The study of Sino-Indian relations said to be a very crucial in the entire gamut of India’s foreign policy. The Sino-Indian relations were cordial and friendly since India’s pre-independence days. However, the relations between the two countries started souring when China attacked Tibet in the early 1950s. Since then the relations between India and China were at cross roads. But, the strained relations between India and China had arisen during the late Fifties when the Tibetan issue became the bone of contention between the two countries. Though, sincere efforts were made by Rajiv Gandhi’s predecessors to normalize the relations with China, no concrete results were achieved except during Indira Gandhi’s period. Perhaps, under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi the policy towards China began to change. Soon after assuming the power, Rajiv Gandhi determined to normalize the India’s strained relations with China. Accordingly, he undertook several confidence-building measures to that effect. In this regard, his visit to China in 1988 paved the way for improvement of Sino-Indian relations.

Sino-Indian Relations: A Peep into History

The history of Sino-Indian relations can be traced to the ancient days of Buddha and Confucius. The most significant aspect of ancient contacts was the establishment of Buddhism in
China. During ancient days there was exchange of spiritual ideas between the two countries. Indian Buddhist monks, scholars played a predominant role in this regard. "The Chinese had responded with great enthusiasm to the arrival of Buddhist missionaries and thereafter initiated a wave to bring Indian Buddhist monks and scholars to help teach, explain and to establish Buddhism firmly in China. During the fourth and fifth A.D., a second wave of Buddhist Indian monks as missionaries to China created a counter wave of Chinese Buddhists to India for advanced training. Kumarajiva and Bodhidharama, who went from India to China, and Fa Hien and Yuan Chuang, who came from China to India, are four familiar names who greatly enriched the knowledge and understanding of their countries of origin to their hosts".¹ This naturally made the two countries to develop intimate relations between them.

Even, trade, commerce and cultural contacts flourished between the two countries via Silk Road in ancient days. This resulted in establishing good contacts between the countries. Therefore, there is a lot of similarity between the two countries in so far as the traditions, customs, culture, civilization, etc., are concerned. Further, India and China, the two ancient countries of the world played an important role in the international politics due to their geo-strategic and political status. However, there is some dissimilarity too in respect of the way the two countries achieved

¹ Subramanian Swamy, India's China Perspective, Konark Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, p-1.
their independence with different political systems. In the post-Second World War period, the democratic India and the Communist China achieved independence in 1947 and 1949 respectively and emerged as two powerful nations in South Asia. India achieved independence based on the principle of peace and non-violence, the principle advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, whereas China achieved its independence through violent method by waging a civil war against the Kuomintang. Though there are inherent differences between the two countries, still there are some similarities regarding some fundamental issues.

The boundary dispute was said to be a contentious issue between the two countries. In fact, the boundary dispute as a factor played predominant role in the Sino-Indian relations. Immediately after the independence India's relations with China had no basic problems or irritants. However, it was in the 1950s that India's relations with China began to get strained primarily due to the boundary dispute and the Tibetan issue. In fact, this was proved true in the words of K.M. Panikkar, the then Ambassador to China, "with a Communist China cordial and intimate relations were out of question". The only area where our interests overlapped was in Tibet. Perhaps, the Tibetan issue appeared to be the major irritant in the Sino-Indian relations. As a result, the differences came to the fore when there was disagreement between the two countries over the Tibetan issue and the territorial issue.

---

2 K.Raman Pillai, India's Foreign Policy: Basic Issues and Political Attitudes, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1969, p-126.
India, the champion against colonialism and imperialism and sympathizer of dependent people, opposed China's interference in the internal affairs of Tibet. Further, India claimed that the McMahon Line as the lawfully demarcated border between India and China. However, China did not agree with India's contention and condemned the McMahon Line as "imperialist line". In this context, the boundary dispute and the Tibetan issues became major irritants in the Sino-Indian relations. Therefore, the arguments and the counter arguments between the two countries over the boundary dispute culminated in the 1962 war.

The Boundary Dispute:

The most important obstacle and the major irritant in the Sino-Indian relations was the thorny boundary question. Immediately after the independence, there was no boundary dispute as such between the two countries. Perhaps, it was in 1954 that the cartographic dispute began with the publication of an official Chinese map in a book entitled "A Brief History of Modern China", which showed vast areas of Soviet Central Asia and South East Asia to be within the historical frontiers of China. Also Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Assam (in India) were depicted similarly. This incident caused enormous concern to India and heightened the tension. Accordingly, the then Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru drew the Chinese attention on the issue. To

---

India's concern Chou Enlai, the then premier of China said, "the map was an "old" reproduction of a publication from "the pro-liberation period" and that as his government was busy it would do the needful soon".  

Prior to this in November 1950, the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru proclaimed to Parliament that the "McMahon Line was indeed India's border with Tibet in the North-West, reiterating that it had been "fixed by the Simla Convention of 1914", even as the Survey of India of the Home Ministry then had published the official map of India showing the border as 'undemarcated' and 'unidentified'. He went on to say, "map or no map, the McMahon Line was India's boundary and we will not allow anybody to across [it]". However, China, which was not happy with the demarcation process, rejected the Simla Convention on the grounds that the Tibetan government was local government and therefore did not have the treaty-making powers. It does not recognize Lhasa's 1913 declaration of independence, nor does it consider the McMahon line to be a legal boundary. Even China contended that it was not signatory to the Simla Convention, which mapped out the McMahon Line. Further, in 1959 Chou-Enlai, the then Premier of China questioned for the first time the established boundary between India and China. He contended that the "Sino-Indian boundary had never been formally delimited" and that the
so-called 'McMahon Line was a product of the policy of aggression against the Tibet Region of China' and therefore, an "illegal line".⁷

Therefore, from the above statement it is clear that China had never accepted the McMahon Line as the boundary between India and China though they "accepted the McMahon Line in toto with Burma"⁸ as the boundary line. When the boundary dispute started taking a different shape, the situation along the Line of Actual Control became tense. The Tibetan revolt in 1959 further worsened the situation. In the meanwhile, the para-military clashes between Indian Army and China's Peoples Liberation Army continued unabatedly along the Line of Actual Control. This hostility between the two countries took further shape and increased the tension on the Sino-Indian border.

