

Interview – Preethi Amaresh

Written by E-International Relations

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This interview is part of a series of interviews with academics and practitioners at an early stage of their career. The interviews discuss current research and projects, as well as advice for other early career scholars.

Dr. Preethi Amaresh is a Political Scientist and Manager of the CyberDiplomacy & International Relations Department at CyberPeace, based at the United Service Institution of India (USI) in New Delhi. She earned her doctorate in International Relations from the Geneva School of Diplomacy, Switzerland, and holds two master's degrees in Psychology and International Relations and was the University gold-medalist. She has been a Visiting Doctoral Scholar at institutions including the National Institute of Advanced Studies (IISc campus, India), the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (University of Copenhagen, Denmark), Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), South African Military Academy (Stellenbosch University).

Dr. Amaresh's expertise lies in foreign and strategic affairs, with a particular focus on India. Recently, her work has expanded to include cyberdiplomacy. She has authored four books in the fields of international relations and foreign policy: *Nihonomics: Economic Foreign Policy of Japan* (2020), *Nānmín: Concavity of China's Refugee Policy* (2021), *Ninengan Mae: The Stateless* (2022), and *Namastey Bharat: Churning the Soft Power Treasure of India* (2023). She is currently working on four additional book projects as the sole author. In addition, Dr. Amaresh has authored numerous publications on International Relations for numerous websites, including Modern Diplomacy, The Diplomat, and The Diplomatist. Additionally, she has an interest in aviation and collaborates with her husband, a Boeing International pilot, on related articles.

What (or who) prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking or encouraged you to pursue your area of research?

Passion in any field is what makes an individual move forward in life. It is important to ignite that fire within you and pave the way for your own success. Embody your unique qualities and let them guide you towards achieving your goals. During my early days as a doctoral scholar or even before pursuing my doctoral research, focusing on a distinct area of research turned out to be challenging. Nevertheless, remaining motivated and committed to your "preferred area of study" is important to contribute significantly to the academic world.

All my life, I have taken enough risks by experimenting with what I really want, and my failures and critics have only made me stronger. My mother, a former banker has been a great influence in inculcating in me the habit of reading different genres of books since my school days. Given my passion for writing and contributing to school and college magazines, my interest gradually shifted to research and writing books. All these aspects have transformed me into a better individual and helped me to have smooth sailing to complete my doctoral thesis in 2.5 years, further receiving appreciation from my thesis defense panel in Switzerland for the high-quality work. Traveling to other institutions/universities as a visiting scholar added additional research experience for my doctoral thesis. My association with these universities and organizations helped me to gain further insights related to my research on aspects such as the foreign policy of India, digital diplomacy, India and Russia's soft power, the impact of artificial intelligence in International Relations and diplomacy, military diplomacy and soft power of India and Africa.

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Switzerland's renowned education system for students provides excellent opportunities, though affordability can be a barrier. In the coming years, I intend to pursue a post-doctorate in either Switzerland or the United States to advance my research capabilities. Importantly, to be successful, it is essential to have the support of near and dear ones. I was raised in a family of highly educated professionals spanning three generations – doctors, surgeons, lawyers, bankers, engineers, and government officials. Quality education was deeply revered in our household. As the sole family member to pursue a different career path, I encountered initial skepticism. Yet, my mother, elder sister (an engineer residing in Australia), and other close loved ones have steadfastly supported and encouraged me throughout my journey, serving as pillars of strength.

One way to also remain motivated is to surround oneself with a supportive web of peers, mentors, and advisors who can provide worthwhile feedback and advice throughout your research journey. I have also been fortunate to have exemplary, highly influential, and intellectual mentors such as Dr. Srikanth Kondapalli (former Dean of SIS, JNU) and several others who have directed me on the right career path and have further helped me in bettering my research capabilities.

Collaborating with people with your mindset who share your interests and goals can spark new ideas, thoughts, and perspectives, leading to visionary and innovative research projects. Similarly, reflecting on your research's influence and importance can be a powerful motivator to continue pursuing one's area of study. It is important to remember that research is a lengthy and demanding process that requires patience, perseverance, and a passion for knowledge. Whether addressing a binding global issue, advancing scientific knowledge, or contributing to the evolution of contemporary technologies, one's research can make a noteworthy difference in the world.

What is the evolving role of cyber diplomacy in the world?

