health problems etc., cannot be solved by the mere efforts of a single country; instead, the world needs cooperative actions to deal with it. Covid 19 pandemic has challenged the entire world's health system and brought the world to a standstill; it has affected all nations irrespective of the level of development uniformly. Such a health crisis can only be dealt with the global cooperation. Through its "Vaccine Maitri" programme, India has established itself as the "Pharmacy of the World" and supplied vaccines and essential medical equipment to impoverished countries, which helped India boost its Soft Power image in "Health diplomacy". India has also tried to support the equitable vaccination drive through its Vaccine Maitri, whereas Western countries

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concentrated on “Vaccine Nationalism”. India’s Vaccine diplomacy has also helped promote its foreign policy as it provided vaccines not only to Neighbouring countries but also to African countries and other small Island nations, along with UN peacekeeping forces. This article will highlight India’s effort to deal with the pandemic through its Vaccine Maitri Programme and its soft power projection in health diplomacy.

Keywords- Internationalism, Soft power, Vaccine diplomacy, Vaccine Maitri, Covid-19.

Introduction

The Corona pandemic has swept the globe and posed a serious threat to the world, primarily regarding health services that led to the global economic slowdown. The whole human-based system was at a standstill due to severe lockdowns during the peak, including extreme stress on health infrastructure, education system, sports activities, tourism and hospitality services, and entertainment activities. Till today various sectors are struggling to get back to normal. However, the rise of different variants is constantly raising fear among people and governments of other countries. The main reason for being among the deadliest viruses in human history is its nature, i.e., it’s very contagious and it’s a high mutation rate. The origin of the coronavirus is linked to Wuhan’s seafood market (Wu et al., 2020). After a month virus was discovered in Wuhan, China, the World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed the coronavirus to be a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared the coronavirus to be a pandemic. After announcing the coronavirus as a Pandemic, nation-states slowly and steadily started imposing lockdowns and banning foreign flights. Covid-19 has “turned into a slayer, affecting both the developed and developing countries” (Shankar Bharti, 2020). Its effects are so devastating that Nobel laureates Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee compared the Covid-19 predicament to the post-war destructions and chose to refer to the overall Covid-19 situation as being “permanently hobbled” (Banerjee, Abhijit and Duflo, 2020). Later on, when the vaccination drive began to mitigate the influence of Covid-19, developed nations

started accumulating vaccine doses double their population and followed the policy of 'Vaccine Nationalism', whereas, on the other hand, India showed solidarity towards developing and small island nations under the flagship programme of 'Vaccine Maitri' under the Ministry of External Affairs and provided them not only with vaccines but also other essential medical equipment to deal with the Pandemic. This step by India was appreciated not only by the impoverished countries but also by the WHO. It highlighted two aspects- Firstly, India's belief in the policy of Internationalism by reflecting India's understanding of the world, i.e., "Vasudev Kutumbakam", which means 'the world is one family' and secondly, India's soft power capability. In the 21st century, health diplomacy has emerged as a soft power tool. India has been one of the critical players in the field as it has emerged as a major player in 'health tourism', attracting not only people from neighbouring and other developing or underdeveloped countries (such as sub-Saharan African countries) but also people from developed countries are equally gets attracted because of treatment at a reasonable price. In addition to being named the "Pharmacy of the World", India has also been named the "Vaccine Manufacturing Hub of the World", accounting for 62 per cent of the worldwide vaccine supply (PTI, 2020).

Soft Power- A Theoretical and Conceptual Understanding

Power as a concept is a central theme in political science in general and international relations in particular. It is also one of the most contested yet highly debatable concepts in the domain of political science. Power is mainly a relative concept, and various thinkers defined it differently. Power as a concept at the earliest can be found in the writings of Machiavelli. Some of the crucial scholars associated with the field of power are Robert Dahl, who gives the theory of community power; which is linked with power as decision making; then another influential scholar, Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz came up with the idea of Two faces of power; this notion of power is associated with power as non-decision making, Steven Lukes gave the concept of 'three dimensions of power' in his famous book "Power: A radical view(1974)", Michel Foucault a postmodernist thinker gave the concept of 'Capillary power', which means that

power is everywhere and it can be derived from everywhere, Hannah Arendt gave the constructive view of power.