In the face of the increasing tension on the border, the then "Chinese Foreign Minister sent notes in the form of proposal to the Indian Embassy in Beijing on August 4, September 13, and October 3, 1962 that the two sides should meet immediately without pre-condition in order to ease the situation. But all the proposals were rejected by India".⁹ As a result, India's refusal to the Chinese proposal led the two countries to the brink of war. Accordingly, in October 1962, China attacked India and occupied thousands of Kilometers of Indian territory in the Aksai Chin and

---

⁷ Quoted in, K. Raman Pillai, Supra No.2, p-130.
⁸ Subramanian Swamy, Supra No.1, p-53.
⁹ Subramanian Swamy, Supra No.1, pp-87,88.
Ladakh area in the Western Sector. The 1962 war resulted in heavy casualties and dropped the curtains once for all on the Sino-Indian boundary dispute. Indeed, the 1962 War shattered the principles of Panchsheel Agreement, and subsequently widened the rift between the two countries.

The Tibetan Issue:

The Tibetan issue was another most important irritant in the Sin-Indian relations. As a result, in the 1950s India’s relations with China began to get strained not with the Boundary dispute but with the emergence of Tibetan Issue. Indeed, the boundary dispute between India and China reached a climax when India became sympathetic towards the Tibetan issue of autonomy in the early 1950s. This was not liked by the Chinese government, which termed India’s stance as interference in China’s internal affairs. Therefore, the Tibetan issue added fuel to the already aggravated boundary problem between the two countries. In fact, China considered Tibetan issue as more important than the boundary issue while improving relations with India, though it was a central issue between the two countries.

Therefore, the boundary dispute and the Tibetan autonomy issue ran parallel in so far as the relations between India and China were concerned. The differences cropped up when there was disagreement between the two countries over the Tibetan issue and the territorial issue. India, the champion of anti-colonialism and
anti-imperialism, opposed China's interference in the internal affairs of Tibet. Nevertheless, China did not like India's role of a savior who claimed that Tibet is an integral part of China. Perhaps, the relations between the two countries got deteriorated when India protested against Chinese invasion on Tibet in the mid 1950. However, the Chinese government took seriously the way India protested on Tibetan issue and did not like its role of a saviour and claimed that Tibet was an integral part of China. Therefore, Tibetan issue was another issue of concern for the strained relations between the two countries. In order to ease the situation and to prevent further deterioration of relations, the two countries agreed to reach some kind of agreement. In this regard, it was in 1954 that an agreement was signed concerning Trade and related issues between India and China. "Under the Agreement, India accepted Chinese sovereignty over Tibet and agreed to relinquish those extra-territorial rights in Tibet which it had inherited from the British when the latter transferred power to India. The agreement was based on the following principles:
   a) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty;
   b) mutual non-aggression;
   c) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs;
   d) equality and mutual benefit; and
   e) peaceful co-existence.\textsuperscript{10}

The outbreak of an anti-China revolt in Tibet in March 1959 became the catalyst for a rapid deterioration in the relations of the two countries. The Chinese government attacked Tibet and ruthlessly suppressed the rebels (Tibetan liberation activists). The military measures against the Tibetan rebels evoked strong response from the general public in India and expressed resentment over the attack. "With the flight of Dalai Lama to India, the situation further deteriorated. China resented the sympathy shown by many in India to the Tibetan insurgents and deemed it as interference in the domestic affairs of China"\textsuperscript{11}. Further, the political asylum to Dalai Lama by India made China furious. As a result, the difference between India and China over the Tibetan issue sharpened.

But China soon suspected in it India's hand, without whose support the Tibetans dared not revolt against Chinese army. As a result, China alleged that India, which was sympathetic to the Tibetan cause, had not only extended her help but also allegedly supported the Tibetan rebellion. The allegations and counter allegations between the two countries proved to be a great hindrance in the way of normalization of Sino-Indian relations.

Therefore, it was not only the boundary dispute but also the Tibetan issue, which was another major irritant that led to enormous tension between India and China. Though several efforts

\textsuperscript{11} T.Karki Hussain, Supra No.10, p-6.
were made to ease the situation, due to one or the other reasons the boundary dispute continued to haunt the Sino-Indian relations. But, it was only after Rajiv Gandhi's emergence as the Prime Minister that some developments started taking place, which ultimately resulted in improving the relations between the two countries.

