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# The Guiding Principle of Peace: Panchsheel

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## ABSTRACT

*India and China have far more similarities than any other two nations. Both nations have rich histories and cultures. The uncanny resemblance between communities, ideas and philosophies. A true spirit of the neighbourhood. The journey of these two great nations has passed through many roadblocks; history is evident that the relations between them weren't always so sour. One of the guiding principles of this peaceful existence is Panchsheel. The present article discusses the meaning of Panchsheel, its origin, the Sino-Indian agreement of 1954 and Prime Minister Nehru's aspirations of friendship with China. The article also addresses the question of whether China stood up to the principles of coexistence or whether it was India's little bubble.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is evident from history that the Indo-Chinese relations weren't as sour as they seem today. The dragon and the elephant have had many similarities in terms of geography, population, and tradition. Many leaders of both nations have time and again expressed their nation's admiration for the other. Mao Zedong himself once spoke to the Indian ambassador about an ancient belief in China that "if a man lived a good life he would be reborn in India."<sup>2</sup> This article focuses on one such agreement of mutual cooperation between India and China and evaluates its relevance in the present political scenario as a reflection of its impact in the past.

Panchsheel, also known as the five principles of Peaceful Coexistence, were the basis of a historic agreement signed between India and the People's Republic of China. The five principles are:

1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
2. Mutual non-aggression.
3. Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
4. Equality and mutual benefit.
5. Peaceful co-existence.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> K. M. Panikkar, 'In Two Chinas: Memoirs of a Diplomat', George Allen and Urwin ( London, 1955)

<sup>3</sup> Boutros Boutros Ghali, 'The Five Principles' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, 14 June 2004 [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/seminaronfiveprinciples\\_665898/t140589.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/seminaronfiveprinciples_665898/t140589.shtml))

The origin of the essence of this peace ideology can be traced back to the work of Buddhaghosha, Visuddhimaggo, which mentions the five principles that a Buddhist has to follow. These five principles were also said to be first proposed by Dr Surkarno as Pancasila in Indonesia. Nehru claimed to have heard the words ‘Punch Shila’ used in Indonesia, but in a different context. In the Indonesian context, these were nationalism, humanism, freedom, social justice, and faith in God.<sup>45</sup>

## II. THE SINO-INDIAN AGREEMENT 1954

In order to promote trade and cultural exchange between the Tibet region of China and India, The Government of the Republic of India and The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China entered into an agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India. This was based on the principles of Panchsheel, as highlighted in its preamble.<sup>6</sup> Two months later, during his visit to India, Premier Zhou Enlai and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru issued a Joint Statement on June 28, elaborating their vision of Panchsheel as the framework for peaceful relations, not only between the two nations but also with all other countries in Asia and the world.<sup>7</sup> Immediate effects of the treaty were seen in trade in 1954–55. Both the nations witnessed a seven-fold increase in trade over the previous year.<sup>8</sup>

## III. INDIA’S COMMITMENT TO PANCHSHEEL

Being true to Prime Minister Nehru’s words, India did not treat Panchsheel merely as an instrument of trade with China. It adhered to the crux of the principles in its relations with other nations. The principles of Panchsheel aligned with India’s constitutional vision of promoting international peace and security.<sup>9</sup> Understanding the convergence of Panchsheel and India’s International Policy would be incomplete without analyzing Nehru’s opinions. Speaking of the

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accessed 6 July 2021

<sup>4</sup> Rajkumar Singh, ‘Perspectives, prospects and challenges of Panchsheel in Asia: the India–China context’ in Huiyao Wang and Lu Miao (eds), *Handbook on China and Globalization* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2019)

<sup>5</sup> D. P. Verma, ‘Jawaharlal Nehru: Panchsheel and India’s Constitutional Vision of International Order’ (1989) vol. 45/ Iss. 4, *India Quarterly* < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45072333> > accessed 8 July 2021

<sup>6</sup> Government of Republic of India, ‘Agreement on Trade and Intercourse with Tibet Region’ (*Ministry of External Affairs*, 29 April 1954) < <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/7807/Agreement+on+Trade+and+Intercourse+with+Tibet+Region> > accessed 7 July 2021

<sup>7</sup> ‘Address by External Affairs Minister Shri Natwar Singh at the International Seminar “50 Years of Panchsheel: Towards a New International Order based on Genuine Multilateralism” Organised by ICWA at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi’ (*Ministry of External Affairs*, 18 November 2004) < <https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/3938/Address+by+External+Affairs+Minister+Shri+Natwar+Singh+at+the+International+Seminar+50+Years+of+Panchsheel+Towards+a+New+International+Order+based+on+Genuine+Multilateralism+Organised+by+ICWA+at+Vigyan+Bhawan+New+Delhi> > accessed 7 July 2021