The American political scientist Joseph Nye coined the term 'soft power' in his book "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power". While giving the concept of soft power, he clarifies that there are two forms of power, i.e., hard and soft power. He defines soft power as "the ability to get others to want the outcomes that you want" and, more precisely "the ability to achieve goals through attraction rather than coercion" and hard power as "the ability to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences and strategies". On the one hand, hard power is a tangible form of power that is linked with military power, geography, economic power, an abundance of natural resources etc.; it is an old form of power, whereas, on the other hand, soft power is linked with intangible elements such as culture, political values, health diplomacy, ideology etc. So, it can be understood that hard power is primarily based on the push factor as it is linked with command power, whereas soft power is based on the pull factor as it is connected with attraction and influence. According to Nye, the soft power of a nation consists of "culture, political values and foreign policies". According to Nye, soft power is more relevant in present times than hard power. He also points out that hard power is not enough in this interdependent global world to accomplish a country's national interest as it is costly. Thus, he emphasises the growing importance and relevance of soft power as it is free and doesn't need resources, unlike hard power, but needs more time to accomplish than hard power.

Internationalism, Soft Power and India's Vaccine Maitri

Internationalism is an ideology based on the idea that advocates cooperation among nation-states on various dimensions. In this globalised era, the importance of Internationalism has increased because of the interconnected world order. A single far-off decision can have ripple effects miles away; examples include the financial crisis, Climate problems, bilateral tension between states, etc. In this interconnected world, it is clear that no nation can survive alone, and they must depend on each other. In the current scenario, when the world is facing a crisis like a climate change, terrorism, refugee crisis, covid-19 etc., it became more evident that it is beyond the capacity

of one nation to address these problems. Even in this divided world between North and south, cooperation is needed among third world countries to counter the hegemony of developed nations.

India had a long history of interconnectedness with the world being a civilisational nation-state. In the field of international relations, the idea of Internationalism is new, whereas, in India, the spirit of Internationalism has been present from time immemorial. Internationalism stands for a world order with greater cooperation among government and people irrespective of culture, religion, identity and nationality. India has continued the legacy and spirit of Internationalism even after its Independence. Independent India has always backed cooperative and friendly relations among the different nation-states. Through its understanding of Internationalism, India has always promoted cooperation among nation-states.

India, since its Independence, has advocated for a fair global economic and political system, a world free from exploitation, poverty, terrorism, environmental problems and above all, promoting international peace and cooperation. Under its Internationalism policy, India has provided troops to United Nations for peacekeeping, peace-making and peace-building, promoted non-alignment, offered humanitarian assistance to needy nations, acted as a bridge between the north and south divide, etc. In Independent India, the very idea of Internationalism was shaped by India's first Prime minister Jawahar Lal Nehru and continues till today under the Prime ministership of Narendra Modi. Covid 19 pandemic, which affected the whole world, requires internationalism effort to overcome the crisis. India's 'Vaccine Maitri' drive has reflected India's historical belief and faith in international cooperation and solidarity principles.

As mentioned above, according to Nye, three primary sources of soft power exist, and health diplomacy comes under the projection of the foreign policy capabilities of a nation. This inter-connected post-cold war world order and the rise of various global health issues have increased the importance of global health diplomacy. Consequently, many countries employ health diplomacy as an instrument of soft power in their foreign policies to serve their national interests.