So far as India was concerned, the central issue between India and China was the border problem. It was the border problem, which created a rift in the Sino-Indian relations. In India's view the real reconciliation would follow a territorial settlement. "However, there has been a substantial change in India's approach to the issue. For a number of years India insisted that a solution to the border issue should be accorded priority so that India-China ties could be normalized, while China advanced the view that two countries should normalize their ties, build confidence and over the years, gradually, a mutually amicable settlement of the border issue would emerge".12

The year 1980 was said to be turning point in the history of Sino-Indian relations. Because, it was during this period that Indira Gandhi re-emerged as the Prime Minister of India and paid attention to improve the Sino-Indian relations. Therefore, in the 1980s, the boundary dispute shifted from antagonism to dialogue and from tension to relaxation. Accordingly, Indira Gandhi took the

12 V.P. Dutt, India's Foreign Policy in Changing World, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1999, p-205.
initiative for starting the official-level talks in 1981. She was able to hold five rounds of talks before her untimely death in October 1984. Another three rounds of talks were held during Rajiv Gandhi's period prior to his visit to the Beijing in December 1988. But Indira Gandhi strengthened the relations between India and China to some extent and later on Rajiv Gandhi's concrete steps to normalization of relations with China bore fruit.

**Rajiv Gandhi's Period:**

Soon after assuming the office of the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi paid a serious attention to improve India's relations with its immediate neighbours especially with China. The strained relations between the two countries were started improving during Rajiv Gandhi's period. Rajiv Gandhi, in fact, determined to start a new chapter in the Sino-Indian relations thereby undertaking several confidence building measures to improve India's relations with China.

Prior to his visit to China 1988, Rajiv Gandhi continued the efforts of his mother for improving the relations with China. When Rajiv Gandhi started talks on the Sino-Indian relations, a number of irritants came his way. The Chinese intervention in the Sumdorong Chu Valley of Arunachal Pradesh in early 1986 was a great cause of concern to India. The said intervention became a major irritant in the Sino-Indian relations when both countries completed almost six rounds of talks. Further, the approval of
Indian Parliament to upgrade Arunachal Pradesh to the level of Statehood caused a big problem in the Sino-Indian relations. However, Rajiv Gandhi made determined efforts to improve India's relations with China despite certain irritants. As a result, he continued the border talks with China, initiated by his mother, Indira Gandhi in 1981.

The Sixth Round of Border Talks:

The earlier rounds of talks on the Sino-Indian boundary dispute were not so effective and failed to bring any desired results on the boundary dispute due to one or the other reason. However, the Sixth Round of talks provided a good background to the talks, when Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the Chinese Prime Minister Zhon Ziang met in New York in October 1985. The sixth round of talks was held in New Delhi in November 1985. The Chinese side said that India should make "matching concessions" in the Eastern sector if it wanted China to vacate some areas in the Ladakh sector. Thus, for the first time in official level talks, the Chinese deviated from the "package" line and asked for territory in the Eastern sector".13 Since China had taken a divergent approach in respect of the boundary dispute, India refused to accept the Chinese proposal. As a result, the leader of the Chinese delegation to the border talks stated that no settlement could be reached unless India made some concessions in the East as proposed.

Therefore, this new Chinese stand marked a critical departure from the previously held position on the boundary dispute. The result was the sixth round of border talks ended without making any important process.

**Sumdurong Chu Valley Intrusion:**

Hardly a week before the Seventh round of talks, a dramatic event took place in July 1986 when the Chinese troops committed a big intrusion into the Indian territory to the South of the McMohan line in Thongdrong area of Arunachal Pradesh's Kameng division. The then Minister of State for External Affairs K.Narayanan said in the Lok Sabha on 8th August 1986 that the government had disturbing information about the Chinese intrusion into the Sumdorong Chu Valley of Arunachal Pradesh*. He further said, “Chinese personnel had not only improvised a helipad there, “it has also been noticed that they are setting up tents and building huts in the area”.¹⁴ India termed these developments as a matter of great concern to its security and integrity. As a result, India lodged immediate protest against Chinese intrusion and decided to take up the issue at the Seventh Round of Sino-Indian border talks to be held in July 1986.

However, “on 22 August 1986 China rejected allegations that Chinese forces had intruded into North-Eastern India as “unwarranted and distorted propaganda”. On the contrary, it

¹⁴ Asian Recorder, 32 (36) September 3-9 1986, p-19060
accused Indian aircraft and military personnel of “repeated” crossings of the Line of Actual Control in the Eastern sector”. The Chinese, however, asserted that the area to the North of the Line of Actual Control was in their territory and re-asserted their position that the whole of Arunachal Pradesh (Formerly known as NEFA) was their territory. Despite all these developments the Chinese put a proposal for “mutual concessions” in the valley of Samdurang Chu, which was not agreeable to India. Instead, Rajiv Gandhi called for “systematic and scientific mapping” of the area which could help in settling the dispute”. India considered this as an attempt on the part of China to reactivate the dispute over the Eastern boundary. The border talks, held under the shadow of this latest Chinese intrusion into India, naturally became an obstacle.

The Sumdurong Chu Valley incident drew the world’s attention for its gravity and intensity. Nevertheless, the matter was not briefed to the press and media agencies. Even, the international observers predicted that the intrusion would result in another war between India and China. According to a scholar, the Sumdurong Chu Valley episode was “a potentially dangerous situation” which “touched off a border build up by both sides” but was “controlled by diplomatic action”.

15 Asian Recorder, Supra No. 14, p-19060
17 Bidanda M.Chengappa, Supra No.3, p-81.
However, it was the dynamic leadership of Rajiv Gandhi who diplomatically handled the Sumdurong Chu Valley incident, which resulted in avoiding a major war on the lines of 1962 Indo-China war. Even, international observers appreciated Rajiv Gandhi's timely action in defusing the tension between the two countries over the Sumdurong Chu incident. Due to Rajiv Gandhi's efforts tension along the boundary line was reduced considerably..