In the digital era, the role of cyber diplomacy has become utmost crucial. Cyber diplomacy, often called digital diplomacy, is a relatively new concept that has emerged with the increasing influence of technology in contemporary international relations. It comprises a range of activities, including negotiations, communication, and information sharing on cybersecurity issues. The origins of cyber diplomacy can be traced back to the early 2000s when governments began to recognize the importance of the Internet and digital technologies in shaping global politics. As the world became more interconnected through cyberspace, diplomats and policymakers realized that more than traditional diplomatic approaches were needed to address emerging threats and challenges in the digital realm.

Similarly, cyber diplomacy is the diplomatic efforts and negotiations in cybersecurity that involve building relationships, establishing norms, and developing protocols to promote responsible behavior in cyberspace. Just as traditional diplomacy is essential for maintaining peace and stability in the physical world, cyber diplomacy is crucial for preventing conflicts and ensuring cybersecurity in the digital domain. By engaging in cyber diplomacy, countries can establish agreements on cyber issues, share information, and address common challenges together.

In today's interconnected world, nations rely heavily on the Internet for communication, commerce, and information sharing. Consequently, cyber attacks and cyber threats have become a major concern for governments and international organizations. Without effective cyber diplomacy, countries may resort to unilateral actions or retaliatory measures, leading to escalation and conflict in cyberspace. By engaging in diplomatic discussions and negotiations, countries can work together to prevent cyber incidents and mitigate the impact of attacks when they do occur. This underscores the necessity of cyber diplomacy as an essential approach for promoting global peace, security, and cooperation in the digital age.

What specific initiatives or strategies have you found to be most effective in promoting cyber peace through your work at the CyberPeace Foundation in India?

CyberPeace is a global organization, which is dedicated to advancing global cybersecurity and promoting digital peace through education, policy advocacy, and strategic collaborations. The organization endeavors to make the Internet a more secure, stable, trustworthy, and inclusive place for all netizens across the globe. As a non-partisan collective, the organization unites expertise, experiences, capacity, and intent across a broad spectrum of

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institutions, disciplines and cultures to combat the common threat of cybercrime.

The Cyber Diplomacy and International Relations (CD&IR) wing of CyberPeace, established in May 2024, focuses on academic and research initiatives in cyber diplomacy and international relations. This wing aims to coordinate and collaborate with governments, international organizations, universities, institutions, and civil society organizations worldwide. It also engages with CyberPeace Scholars from India and abroad to produce op-eds, reports, policy briefs, articles, white papers, monographs, books, occasional papers, commentaries, expert interviews, and more.

Major areas of research for us include critical and emerging technologies (CETs), national and international cybersecurity issues of paramount nature, foreign policy and diplomacy, power related aspects influencing international relations, contemporary issues of global importance, bilateral and multilateral cooperation of India with other nations and its influence in various civil society organizations, international and regional organizations. Some of the important initiatives of the CD&IR wing comprises of cyber peace training programmes, non-resident fellowships, coffee table discussions, academic & young scholar committees and so on that aim to support the organization at the international level.

How can academic research contribute to the development of more robust cybersecurity policies, and what areas do you believe require more scholarly attention?

Through academic research in the development of more robust cybersecurity policies, researchers can identify trends, patterns, and emerging threats, offering data-driven insights for policymakers. Additionally, universities and research institutions often pioneer new technologies and methodologies that can be incorporated into cybersecurity practices to enhance protection mechanisms. Academic studies on risk assessment models contribute to understanding the potential impacts of various cyber threats and aid in developing comprehensive risk management strategies. Research on social engineering tactics can lead to improved training programs and awareness campaigns, while scholars can explore the legal and ethical implications of cybersecurity practices, ensuring policies respect privacy rights and other legal standards. Furthermore, interdisciplinary approaches that combine insights from fields such as computer science, international relations, law, and psychology can lead to holistic cybersecurity policies that address the multifaceted nature of cyber threats more effectively.

The areas that require more scholarly attention include the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning in cybersecurity, particularly in threat detection and response, as well as the ethical implications and potential biases in AI-driven security solutions. There is also a need to address vulnerabilities in the growing network of connected devices within the Internet of Things (IoT) and to create standards and frameworks for securing IoT ecosystems. Protecting critical infrastructure, such as power grids, water supplies, and healthcare systems, from cyber attacks is another crucial area, with a focus on developing robust incident response plans. Researching privacy-preserving technologies to balance security with user privacy and analyzing the financial implications of cyber threats are also important. Finally, studying the challenges and opportunities in global cybersecurity cooperation and proposing mechanisms for international threat intelligence sharing and joint response efforts will be essential in the increasingly interconnected world.

How do you view India's presence on the global stage in the coming decade?

