

Evolution of the discipline of International Relations

The Four Stages of Evolution:

Since the emergence of the new need and new consciousness to theories International Politics, the study of international relations has passed through four main stages of development.

1. The First Stage:

I. The Initial Attempts:

The first stage of the evolution of the subject stretched up to the end of the First World War and was dominated by the historians. “Before World War I,” writes Schleicher, “there was almost no organised study of international relations either in American universities and colleges or elsewhere.”

In the few courses that existed there, initial efforts were little more than unsystematic at discussing a wide variety of current problems which differed greatly in the level of their importance. No real attempt was, however made to study international relations in an organised and systematic way.

II. The Diplomatic History Stage:

The impact of World War I on the study and teaching of the discipline was tremendous. The importance and necessity of studying relations among nations was realized and this influenced the decision to provide an order to the attempts being made. For this purpose the decision was taken for establishing departments and chairs in various universities. Consequently the first chair of International Relations was established in 1919 at the University of Wales.

To begin with, the study was dominated by diplomatic historians and the attention was focused on the study of history of diplomatic relations among nations. The scholars concentrated on the study of past history of political and diplomatic relations among nations because diplomacy constituted the most major, rather the sole channel for the conduct of relations.

Diplomatic historians enjoyed the monopoly and the relations among nations were presented as historical descriptions without reference to how various events and situations fitted into the general pattern of international behaviour.

The whole concentration was upon the chronological description of history of diplomatic Nations and little attention was paid to the necessity of relating the present with the past. Their attempts brought to light certain interesting and important facts about past international relations but these failed to provide any meaningful help to the study of relations among nations.

The descriptive and chronological studies of the relations conducted by the diplomatic historians did not satisfy either the need for an organised study of the international relations of their time or the demands of the future development of the subject. Except for highlighting certain facts, this stage failed to render any significant help to the understanding and theorizing of international relations.

2. The Second Stage:

The concern and experience with the study of war-time relations gave a new turn to the discipline of International Politics. The creation of the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Relations at the University of Wales opened a new era in the study of the subject. The study of current events and problems came to be regarded as the central theme of International Relations.

The review of newspapers, periodicals and journals was considered to be the right and necessary step for understanding the day to day relations among nations. Several scholars now came forward to place emphasis upon the need for the interpretation of current developments and problems at international level. An attempt was made to overcome the shortcomings of the first stage and replace the historical bias by the study of present events.

However, in itself this second stage was almost as much incomplete, partial and inadequate as the first stage. The first stage remained concerned with the study of past without relating it to the present. Likewise the second stage, the current events stage, was concerned with the present without attempting to trace the historical roots of the problems and events. This stage also lacked an integral view of international relations.

3. The Third Stage:

The third stage, which developed simultaneously with the second stage, involved an attempt to reform the nature and content of international relations in future through the development of international law and institutions. Shocked by the suffering inflicted by the First World War, the scholars adopted an idealistic outlook which focussed attention upon the task of reforming international relations by institutionalizing these through the development of international institutions like the League of Nations, and by the codification the rules of International Law.

The Fourteen Points listed by President Wilson of United States were together regarded as a charter of reforms for relations among nations. The Paris Peace Conference and the subsequent establishment of the League of Nations gave strength to the optimism that it was possible and desirable to make efforts towards an improvement of international relations for eliminating war, violence, tyranny and inequalities.

The study of international relations at this stage was influenced by a strong faith in goodness of human relations, and consequently, it sought to study, codify and improve international

law and institutions. War was looked upon as both a sin and an accident which was to be eliminated through institutionalization of relations.

It was believed that all international problems could be solved by developing a system of international law and by successfully organizing and working international organisations.

The approach at this stage was again partial and incomplete. It concentrated upon future without realizing the importance of the past and present. It made little attempt to base the study of international relations upon an understanding of the past history and the knowledge of current problems faced by the nations.

It ignored the hard realities of international relations and instead adopted an idealistic approach which was soon found to be superficial and inadequate. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 proved the idealistic and unhelpful nature of the third stage.

It was idealistic in nature and content and was far away from the hard realities of international relations use of power by for the states for securing goals of national interest. The scholars were putting the cart before the horse by attempting to develop legal institutions and organisations without first trying to understand the true nature of international relations.

The rise of dictatorships, aggressive nationalism, desperate quest for security, and certain other factors, like the economic depression of the 1930s, made the matters worst both for the League of Nations and International Law.

4. The Fourth Stage:

The evolution of International Politics in its fourth stage can be studied in several sub-parts:

(A) Post-War Stage—The need for a Theory of International Politics:

The fourth stage in the evolution of the study of international relations began after the end of the Second World War. The deterioration in international situation which resulted into the outbreak of the Second World War amply proved the shortcomings of the approaches of inter-war period. The need for new approaches capable of examining and explaining relations among nations was felt in a big way.