The Seventh Round of Border Talks:

Despite the Sumdurong Chu incident, the Seventh rounds of talks were held as planned in July 1986. India accused the Chinese intrusion into the Sumdorong Chu Valley of Arunachal Pradesh and as expected raised the issue apart from the border dispute at the Seventh Round of Sino-Indian border talks. China strongly refuted this accusation but the tension generated by this exchange caused the seventh round to head towards a breakdown. However, then Foreign Secretary A.P.Venkateshwaran, the leader of the Indian delegation, claimed that the ongoing talks had resulted in a much better appreciation of each other's positions on the various issues".18 But the talks on the intrusion and border issue ended in Beijing in July 1986 without making any substantial progress. As such the relations between India and China continued to drift throughout 1986.

Conferring Statehood On Arunachal Pradesh:

When the efforts were made to improve the relations between India and China, the major irritant was the issue of Arunachal Pradesh. As a result, relations between India and China reached the climax when "the Lok Sabha passed two bills on 8th December 1986 conferring Statehood on the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh". The main objective of the Indian government's decision to confer Statehood on Arunachal Pradesh was to ease the situation in the Eastern sector as it was considered a disputed area. The relations between India and China were not so cordial before upgrading Arunachal Pradesh, a Union Territory, to the level of a State.

But Chinese government taking into consideration the development that had taken place in Arunachal Pradesh, strongly protested against the Indian action declaring Arunachal Pradesh as an independent State. The spokesperson of the Chinese government issued a statement that "a Bill upgrading Union Territory, Arunachal Pradesh to the level of State established on a part of Chinese territory illegally occupied by India. This act has once again seriously violated China's territorial integrity and sovereignty and deeply hurt the feelings of Chinese people. The Chinese solemnly declare that the Bill approved by the Indian Parliament is absolutely illegal and that China will never recognize

the so-called Arunachal Pradesh established in the most disputed Eastern sector of the Sino-Indian boundary".20 The main idea behind the protest was that China considered the Northeastern sector of (NEFA) North Eastern Frontier Area as a disputed area.

But India refuted the Chinese allegation over the issue of granting statehood to Arunachal Pradesh and categorically stated that the protest from China was against the principle of Panchasheel Agreement, which envisages non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Since the granting of statehood to Arunachal Pradesh is an internal affair of India, China has no absolute role to play in the matter. Therefore, India termed the China's protests as unwarranted and baseless and described the statement as a "clear interference in the internal affairs of this country".21 Further, India also made it clear that before making any statement against India, China should have considered its commitment to the Panchasheel Agreement in letter and spirit.

Despite these developments the process of peaceful negotiations continued. Further, India continued its efforts in normalizing the relations with China. In this context the then foreign Minister, N.D.Tiwari, visited Beijing in June 1987. In their joint statement both he and Vice-Foreign Minister Liu-Shuqing emphasised that peace and friendship were more important than any differences.22

The Eighth Round of Border Talks:

A comparatively relaxed atmosphere preceded the eighth round of talks held in New Delhi in November 1987. The tensions of the first half of 1987 gradually reduced. "In fact, China was full of appreciation of India's decision not to give any support, moral or physical, to the agitation that the Tibetans had launched earlier in the year".23 It was happy about India's stance in relation to Tibetan issue. It was particularly because of the American criticism against Chinese action. Obviously, at the eighth round of talks India had decided not to raise the border issue for the time being and confined to the areas of cooperation with a view to creating a conducive atmosphere during the talks. This was perhaps a change of policy under Rajiv Gandhi's leadership over the boundary dispute. "Indira Gandhi had attached the resolution of the boundary issue to the development of relations in other domains. Rajiv Gandhi's leadership deviated from this position and emphasized that the improvement and strengthening of relations in other spheres such as trade and commerce, science and technology and culture should not be held hostage to the border issue".24 The two groups also discussed the international issues. Therefore, among the earlier rounds of talks, the talks held at the eighth round succeeded in making some breakthrough in the dialogues. However, the boundary dispute remained unresolved.

23 Quoted in J.K. Baral and Others, Supra No. 13, p-265.
After eight rounds of talks on the border dispute a little breakthrough had been achieved due to the change of policy introduced by Rajiv Gandhi. But the boundary question remained unresolved, despite several rounds of talks. This obviously prompted Rajiv Gandhi to undertake a visit to China in December 1988, which aroused new hopes in the Sino-Indian relations. Another important factor, which prompted Rajiv Gandhi to improve the Sino-Indian relations, was the initiative of Gorbachev, the General Secretary of Communist Party of Soviet Union to improve its relations with China. "In 1986 he openly declared in Vladivostok that the Soviet Union was interested in improving her relations with China".25 Also the All India Congress Committee passed a resolution on 5th November 1988, and authorized Rajiv Gandhi to seek a settlement based on "mutual interest" and "acceptable to the peoples of both countries" through "peaceful negotiations" even if it took time.26 This further strengthened the hands of Rajiv Gandhi in taking concrete steps to improve the Sino-Indian relations by undertaking a trip to China.