<sup>8</sup> K. K. Mody, ‘Trade and Commerce between India and China.’ *Times of India* (New Delhi, 1 December 1956) 2

<sup>9</sup> Constitution of India, art 51

agreement with China, Nehru called the preamble “the major thing about the Agreement” in the parliament and added that many problems of the contemporary world might disappear “if these principles were adopted in the relations of various countries; with one another.” Adherence to these principles created an “area of peace” between India and China, and Nehru wished that the area of peace was “spread over the rest of Asia and over the rest of the world.”<sup>10</sup> Nehru’s optimism regarding “Panchsheel” was reflected in his famous speech that he delivered from Colombo in which he asserted that “If these principles were recognized in the mutual relations of all countries, then indeed there would hardly be any conflict and certainly no war.”<sup>11</sup> In April 1955, for the first time since its inception, Nehru promoted the Panchsheel movement at an international level at the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, Indonesia.<sup>12</sup> Following this, the Conference of Non-aligned nations in Belgrade accepted them as the core principles behind the non-aligned movement. The United Nations accepted the Five Principles as a code of conduct in international relations. On December 11, 1957, Yugoslavia, Sweden and India moved a resolution in the United Nations, which included the Five Principles and was adopted unanimously.<sup>13</sup> Many Prime Ministers after Nehru followed his pursuit in upholding the principles of Panchsheel as a part of India’s foreign policy. In 1983, Madam Indira Gandhi, while giving her inaugural speech at the Seventh NAM Summit, emphasized the point that “Only with coexistence can there be any existence. We regard non-interference and non-intervention as basic laws of international behaviour.” During his visit to China in 1998, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi asserted that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence provided the best way to handle relations between nations. Prime Minister P. V. Narsimha Rao, in his speech at Beijing University, spoke at length about Panchsheel and its implementation, “We had already shown the ability to conceptualize the principles that should guide international relations when we, together, evolved the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, or Panchsheel as they are known in India. These principles remain as valid today as they were when they were drafted.” Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who always believed in peace within the neighbourhood and taught us a lesson on how one can change friends but not neighbours, while pointing towards a need for clear borders, once said, “One cannot wish away the fact that before good neighbours can truly fraternize with each other, they must first mend

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<sup>10</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speeches, n. 41, vol. 111, p. 262-263; Frank h-moraes, ‘Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography’ (New York, 1959) 451-452

<sup>11</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speeches, ‘The Colombo Powers’ Peace Efforts’, broadcast from Colombo, 2 May 1954, (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1958) vol. 3, p. 253

<sup>12</sup> Jansen G. H., *Afro-Asia and Non-alignment* (London : Faber, 1966) 173-174

<sup>13</sup> President K. R Narayan, ‘Revitalising Panchsheel’ (*Ministry of External Affairs*, 20 July 2004) <<https://www.mea.gov.in/articles-in-indian-media.htm?dtl/15408/Revitalising+Panchsheel>> accessed 7 July 2021

their fences. After a hiatus of a few decades, India and China embarked on this important venture a few years ago. We have made good progress. I am convinced that, with steadfast adherence to the five principles of peaceful coexistence, with mutual sensitivity to the concerns of each other, and with respect for equality, our two countries can further accelerate this process so that we can put this difference firmly; behind us.”<sup>14</sup>

#### IV. CRITICISMS AND VIOLATIONS

Until 1959, India and China did not share borders officially as Tibet was a buffer zone between two of the oldest civilizations as treated under the British policy.<sup>15</sup> There were many conflicts regarding the status of Tibet. In 1903, the British and the Government of Tibet signed the Lhasa Convention following the successful Younghusband expedition. The Convention was a mark of Tibet’s untrammelled sovereignty.<sup>16</sup> The British enjoyed the rights and privileges granted by Tibet to them under that document till they left India. After that, a treaty was signed between the British and China in 1906. Under the agreement, the British agreed not to annex Tibet and China agreed “not to permit any other foreign state to interfere with the territory or internal administration of Tibet.”<sup>18</sup> In August 1947, the Government of India inherited the treaties of the British with regard to Tibet, some of which were guaranteed under the 1914 Simla Convention.<sup>20</sup> The British Mission in Lhasa then became India’s diplomatic mission.<sup>21</sup> Prime Minister Nehru, on the one hand, firmly believed that Tibet should have been a separate nation.<sup>22</sup> A separate invitation was extended by India to Tibet for the Asian Relations Conference convened by India in New Delhi on March 19, and Tibet’s flag was flown along with the flags of other participating countries.<sup>23</sup> In 1950, the Chinese Communist regime decided that Tibet must become a permanent part of the People’s Republic of China and launched an invasion.<sup>24</sup> India was then quick in calling the act deplorable and not in the interest