Health diplomacy consists of exporting medical treatment, expertise, and manpower to those in need in order to win their hearts and minds (Fauci, 2007). Vaccine diplomacy is a part of health diplomacy. It aims to influence countries so that the desired outcome is pursued in the long run by sending the vaccine through the projection of soft power using foreign policy tools. In his book *Preventing the Next Pandemic: Diplomacy in an Age of Anti-Science* (2021), Peter Hotez asserts that vaccine diplomacy is a viable option for dealing with the current global health and disease situation.

India has been continuously focussing on global health security, and this experience has helped India in dealing with the pandemic, “Firstly, India produces considerable human capital for health; secondly, India exports US\$22 billion worth of medicines annually, ensuring affordable healthcare for millions of people across the world, thirdly, health diplomacy is an emerging foreign policy tool and Fourthly, India provides health care for 1.3 billion people at home” (Sehgal, 2022). Covid-19 has impacted the world severely, and there is a dire need for vaccines to deal with it; vaccine diplomacy is proving to be a significant step to tackle the pandemic as it is helping the poor or low-income countries by providing them with Vaccines and other essential medical equipment because they lacked the proper infrastructure and other basic amenities to deal with the pandemic. It is also observed that vaccine diplomacy has helped promote global peace cooperation and tried to mitigate the gap between the developed and developing countries.

But at the same time, it was also observed that during the pick time of the pandemic, developed countries accumulated vaccines more than their population and followed the policy of “Vaccine Nationalism” and “Vaccine Inequality”, which disrupted the worldwide supply chain of vaccinations, for instance, Canada had secured 338 million doses, five times more than it required, by the end of 2020, while the United Kingdom had acquired three times it’s needs. According to Dave Lawler, it is estimated that by February 2021, 56 per cent of the Covid-19 vaccines have been acquired by high-income nations, which constitute just 16 per cent of the overall population(Lee, 2021). UN is also worried about the vaccine inequality and described it as a “catastrophic moral failure” as “it was found that 80% of the world’s COVID-19 vaccine is with ten

countries of the world and thus launched a global campaign 'Only Together' with the aim of fair and equitable access to Covid -19 vaccines all the countries of the world" (United Nations, 2021).

In contrast, on the other hand, India showed complete solidarity with the countries and launched the "Vaccine Maitri" under the Ministry of External Affairs. India has established itself as the 'pharmacy of the world', and the pandemic outbreak has allowed India to project its soft power capability in the field of health diplomacy. Since independence, a significant change has been witnessed in the pharma industry, "In 1969, international pharmaceutical companies held 95% of the Indian pharmaceutical market and Indian pharmaceuticals held 5%. By 2020, the situation had reversed, with Indian pharmaceuticals holding an approximately 85% market and the rest of the world at 15%. For more than half a century, Indian companies have been successful in the medicines industry, both at home and abroad" (Sahay, 2020). In the coming years, the Indian pharmaceutical sector is going to increase rapidly, it is estimated that "The pharmaceutical industry in India is in an excellent position to reach a value of US\$ 100 billion by the year 2025. In FY20, India exported US\$ 16.3 billion worth of pharmaceuticals. This figure comprises sales of both finished pharmaceuticals and raw materials used in their production. The biotechnology market in India is projected to grow from its current value of US\$ 64 billion annually to US\$ 150 billion by 2025, with growth coming mostly from the biopharmaceutical, bio service, bio agricultural, bio industrial, and bioinformatics sectors" (Ministry of External Affairs, 2021a).

According to Medicine Sans Frontier, "India exports 67% of its manufactured pharmaceuticals to third world nations. The main procurement organisations for developing countries health programmes buy their pharmaceuticals in India, where high-quality items are available at inexpensive prices. UNICEF sources approximately 50% of its important medications for distribution in developing countries from India, and the International Dispensary Association (IDA) sources between 75% and 80% of its medicines for distribution in developing countries from India" (Medicine Sans Frontier, 2007). On one hand, India with its medical capability came to the forefront during the catastrophic public health emergency and

reached out to vulnerable countries and helped them. On the other hand, besides 'vaccine nationalism', global powers also adopted 'discriminatory policy'. For example, in September 2021, when it opened to travel, the UK failed to recognise the effectiveness of Indians vaccinated with covishield and covaxin and were asked to finish their quarantine period. India also stood against the idea of a 'vaccine passport'- a document that will have a full record of an individual's vaccination, as this step will promote and highlight the inequality between the developed and developing countries. The idea of a 'vaccine passport' will be successful only when all the countries have equal access to vaccines.