**From Confrontation to Normalization:**

As a step of moving forward, Rajiv Gandhi visited China on 19th December 1988 after a lapse of 34 years, which is not only a leap forward in the improvement of relations between the two

---

25 B.R Deepak, Supra No. 24, p-319.
countries but also a remarkable event in the history of Sino-Indian relations. His visit to China opened a new chapter in the sense it broke the barriers of hostility and suspicion and established mutual trust between the two countries after the Sino-Indian War of 1962. As a result, great hopes were set on Rajiv Gandhi’s visit, which would result in finding a lasting solution to the Sino-Indian border dispute. During the visit Rajiv Gandhi made it very clear that the problems between the two countries could not be solved in a visit of three or four days. He said, “We have to pave the way for creating an atmosphere, which may help in solving mutual problems. This visit to China, the first ever by an Indian Prime Minister since 1954 was an endeavour to rebuild the bridges of friendship through peaceful coexistence”.27 The primary objective of the visit was to improve the atmosphere and move from confrontation to normalization of relations, i.e., opening up new areas of co-operation in trade, science and technology, education, mass media, etc.

During the visit, though the border question remained the key concern, it was emphasized that keeping in mind the changing technological advances both the states should attempt to strengthen the growing good will and enlarge the areas of co-operation in cultural, scientific and socio-economic spheres. Stressing on the purpose of the visit, Rajiv Gandhi remarked,

national sentiments and dignity of both countries has to be understood and respected and said, “We shall conduct our dialogue in this spirit”. It was agreed during the visit that a Joint Working Group was to be constituted to look into the border question. China has laid claim to 90,000 Sq.Km. of Indian territory in the Akshai–Chin area of Ladakh in the Western sector”.28

Though the boundary question figured prominently in the agenda of Rajiv Gandhi’s discussion with the Chinese leaders, still the bilateral agreements were given priority during the talks. The Chinese leaders, who always insisted on give and take policy, once again put forth the package deal during the talks. But Rajiv Gandhi was not agreeable to the package deal in so far as the border dispute was concerned. Even Rajiv Gandhi, prior to his visit, ruled out any territorial concessions to China and said, “There is no question of giving any piece of land while I am in China. Let me make it very clear.”29 Therefore, Rajiv Gandhi was firm in mind that under his leadership India would not accept the proposal of Chinese government on the border issue.

Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to China was hailed as “historic”, since it made “a new beginning” in the relations between the two countries. Rajiv Gandhi’s leadership was mainly responsible for improvement of Sino-Indian relations, which had remained strained for several years. The “Hindi-Chini bhai bhai” sentiment of 1950s which

28 M.R.Biju, India’s Foreign Policy, National Publishing House, Jaipur, 2000, p-237.

321
receded in the history for the past several years, was resurfaced during Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988. An important outcome of this visit was the formation of the Joint working Group (JWG) in early 1989.

During Rajiv Gandhi's visit, both sides agreed to set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) at the level of Vice-Ministers for negotiations on the boundary issue. This was viewed as a major break-through towards the improvement of Sino-Indian relations. With the setting up of the JWG the border issue was officially separated from other bilateral issues, and that Sino-Indian relation would be seen that the establishment of JWG did the groundwork for dispelling tensions along the border, and the formation of confidence building measures. Among other things, the working group was expected to consider a "re-working of the Deng proposal" of 1979-80, which was basically a revival of the Chou Enlai "give and take" idea of the late fifties and early sixties.\footnote{Asian Recorder, 35 (7), February 12-18 1989, p-20434.}

According to the observers, the decision of the two governments to establish the JWG on the boundary question replaced the long-drawn-out process that saw eight mostly metaphysical rounds of official level talks. The new decision was believed to create a situation where both India and China would be free from bickering that had characterized the relations over the past few years. Further, it was believed that the establishment of
JWG would definitely strengthen the process of normalization of relations between the two countries.

**Bilateral Agreements:**

Both India and China signed three separate agreements on inter-governmental co-operation in the field of civil aviation, science and technology and bilateral cultural exchange programme. "The agreement on co-operation in science and technology called for interaction between the scientific communities and institutions in the two countries, and envisaged the establishment of a joint committee, which would meet at regular intervals to monitor progress. Under the air services accord, the two countries agreed in principle to establish direct air links between New Delhi and Beijing. The cultural agreement covered the exchange of dance and music troupes, artists, writers and press delegations, art exhibition, etc".31 In fact, during Rajiv Gandhi's period a new era ushered in the bilateral co-operation between the countries. As a result, the bilateral economic and trade co-operation considerably increased, keeping aside the boundary dispute for the time being. Though the boundary issue was a bone of contention in the relations of two countries was marginalized during the talks.

---

Joint Communique:

At the end of the meeting a joint communique was issued on 23 December 1988 and it stated that talks were beneficial and promoted mutual understanding, and were beneficial for the further improvement and development of bilateral relations. "It further emphasized on the importance of Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence and reiterated that these should be the basis guarding principles for establishing new political and economic world order. As regards the boundary issue, the joint communique stated that both sides agreed to resolve this problem through peaceful means and consultation. It was also agreed that while seeking solution to the border issue acceptable to both sides, efforts would be made to develop relations in other spheres so as to create an atmosphere and conditions conducive to settle the border issue reasonably and justly".32

During Rajiv Gandhi's visit, though the boundary dispute was the main agenda of the bilateral discussions, it was put aside as the talks between the Indian and the Chinese leaders mostly centered on the bilateral agreements and improvement of relations between the two countries. Probably it was the belief of Rajiv Gandhi that the bilateral agreements would certainly reduce the tensions in the Eastern sector along the Line of Actual Control and

32 B.R.Deepak, Supra No. 24, p-332.
would pave the way for settling the border issue. Therefore, during the talks the bilateral agreements between the two countries preceded over the border talks.