<sup>14</sup> External publicity division, ‘Panchsheel’ (*Ministry of External Affairs*, June 2004) < [http://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/191\\_panchsheel.pdf](http://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/191_panchsheel.pdf)> accessed 8 July 2021

<sup>15</sup> Heather Spence, ‘British policy and the development of Tibet’ (1933) Doctor of Philosophy thesis, Department of History and Politics, Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong, < <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/1433>> accessed 11 July 2021

<sup>16</sup> Warren W. Smith, Jr., ‘Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations’ *Harper Collins India* (New Delhi, 1997) 161

<sup>17</sup> Rajiv Sikri, ‘THE TIBET FACTOR IN INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS’ *Journal of International Affairs* (2011) vol. 64, no. 2, pp. 55–71 < [www.jstor.org/stable/24385534](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24385534)> accessed 11 July 2021

<sup>18</sup> Convention Between Great Britain and Thibet (1904) [385]

<sup>19</sup> Convention Between Great Britain and China Respecting Tibet (1906) [389]

<sup>20</sup> Ram Gopal, ‘India China Tibet Triangle’ (1964) *Appendix E* p. 206-210

<sup>21</sup> Members of the International Commission of Jurists, Geneva, ‘The question of Tibet and Rule of Law’ (1959) p. 6

<sup>22</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, ‘Glimpses of World History’ *Oxford University Press* (New Delhi, 1982) 842

<sup>23</sup> L. L. Mehrotra, ‘India’s Tibet Policy: An appraisal and Options’ (*TPPRC*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1997)

<sup>24</sup> ‘Tibet’s History’ *Free Tibet* < <https://freetibet.org/about/history>> accessed 11 July 2021

of peace. However, by signing the Panchsheel agreement in 1954, India formally accepted Chinese control over the Tibet region. Thus being called an agreement born out of sin by Acharya Kriplani.<sup>25</sup> On ceding some of the rights, India sincerely anticipated an end to all the hostilities with Beijing and focused on other issues requiring immediate attention. However, within a few months after signing the peace agreement, China made its first attempt of infringement by putting claim over Bora Hoti, traditionally an Indian territory.<sup>26</sup> Within a decade, the Sino-Indian war broke out, putting an end to India and Nehru's Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai sentiment. With Tibet no longer being a buffer zone, India shared direct borders with China. Delhi was growing more aware of China's true intentions. India made its delayed attempts of defending Chinese expansionism, but China's offensive approach had already caused a major diplomatic and military setback.<sup>27</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

"A large and powerful state on the border is bound to become a natural enemy when there is a conflict of interest. A bordering state is therefore always an enemy-in-being, if not in fact." A notable theory propounded by Kautilya thousands of years ago remains a lesson for India even today.<sup>28,29</sup> Panchsheel, in its theoretical sense, remains a guiding principle for India, China and many other nations for International Peace. However, as an instrument of bilateral relations between India and China, it could not serve its purpose then, and it may not fulfil its aspirations now. India has by now accepted the fact that China is a communist country wedded to the idea of expansion and evolved its foreign policies accordingly; however, initiatives from our end for peace and cooperation must not end, for Nelson Mandela once said, "If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner."<sup>30</sup> And history has it; India has never seen China as an enemy, just a neighbour with a different ideology.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. at 6

<sup>26</sup> 'Notes, Memoranda and letters between the governments of India and China 1954-1959', *National Archives of India* (MEA File No. 5/11/R&I/59) accessed 12 July 2021

<sup>27</sup> Nareshwar Dayal Seth, 'India's Policy towards China' *The Indian Journal of Political Science* (1968) vol. 29, p. 143-150 < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41854262> > accessed 12 July 2021

<sup>28</sup> Dr. R. Shamasastri, 'English translation of Arthshastra of Kautilya' (3<sup>rd</sup> Edn., Book 4) Ch. 2 p. 290

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Hobbes in Richard Tuck (eds.) 'Leviathan' *Cambridge University Press* (New York, 1991), p. 89

<sup>30</sup> Nareshwar Dayal Seth, 'India in the Geopolitical Perspective' *National Herald* (Lucknow, 1967) p. 11