



The Gandhi Factor: Socio-Psychological Determinants of Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy Decisions

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Abstract

Indira Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister of India marked a significant phase in the evolution of the country's foreign policy, characterized by strategic autonomy, regional assertiveness, and a strong emphasis on national security. This study examines the socio-psychological determinants that influenced Indira Gandhi's foreign policy decisions, with particular attention to the interaction between her personality, political experiences, ideological outlook, and the domestic socio-political environment. Rather than viewing foreign policy solely through structural or geopolitical explanations, the study explores the role of leadership psychology, perceptions of threat, political socialization, risk assessment, nationalism, and personal experiences in shaping strategic choices. Indira Gandhi's approach to international affairs was influenced by her political upbringing, association with the nationalist movement, exposure to global politics, and experiences of political conflict. Her decision-making demonstrated a combination of pragmatism, strategic caution, personal conviction, and a strong commitment to preserving India's sovereignty and regional interests. Major developments, including the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, India's nuclear policy, and relations with neighbouring states, provide important contexts for examining these influences. The study argues that Indira Gandhi's foreign policy cannot be fully understood through material interests alone; leadership characteristics and socio-psychological factors played an important role in interpreting international events and determining policy responses. The analysis therefore contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Indian foreign policy by integrating psychological and political perspectives on leadership and decision-making.

Keywords: Indira Gandhi, Foreign Policy, Socio-Psychological Factors, Leadership Psychology, Decision-Making, National Security, Strategic Autonomy, Indian Foreign Policy, Political Leadership, International Relations.