With regard to international situation, the two sides held that, in the present-day-world, confrontation was giving way to dialogue and tension to relaxation. This is a trend resulting from long years of un-answering struggle by the peace-loving countries and people of the world against power politics. Both sides shared the view that the time is conducive to world peace and to the settlement of regional problems. It was resolved that China and India would make their own contribution to the maintenance of world peace, promotion of complete disarmament and attainment of common progress.

The notable feature of the talks was that China expressed concern over the activities against the motherland by some Chinese Tibetan in India. However, whereas the Indian side reiterated the long and consistent policy of the government of India, and Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi said, “Tibet is an autonomous region of China and that India does not allow these Tibetans to engage in political activities against China in India”. But Rajiv Gandhi’s concern over Tibetan issue and his statement became one of debatable subject.

The success of Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to China in 1988 is as follows:

33 www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/
1) Sino-Indian relations were taken out of the past prejudices and put on a forward looking posture to momentum to an all round development of relations.

2) Pending a solution to the boundary dispute, both sides agreed to maintain peace along the line of actual control and at the same time laid emphasis on cooperation in other areas of mutual concern and benefit.

3) The principles of Panchasheel were reemphasized acting as a guidepost to relations between the two countries.

4) Formation of a working group at the level of Vice-Ministers for negotiations on boundary question and for strengthening the maintenance of peace and tranquility along the border.

5) Formation of working Group at the level of Vice-Ministers to promote trade, economic and investment relations. 34

Even after Rajiv Gandhi's exit, the spirit of his visit remained intact. There were a series of high-level exchanges between the two countries and the Joint Working Group (JWG) proposed by Rajiv Gandhi and Li Peng was set up in 1988 to work out modalities to resolve all disputes. It was entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining peace and tranquility on the border.

The two leaders of the JWG, namely, the Indian Foreign Secretary and the Chinese Vice-Minister were given powers to review and initiate proposals for resolving the border issue. The JWG met in July 1989 to discuss all outstanding issues, including the border question. Though nothing significant came out of the meeting, at least it created an atmosphere favourable for sitting across the table to sort out differences without resorting to hostility or war.

**Meeting With Deng Xiaping:**

Rajiv Gandhi also happened to meet the Chinese oldest person Deng Xiaping. In his meeting with Rajiv Gandhi on December 21, 1988 Deng Xiaping, Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the PRC, said, "Let both sides forget the unpleasant period in our past relations, and let us treat everything with an eye on the future".35

The talks between the two leaders established the basis for the development of Sino-Indian relations to proceed. Both sides reached some understanding on border issues and agreed to settle them through peaceful and friendly negotiations. The visit was marked by two major events: Deng's meeting with India's young Prime Minister when the ageing leader of China declared that the future belonged to the generation of young leaders of the world, and Rajiv Gandhi's acceptance of the Chinese position that the 5,000 km border was negotiable.36

---

Though Rajiv Gandhi's China visit was responsible for accomplishments of certain objectives, still both newspaper columnists and members of the opposition criticized his trip. Because, they zeroed in his statement that "Tibet is an internal matter of China". Rajiv Gandhi’s statement achieved significance and became a debatable subject in India. Even the leaders of different political parties questioned India’s propriety and the genuineness of its policy towards Tibet, which had been followed right from Jawaharlal Nehru’s period. As a result, India’s stand on Tibet came under the scanner which claimed herself the champion against colonialism and imperialism, which had been followed since pre-independence days. Even Rajiv Gandhi’s statement during his stay in Beijing elicited criticisms and it was termed as the violation of principle of reciprocity, by not asking China about the absence of Human Rights in Tibet and by neglecting to secure China’s recognition of Sikkim’s merger in India. On the contrary some critics claimed that Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to China would considerably help in building and strengthening peace in the region as well as in the world at large.

However, it is pertinent to note that the leaders were not aware of Jawaharlal Nehru who clarified India’s stand on Tibet much before Rajiv Gandhi’s statement. In 1954, Jawaharlal Nehru said, “Tibet was a part of China and in 2003, A.B. Vajapayee the

---

38 K.Baral and others, Rajiv Gandhi’s China Diplomacy: Dynamics and Problems, Millennium, 26 (3), July-September, 1989, p-268
then Prime Minister said, "the Tibetan Autonomous Region was part of China."\textsuperscript{39} Therefore it clearly indicates that Rajiv Gandhi's statement on Tibet was nothing but reiteration of what Jawaharlal Lal Nehru had said.

Perhaps, "the Indian officials closely associated with the visit took a different view and contended that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's statement was mere reiteration of a long-standing Indian position that dates back to 1954 when India firmly acknowledged Chinese sovereignty on Tibet". Furthermore, they argued that it would have been foolish to seek a similar endorsement on disputed Indian territories.\textsuperscript{40} India consciously refrained from making any provocative statements on Tibet since it was believed that statements on Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) would definitely lead towards deteriorating relations between the two countries. Therefore, Rajiv Gandhi dealt the issue diplomatically with a view to improving the India's relations with China.