India, heralded as the oldest civilization, has profoundly influenced the West since the dawn of time. The allure of India is encapsulated in its centuries-aged culture, expansive geography, sizable yet youthful population, and the immense potential of its economy. The nation has steadily attained prominence globally in the contemporary decades and is poised to have greater influence. As the world's largest democracy, India's political, diplomatic, and defence influence will continue to grow, with the country also playing a pivotal role in international organizations such as the United Nations and aspiring for a multipolar world order.

India's presence on the international stage in the coming decade will also be strengthened by its strategic location in South Asia, giving it an exceptional standing to impact regional dynamics. With a rapidly expanding economy, advancements in technology and innovation, and a burgeoning youth population, the country is set to have a pivotal

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role in constructing the global landscape in international relations and diplomacy. India's growing defence capabilities and strategic collaborations with countries such as the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, and Japan will enrich its status as a fundamental player in international security happenings.

India, as one of the fastest-expanding foremost economies in the world, is attracting increasing attention from multinational establishments aiming to tap into its extensive market potential. However, the country also faces significant social, economic, and environmental challenges. To truly solidify its presence on the global stage, India will need to effectively address these issues and enforce policies that foster inclusive growth and sustainable development. By leveraging its unique strengths and overcoming its impediments, India is on the path to becoming a significant player in global politics, economics, and security in the forthcoming years.

How can Paradiplomacy play a major role in the foreign policy of India?

Paradiplomacy has been prominent in shaping foreign policy at both the national and international levels. It relates to the engagements of subnational states in foreign policymaking and is also known as 'continent diplomacy,' 'state diplomacy,' 'regional diplomacy,' and 'subnational diplomacy.'

India's paradiplomacy remains in a formative stage. The country should decentralize political power and empower its regional governments to make further progress and let them become key players on the global stage. This strategy could elevate India's federal states onto the world map, thereby expanding the country's overall diplomatic influence. For instance, the Chief Ministers of Kerala, West Bengal, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu have conducted the role of "Chief-diplomat" in promoting paradiplomacy with several countries. This decentralization of diplomatic power allows subnational entities to boost their interests and develop global partnerships that align with their distinctive emphases and objectives.

One of the fundamental advantages of paradiplomacy is its capability to facilitate economic growth and attract foreign investment. For instance, cities may establish sister city connections with foreign counterparts to promote cultural dialogue and trade partnerships. Similarly, it can also contribute to addressing international challenges such as climate change, security threats, human rights matters, and so on.

Through paradiplomacy, India can play a pivotal role in shaping global governance and promoting shared goals and values on the global stage. Paradiplomacy can act as a binding instrument for heightening partnerships and cooperation between various levels of government, facilitating a more sustainable and peaceful world. The establishment of a 'States Division' within India's Ministry of External Affairs is a positive step, but the union government must urgently take a more integrated and transparent approach to effectively advance paradiplomacy. Actively involving states and leveraging their economic strengths is crucial for India's rise. This will enhance state-civil society interaction, boost India's soft power, and strengthen its foreign policy. Embracing this cooperative federalist approach will further support India's trillion-dollar economy.

What are you currently working on?

Cybersecurity, emerging cyber threats, cyber warfare, diplomacy and foreign policy at the global level, civil society organizations and the modern world order, climate change and Sustainable Development Goals, the roles of state and non-state actors, international policymaking and governance, and space and nuclear technology, among others. From my perspective, it is crucial to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of international relations. By exploring these intricate and multifaceted challenges, we can better address the pressing issues facing the global community and pave the way for further development in this vital field.

What is the most important advice you could give to other early career or young scholars?

One of the most crucial pieces of advice for early career or young scholars is to prioritize building a robust professional network. Networking is necessary for establishing affinities with other professionals and scholars in one's specialization, potential collaborators, and mentors who can provide guidance and support. In addition,

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attending several conferences, workshops, discussions, and seminars and strengthening active engagement on professional networking platforms can assist you in boosting your network and staying informed about the latest research outcomes.

Another important aspect for young scholars is to seek out prospects for professional growth and skills building. It is therefore essential to always work on improving your research skills, writing capabilities, and articulation techniques. Participating in research projects, taking courses, and most importantly, seeking out mentorship from more experienced scholars can significantly enhance your skills and equip you to remain competitive in the academic job market. Last but not least, young scholars need to maintain a healthy work-life balance. The academic world can be challenging, arduous, and competitive, and it is necessary to prioritize self-care, set limitations, and not run out of steam. Taking breaks, traveling, pursuing hobbies, and spending valuable time with friends and family can help one rejuvenate and maintain a sustainable work schedule. Constructing a support system of peers and mentors can provide emotional help and motivation during the inevitable ups and downs of academic life.