During the pandemic, India has situated herself as the leading supplier of vaccines not only from the commercial viewpoint but also from the humanitarian ground as India donated vaccines and other essential medical equipment to nations and international organisations. India's vaccine efforts during the pandemic have been appreciated not only by the developing countries but also by WHO Director-General Ghebreyesus for supporting the "vaccine equity" and the developed countries of the west such as the USA, and France and Canada etc. Antonio Guterres (UN Security General) stated, "The ability of India to produce vaccines is currently the world's most valuable resource" (NDTV, 2021). India initiated the "Vaccine Maitri" project in January 2021, a massive diplomatic endeavour to distribute made-in-India vaccinations to poor and developing countries worldwide so that the divide between north and south couldn't hamper dealing with the pandemic. Presently in India, the Covishield vaccine manufactured by India's Serum Institute, Covaxin manufactured by India's Bharat Biotech, and Russia's Sputnik V vaccine developed by Dr Reddy's laboratory are functional.

The entire "vaccine diplomacy drive of India can be divided into three parts: (a) with Neighbours, (b) with African countries and (c) with small island nations" (Iwanek, 2021). India has always stood by its neighbours whenever they faced catastrophic devastation or any crisis, and even during this pandemic period, India has shown solidarity with its Neighbours and has boosted its 'Neighbourhood First Foreign Policy' through vaccine diplomacy. As the pandemic spread across the neighbourhood, India took a two-step strategy,

focusing on its 'Neighbourhood First' policy. On the one hand, it used bilateral relations to help out its neighbours, and on the other hand, it revived the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), intending to combat the pandemic collectively. The first country to receive the vaccine under "Vaccine Maitri" was Bhutan, with 150,000 doses. After receiving the vaccine doses, the Prime Minister of Bhutan stated that "It was a present from a reliable friend who has stood by Bhutan throughout the years and is doing so once again during this pandemic" he further said, "To mark this new step in our fight against the pandemic at home, we want to express our gratitude to the government and citizens of India, led by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, for their selfless concern for the welfare of all people" not only this he even went on saying that "It is of immeasurable worth when valuable resources are shared even before one has enough to satisfy their own wants, as opposed to giving out solely after one has amassed sufficient resources for themselves" (Prime Minister's Office, 2021). According to a report, "India promised to give Nepal 67.8 million in aid, and so far, 39.3 million has been sent. Bangladesh was promised aid worth 39.7 million, and aid worth 36.1 million has been given. Afghanistan was promised \$22.3 million in aid, but only \$2.9 million has been allocated so far" (Mishra, 2020).

Bangladesh is another neighbour that has received vaccines and other medical equipment, "On March 25, 2020, the first shipment of emergency medical aid to Bangladesh, consisting of 30,000 surgical masks and 15,000 head caps, was delivered. The second tranche, consisting of fifty thousand pairs of sterile surgical gloves and one million tablets of hydroxychloroquine, was delivered on April 26, 2020. The third tranche consists of thirty thousand RT-PCR COVID-19 test kits" (DD News, 2020). In response to a request from the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL), India delivered approximately 13 metric tonnes of essential pharmaceuticals that save lives to Sri Lanka in April of 2020. Another consignment of gloves was sent out of the warehouse. There were three shipments of medical gloves and medications that were essential to preserving lives. A special Indian airline delivered the fourth shipment, which contained 12.5 tonnes of equipment and medications, to Sri Lanka on May 8, 2020 (Pattanaik, 2021). An additional cargo of 30,000 PCR kits and 28