India considered Tibet as an issue adversely affecting the Sino-Indian relations. The history of Sino-Indian relations reveals that it was the Tibetan issue that led to the deteriorating relations between the two countries. "For China, Tibet has been a highly sensitive issue". As Jawaharlal Nehru once remarked, it was not clear from whom the Chinese wanted to liberate Tibet as China talked darkly about imperialist forces even as it sent its army to

\textsuperscript{39} http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow.
\textsuperscript{40} Sumit Ganguly, Supra No.37, p-1133.
occupy the “roof of the world”. India has had long-standing cultural and religious ties with Tibet, but no desire to maintain an “imperialistic” presence there and so surrendered the British-maintained installations in Lhasa”.41

Package Deal:

When the boundary dispute between the two countries became thorny and remained unresolved, China took the initiative and proposed the settlement of the problem through mutual trust and negotiations. In this context, China suggested that their outstanding border problems should be settled on the basis of the present Line of Actual Control. Pertaining to this, the then Chinese Vice-Premier Teng Hsiao Ping had reportedly said, “while we recognize the present Line of Actual Control in the Eastern sector, India should recognize the status quo in the West”, - meaning the Aksai-Chin and the Karakoram area which is under the Chinese control at present”.42 But in simple terms the proposal put forth by the Chinese government was nothing but a “give and take formula”. In other words the package deal was involved settling the dispute along the lines of actual control with concessions/adjustments in the Eastern sectors.

Further, it was during Indira Gandhi’s period that a similar proposal was put forward. In June 1980 China suggested that the

---

border problems be settled on the basis of the present Line of Actual Control. Therefore, in order to resolve amicably the boundary issue, the then Chinese leader Deng Xioping announced a "package deal" on the Sino-Indian border question. But the Indian government played it cool. Because prior to Deng, the then Premier Chou Enlai had proposed practically the same thing during his talks in New Delhi in 1960 which was ultimately rejected by the Indian government. The deal proposed by Deng Xioping was that "in the Eastern sector China recognize that McMahon Line as demanded by India; in turn, India could concede Aksai-Chin to China in the Western sector".43 It was also made clear that, if an agreement could not be reached, the problem should be put aside so that the relations between India and China improve.

The Indian public reacted sharply to this proposal of Deng, and was put into back burner. Reacting coolly to the proposal, the then Foreign Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao submitted in the Lok Sabha on July 1980 that some other ways than the package solution could prove more 'effective'. India, on its part, hoped to settle the border question in a spirit consistent with national honour and interests of both sides on a basis of equality".43 It, however, considered the fact of the two governments coming to grips with the longstanding and complex border problem after a considerable lapse of time as a positive step.

44 Verinder Grover,(ed) International Relations and Foreign Policy of India: China, Japan and India's Foreign Policy, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1992, p-75.
During Rajiv Gandhi's period also the "package deal" surfaced particularly during the sixth, seventh and eighth rounds of Sino-Indian border talks. The Chinese also put forward their long-standing claim that the traditional boundary line lay to the east of the McMahon Line, i.e., the Himalayan crest. India perceived that the Chinese had toughened their position. "In December 1985 the External Affairs Minister stated in the Rajya Sabha that the resolution of the border problem was a prerequisite for a complete normalization of relations". Therefore, the package deal did not bear any fruit, but it was put into the backburner during Rajiv Gandhi's period.

B.R. Deepak, a scholar on Indo-China relations suggested that in order to resolve the boundary dispute "India must not talk of 1963 Parliament resolution that talks of taking back "every inch of Indian territory". Similarly, China should stop the rhetoric that it does not recognize the "so-called" Arunachal. As far as the latter suggestion is concerned it is the internal matter of India, and the former is not acceptable to it. Because, in simple terms the suggestion is nothing but the reformed proposal of "package deal", i.e., a give and take policy. The plain reading of the package deal reveals that the deal, which talks about status quo in the Western sector and negotiation on the Eastern sector, was one sided. This proposal was not accepted by India. Because India wanted to have

---

44 Sumit Ganguly, Supra No.37, p-1129.
45 B.R. Deepak, Supra No. 24, p-439.
negotiation sector-by-sector, which considered all the sectors as disputed. Whereas China considered only Eastern sector as disputed, and wanted to have negotiations only on this. This clearly indicates the Chinese intention in resolving the boundary dispute.

Therefore, if Jawaharlal Nehru had accepted the package deal or the give and take proposal offered by Chinese as suggested by the scholar, India would have lost thousands of Kilometers of its territory to China. Further, the deal would have gone against the wishes and the public opinion of the Indians who were against parting even an inch of India’s territory to China. In fact, the Indian government under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru reaffirmed “the 1963 Parliamentary resolution that India would not hold substantive discussions with China until the Chinese vacated every inch of Indian territory”.46 In this context the decision taken by Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime minister, in accepting the Chinese proposal appears to be correct in the interests of the people and the sovereignty of India. In fact, the Package deal suggested by the then Premier of China, Chou-Enlai and subsequently by Deng Xioping was not in India’s interest but intended to serve the Chinese only.

“Tian’anmen Square Incident” and the Indian Stance:

It was during the latter part of 1980s some dramatic events took place in the international politics. More particularly, the

46 Quoted in Sumit Ganguly, supra No. 37, p-1126.
Communist countries of the world witnessed such events. Firstly, it was in 1990, the Soviet Union collapsed due to the liberal policies introduced in 1985. Secondly, the consolidation of forces of liberal democracy and freedom clashed with authoritarian and oppression in some parts of the world. In this context, the reverberations were also felt in the Chinese capital, Beijing. “The death of Huo Yaobang on 15th April 1989 who was dismissed in 1987 for being lenient with pro-democracy students provided an opportunity for the students to vent their anger out on the hard-line Communist leaders including Xioping Deng”. In early June 1989, the Chinese government started to crush the pro democratic movements led by the students and reformists resulted in untoward violence throughout the country. The Chinese students who opposed the authoritarian attitude of the Premier Zhian Zhou were made to crush. However, the students withstood the oppressive measures initiated by the Chinese leaders to suppress the movement. When the situation became volatile the Chinese government ordered firmly to deal with the protesters. As a result in early June 1989, Chinese troops ruthlessly suppressed the students-led prodemocracy movement in Beijing. The Chinese government used force against the students who have assembled in the Tiananmen Square of Beijing capital. In the ghastly incident thousands of protesters wounded and hundreds were dead.