The deep changes produced by the Second World War and its impact upon the power structure at the international level, created a really challenging situation. A number of scholars came forward to meet the challenge and in the process they initiated the fourth stage in the study of International Politics. Attempts were initiated for developing a theory of international relations.

(B) Comprehensive Study of all Factors and Forces and not only Institutions:

In this fourth stage, the emphasis got shifted from law and organisation to the study of all factors and forces which conditioned and shaped the behaviour of nations in the international environment. It was realized that there existed regular patterns in international behaviour which were far away from idealism. This realization led to the emergence of political realism which advocated the study of International Politics as struggle for power among nations. The emphasis came to be upon the study of the determinants and operation of foreign policy.

Further, the process of conflict-resolution at international level was accepted by many scholars as the field of research. The understanding and theorizing of international relations through a realistic and objective study came to be accepted as the goal of study.

(C) The Major Concern in the Post-War Period

During 1945-2000, considerable progress was secured in the direction of developing a theory of International Politics. Many useful theories and approaches were developed. The beginning was made in the late 1940s with the development of a Realist Model of International Politics particularly as formulated by Hans Morgenthau. His Realist Theory

advocated the study of International Politics as struggle for power among nations. It advocated National Power, National Interest and Foreign Policy as the fundamental units of study.

The main concern came to be the study of:

(i) The motivating factors of foreign policies everywhere,

(ii) Techniques of conduct of foreign policies, and

(iii) Modes of resolution of international conflicts.

The study of international institutions now came to be conducted not from the legal and moral perspective but from the political perspective. For example the United Nations was viewed as a political organisation designed not as a substitute of power politics but as an appropriate mechanism with which the direct national rivalries could be compromised through normal processes.

In an age which had witnessed two World Wars within a short duration and which was witnessing the super power rivalry and cold war in international relations, it was natural for the Realists to define International Politics as struggle for power in which each nation tried to secure the goals of its national interest by the use of national power. International Politics was viewed as politics among nations.

The 'realistic' posture of the Realists made it a power approach to international relations of the post-war years. However in the 1950s, there appeared fissures which gradually fragmented the realist school.

It was felt that these questions did not admit an answer on the basis of any theory. These needed an empirical analysis and answer. Such thinking led to the emergence of behaviouralism or scientific-empirical approach in international relations. Several scholars now accepted and advocated the use of empirical methods and these began becoming more popular than realism.

(D) Behaviouralism in International Politics:

Under the impact of Behavioural Revolution in Politics, political scientists studying international relations started formulating new approaches and methods for the study of International Politics. The development of scientific approach in International Politics came as a major landmark in the post-1945 development of the study of the subject. The interdisciplinary focus, as advocated by the Behaviouralists found favour with a large majority of scholars studying international relations.

The scientific study of the substantive issues and problems of international relations and actual course of relations among nations came to be a very popular direction. Along with this, the drive towards the development of more and more sophisticated methods and tools for the study of relations among nations appeared. All these attempts revolutionized the study of international relations.

Thus, in the fourth stage of the development of International Politics, there came to be a big change. Its study started becoming more and more systematic. The exercise still continues in the 21st century. The study of International politics with the help of new concepts, approaches, theories and model continues to be a major popular area of study. International Policies has now come to be a very vast and complex field of study. It has gained increasing recognition as an autonomous discipline

Post Modernist Approach, Neo.-Realist Approach, Structural Approach, Marxist Approach, Neo-Libertarian Approach, Human Rights Approach Feminist Approach, Environment Approach and several others are being used and advocated by modern scholars of International Politics. The rapid and far reaching changes in the study of International

Relations have been coming not by themselves. These have been determined by fast developments in international relations under the impact of two World Wars and due to the rise of several new factors in the environment.

The recognition of the role of power in international relations, the strong desire for durable and stable peace, the emergence of ethnic factor of international relations, international terrorism, human rights approach, environment approach, emphasis upon peace research and sustainable development, issue of nuclear proliferation vs. non-proliferation, increasing interdependence among nations, continued presence of MNCs, transnationalism, non-operation of balance of power, the prolific growth of international organisations and agencies spear-headed by the United Nations, the rise of many active non-state actors, the emergence of globalisation, and above all the need for building a scientific, comprehensive and valid theory of international relations capable of explaining the behaviour of nations, have now together combined to produce a big change in the nature and scope of International Politics. These have together given a new importance to International Politics. It has now come to be recognized as one of the most major disciplines requiring continuous and systematic study.