Intensive Care Unit (ICU) ventilators, as well as 2,000 vials of Remdesivir injections, were supplied to Nepal in May along with 825,000 doses of essential pharmaceuticals, including 320,000 doses of paracetamol and 250,000 doses of HCQ. India first sent Nepal 825,000 doses of these life-saving medications in April 2020 (Pattanaik, 2021). India also extended its help towards the Maldives through operation Sanjeevani and also by sending specialists and doctors. India, under 'Vaccine Maitri' provided vaccines to its neighbouring countries, "Bangladesh has got 3.3 million doses of vaccines, Myanmar got 3.2 million doses, Nepal got 1.11 million doses, Bhutan got 0.55 million doses, the Maldives got 0.2 million doses, Sri Lanka received 0.5 million doses, and Afghanistan got 1 million doses" (Ministry of External Affairs, 2021b).

Through the International Training and Education Consortium (ITEC), India has helped its South Asian neighbours by providing e-training to medical professionals from those countries. This has been done in collaboration with the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education & Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh. As a further measure, AIIMS Bhubaneswar has begun offering training in Bengali in the hopes of attracting medical professionals from the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. During the pandemic, an effort was also made by India to revive the SAARC so that the battle against the virus could be won, as it became clear that no country alone could win against the Nobel Coronavirus. In this regard, PM Modi said, "We can respond best by, Coming together not growing apart; Collaboration, not Confusion; Preparation not Panic" (Ministry of External Affairs, 2020b). South Asian countries have close borders with each other and are porous also, so to reduce the rate of transmission across the border in the region, PM Modi stated that "In these kinds of situations, we should come up with common SAARC Pandemic Protocols that can be used on all of our borders and inside our borders. This will help keep these viruses from spreading throughout our region and will allow us to maintain our freedom of travel inside the country" (Ministry of External Affairs, 2020b). India has also initiated SAARC COVID-19 Fund and contributed US\$10 million, which constituted half of the fund. To mitigate the virus in the region, India also initiated 'SAARC COVID19 Information Exchange Platform (COINEX)'. India has

used "1.7 million from SAARC COVID-19 Fund to send drugs, medical supplies and machines to Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives and Sri Lanka" (Gupta, 2020).

African countries, too underwent severe health crises after the break out of the Pandemic in the continent. Before the Pandemic, other diseases like Malaria, TB, HIV/AIDS etc. had already brought havoc to the mainland in the past and India has played an essential role in reducing the burden on the health infrastructure of African countries by providing necessary aid through various means such as (extending line of credits, Cheap medicines, Telemedicine, Focus Africa Programme, Pan Africa e-Network etc.). Companies from India, such as Cipla and Ranbaxy, have also been instrumental in enhancing Africa's healthcare infrastructure. Because of their inadequate healthcare systems, African countries heavily depend on imports to meet 94% of their pharmaceutical needs. These imports come from places like the European Union (51%), India (19%), Switzerland (8%), China (5%), the United States (4%), the United Kingdom (3%) and other countries (9%). African nations could not track and test COVID19 patients due to the lack of health infrastructures. Later, with the assistance of the World Health Organization, COVID19 research laboratories were constructed to cope with the Pandemic. As of January 2, 2022, there are approximately 7 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Africa. A total of 65.0% (4,700,728) of all COVID-19 cases have been reported from Africa, with the biggest number coming from South Africa (3,472,436; 48.0%), followed by Ethiopia (426,656; 6.0%), Kenya (298,509; 4.0%), Zambia (259,677; 3.6%), and Nigeria (243,450; 3.4%)(World Health Organisation, 2022).