46 B.R.Deepak, Supra No. 24, p-334.
The Tiananmen Square incident generated a great deal of furore and argument in the Western world including the Communist countries. Yet the incident did not seem to make any changes to Western policies towards PRC. In fact, the incident shook the whole world and paved way for the widespread criticisms throughout the world. Even, several pro-democratic countries in the world condemned the incident strongly. Gorbachev, the then General Secretary of the Communist Party of Soviet Union told in a press conference that he regretted some aspects of what had happened in China. He also indicated that during his visit he had received letters from the demonstrating Chinese students and said he felt that many of their concerns were legitimate.47

Rajiv Gandhi who had just arrived from China's visit expressed deep concern over the ghastly incident, without making any anti-China statement on the massacre. In fact, Rajiv Gandhi in a press conference on 16 June 1989 made it clear that though India approves of democracies in all the places, however, does not intervene in other country's internal affairs.48 This naturally made the pro democratic countries of the world to question the propriety of India's stand and its genuineness. However, Indian Ministry of External Affairs issued a carefully worded statement that avoided direct criticism of the Chinese leadership. Furthermore, India did not postpone the first meeting of the Joint Working Group.49 Both

---

these gestures clearly conveyed a message to Beijing that the Indian leadership was prepared to continue doing business with the Chinese despite their diplomatic isolation after the events in Tiananmen Square.

In this context, Rajiv Gandhi meticulously followed the principles of Panchasheel i.e., the non-interference in the internal affairs of each other's in letter and spirit. Rajiv Gandhi believed that making remarks against China would result in the interference of Chinese affairs and deteriorate the relations further between the two countries. Therefore, Rajiv Gandhi carefully avoided the friction between the two countries by refraining and making any anti-China comments on the Tiananmen Square issue.

In the meanwhile, the first meeting of the JWG was held in Beijing from 30 June to 4 July 1989. K.Natwar Singh, the then External Affairs Minister led the Indian delegation. The friendly attitude of Beijing during the talks was the outcome of a "cautious approach" adopted by India on Tiananmen incident. Therefore, the Indian approach towards Tiananmen squire incident elicited appreciation from the China and it expressed happiness. Gulam Nabi Azad the then General Secretary of Congress, further elaborated the Indian position during his visit to China in July 1989 after the Tiananmen incident. During his visit Azad said, "We strictly adhere to the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, one of these being non-interference in other country's internal affairs.

---

50 B.R.Deepak, Supra No.24, p-335
Ziang Zemin appreciated India's approach during the Tiananmen incident and emphasized that China attached great importance to develop relations with India.\textsuperscript{51}

India's silence over the Tiananmen square should not be construed as India's support to such incidents in China, which was a violation of human rights. Rajiv Gandhi's only commitment was to improve the strained relations between the two countries. Because, it took nearly 38 years for the Indian leadership to improve India's relations with China. Therefore, Rajiv Gandhi's stance in not passing any anti-China remarks over the incident appears to be correct in that hour, which intended to improve India's relations with China. India being sovereign country need not follow others actions or to accept the actions of the Chinese government. In fact, Rajiv Gandhi proved his statesmanship and made it clear that India respected the Principles of Panchsheel Agreement signed between India and China.

In so far as Sino-Indian relations were concerned Rajiv Gandhi played a pre-dominant role in improving the relations between the two countries. In fact, his bold step in visiting China despite opposition from the opposition parties in India evoked appreciation not only from the Indian public but also from the international community. It was because of his sincere efforts today the two Asian giants could closely figure in the international politics by signing various bilateral agreements in diverse fields. It was also due to Rajiv Gandhi's leadership today there is co-

\textsuperscript{51} B.R. Deepak, Supra No. 24, p-335
operation between India and China in almost all areas including the strategic areas. Indeed, the post-Cold War era paved the way for improvement of strained relations under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi.

The post Cold War period was more pragmatic in taking concrete steps for introducing mutual co-operation and in this context the Sino-Indian relations are very crucial. Accordingly, both countries held a number of talks between the leaders of the two countries to strengthen bilateral co-operation in the field of Information technology and Biotechnology and other related fields. Even during the post-cold War era the boundary dispute between the two countries resulted in ending the conflict due to the subsequent talks held by P.V.Narasimh Rao, the then Prime Minister of India. In fact, the base for the talks was initiated under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi who was responsible for change in the policy towards the boundary dispute. It was he who heralded a new era of co-operation between India and China. Because of his endeavour large number of visits of Chinese dignitaries to India began. The first being the Li Peng the then Chinese Premier and followed by P.V.Narasimh Rao's visit to China set the agenda for normalization of bilateral relations between India and China. Later the exchanges of high-level dignitaries followed the suit and they further quickened the pace of normalization of relations between the two Asian neighbours. Therefore, Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988 substantially improved the Sino-Indian relations.