The COVID19 crisis has once again provided an opportunity for India to help African countries in battling the Pandemic. In the past, India provided help to African countries in tackling natural disasters like floods, cyclones, droughts etc. and epidemics like Ebola. India has played a pivotal role in Africa's ongoing fight against the COVID-19 pandemic by supplying the need for medications, diagnostics, and vaccinations. This demand has been driven by the continent's ongoing response to the pandemic. India has extended support to a large number of African nations in general, but has focused particularly on the countries that have been impacted by

COVID-19. India has assisted in various African countries such as “Mauritius, Comoros, Madagascar and Seychelles in different capacities and even deployed rapid response teams of doctors” (Ministry of External Affairs, 2020a). India has also supported African Countries by providing health care training in COVID-19 management and protocols via the e-ITEC courses. An online course called “COVID19 pandemic: prevention and management guidelines for healthcare professionals” was put together by the Ministry of External Affairs (GOI) to assist frontline healthcare professionals in African countries. Another vital aspect of assistance was made available through telemedicine support from the nation’s top medical institutions during the pandemic. Arogya Setu app was also shared with the African countries.

Indian defence forces, especially the Indian Navy, have played a vital role in the African continent to deal with the pandemic; for example, INS Kesari has supplied essential items related to COVID19 to Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Comoros, and INS Airavat reached out to Sudan, Djibouti, South Sudan and Eritrea. India has expanded its “Vaccine Maitri” programme to Africa, donating millions of doses of the COVID19 vaccine in the region, and Seychelles became the first African country to receive the Indian made vaccines. India has donated over 25 million doses of vaccines manufactured in India to 41 African nations, including approximately 1 million as a donation to 16 countries and more than 16 million through the COVAX facility to 33 countries (Choudhary, 2022). The World Health Organization (WHO) has designated the new variant, Omicron, as a variant of concern due to its rapid mutation, and India has chosen to provide Covid-19 vaccinations, life-saving medications, test kits, and medical equipment to African countries in order to combat the new Omicron variant (Laskar, 2022).

Conclusion

India is gradually becoming one of the most important soft power players at the global level, and it has already proven to the rest of the world that it is capable of playing a significant role in the diplomatic process related to global health issues. Soft power has become a key part of India's foreign policy and a successful tool. India used the COVID19 Pandemic to show off its soft power in the sphere of global health and proved itself as a reliable global partner by

sending sufficient medical resources and vaccines to countries in need at a time when developed nations were practising “vaccine nationalism” and “discriminatory policy”. India has shown its support for poor and low-income countries by giving them vaccines and medical equipment for free. This shows that India wants to help these countries in a humanitarian manner. During the pandemic, Indian defence forces have also promoted India's soft power by fulfilling the medical and essential needs of African and small Island countries and evacuating its citizens under the ‘Vande Bharat’ mission and ‘Samudra Setu’ from different parts of the world. Pandemic has also helped India boost its domestic and foreign policies such as ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’, ‘Neighbourhood First Policy’ and ‘SAGAR’. India's vaccine diplomacy is successful not only because it is inexpensive but also because it is easily stored by poor and developing countries, as India's vaccine can be stored at temperatures ranging from 2 to 8 degrees Celsius, whereas Moderna and Pfizer vaccines require temperatures below zero, placing less strain on their infrastructural facilities. However, due to the breakout of the second wave, India has put a hold on the ‘vaccine maitri’ programme to meet its own domestic needs but continued to supply other essential medical items and even helped out African nations through telemedicine. Now, India has two more vaccines, i.e., ‘Covovax’ and ‘Corbevax’, to fulfil its domestic needs and three earlier vaccines. After the second wave, India again started its ‘vaccine maitri’ programme and has started sending vaccines to impoverished countries since October. Iran became the first country to receive it, followed by Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. Coronavirus can be brought under control by joining the hands of all the nations, but the global powers have failed to bring international solidarity to deal with the pandemic and kept asserting their interests first, leading to distrust and division. On the other hand, India has used COVID 19 pandemic as an opportunity to boost its soft power image and present itself as a reliable and responsible global power.

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