

Indian Thinking in International Relations

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Introduction

It is no secret that international relations (IR) as a discipline has tended to be Anglo-American ethnocentric in character. In the nineteenth century, Great Britain dominated the study of international relations. British dominance was contested by the United States in the second half of the twentieth century and this development also found its echoes, eventually in an American hegemony over the discipline (Waeber 1998; Schmidt 1998). As a provocation, it is perhaps not unforeseeable to visualize *ceteris paribus* given China's growing clout in international affairs that by the middle of the twenty-first century an unmistakable Chinese footprint with its own *schools of thought* might well be registered much more strongly in international relations than it has in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Why has disciplinary international relations tended to be so integrally connected with the changing fortunes of powerful players in the international system? What about the several 'others' in the international system who possess neither the power nor the pelf of the major powers. It is ironical that, though the Global South in terms of brute empirics populates most of our political universe encompassing large swathes of Asia, Southern America and Africa, it has nevertheless remained by and large peripheral to the discipline of international relations. By implication, these actors have often been perceived as low stakeholders in determining the overall trajectory of the discipline as well.

It is against this backdrop (given its unfamiliarity as well as changing standing within the contemporary international system) that the story of Indian IR generates more than a degree of curiosity today. In the course of the chapter, I address three issues. At the outset, I begin by clarifying my usage of the terms, 'Indian thinking in international relations'. Second, I examine four arguments about the nature and sensibilities at work in Indian IR. Finally, I sample reflections on some recurring themes

of international politics as viewed from an Indian vantage point. These include assessments of Indian foreign policy, bilateral relations, ethnicity and state-building questions, regionalism and multilateralism. I must forewarn the reader that this is by no means intended to be an exhaustive state of the art review of literature of all available Indian IR writings. That is a task that needs to be undertaken afresh by every generation with some seriousness and rigour, but will have to await another moment. Elements of Indian political thought have received attention in some scholarly works (Mehta 1992; Parekh 1989; Pantham and Deutsch 1986; Ghose 1984; Appadorai 1970; Bandhopadhyaya 1969; Damodaran 1967). My objective here is much more circumscribed. I gesture to some bodies of literature, from the past as well as the present, in order to give the reader a sense of both the menu of issues as well as the modes of argumentation employed by some well-known exemplars, drawing from different generations of Indian IR scholarship.

Conceptualizing Indian IR

What is Indian IR about? Who are its principal protagonists and detractors? In what fashion has it been institutionalized and with what effect? These are questions which any student of international relations in India is likely to confront and mull over at some point or the other. Unfortunately, given the absence of a comprehensive account of the discipline and its evolution in India, we must for the time being rely more on available assessments, robust common sense, good hunches and impressions of what appears to have transpired in the Indian variant of the discipline. My own phenomenological experience, both as a student and teacher of international relations in one of India's pre-eminent schools of international studies, generates a particular picture of the state of affairs. I have no doubt that there are several other plausible competing versions of the animating drives of Indian IR, but I will confine myself to conveying these perceptions for what they are worth.

By 'Indian IR', I refer to scholars living and working in the field of international relations in India. The works of these scholars stem from their particular institutional locations in India and is also reflected in their participation in debates that acquire some urgency in the Indian context (Bajpai 2009). These inquiries relate, generally speaking, to traditional foreign policy questions, bilateral relations between India and the major powers and its immediate South Asian neighbours, questions pertaining to ethnicity and nation-building, regionalism and multilateralism. This is not to suggest that these scholars do not see themselves as participating in IR debates outside of their own national settings. However, they remain conscious of their location and speak in accents more specific to their local milieu.

International relations as a discipline in India took off with the establishment of the Indian School of International Studies (ISIS) in 1955. Prior to this, the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) was established in New Delhi in 1943. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru's influence in shaping perceptions

relating to India and the world is legion. His erudition on these matters was often without any parallel. This had both its pros and cons. On the positive side of the ledger, Nehru worked hard to inform the Indian public about the significance of world affairs and the rationale for the Indian stance on various questions ranging from non-alignment, new statehood, decolonization and its implications, development, human rights, the value of multilateralism and nuclear disarmament. By any standards, he was an eloquent speaker and also wrote at great length explaining the bases for India's various engagements with the external world. On the negative side, Nehru's expertise and ideological slant stymied independent scholarship because there was hardly anybody from within the domestic academia who felt they could adequately contest or critique Nehru's foreign policy (Bajpai 2005). It was not merely an issue of intellectual wherewithal. It also had much to do with the manner in which international relations, along with other social sciences in India, saw its task as one primarily contributing to the state-building project (Bajpai 2005: 17–38). As a consequence, this led to a deficit in terms of a more critical evaluation of state policy and was manifest in a rationalization of the official stance on a range of issues (Rana 1988).

Another important development in the early years of Indian IR was the emulation of the area studies tradition. International relations came to be equated with area studies and this had enormous implications in the subsequent years, when IR theory received short shrift because of this conflation (Sahni 2009: 49–68). While area studies scholars were interested in ideographic accounts, it would require a more rigorous tradition of engagement with IR theory that would make possible broader nomothetic formulations within the discipline. The ISIS which was merged subsequently with Jawaharlal Nehru University and was re-christened as the School of International Studies (SIS) reflects very much the area studies model at play. While a rigorous area studies tradition could have potentially provided an essential corrective to grand and middle-range theories, unfortunately in the Indian instance this was not to be the case. With the exception of some scholars, area studies did not fully live up to its original intent or promise. A part of the problem was that funding remained woefully inadequate, inhibiting the possibility of long periods of stay by scholars in their relevant areas of study. This further impinged on familiarizing themselves with the requisite language skills—a basic pre-requisite for good area studies (Rajan 2005: 195–204). Two other complex processes appear to be at work. The first, given an absence of rigorous training or exposure to the main strands of IR theory generated a suspicion of theory and at times a misplaced animus (Sahni 2009). Most accounts, therefore, tend to provide rich analytical histories of certain episodes in the life of the new nation, but do not explicitly tell us from which theoretical position the author advances her case. This explains, at least in part, why many of the writings of the first generation of IR scholars in India do not engage explicit IR theory. Second, along with a degree of intellectual diffidence and disguised awe about Western knowledge systems, there was sometimes a misplaced nationalism that bred a particular form of insularity where no conscious attempt was made to offer a comparative picture of states similarly placed in history and

the implications they carried as 'latecomers' for the international system.* There were, of course, honourable exceptions to both these impulses within even the first generation of IR scholarship, but the norm more often tended to exhibit elements of the complexes gestured to.

The first strides of Indian IR could have benefited considerably from the anti-colonial nationalist legacy. After all,

the intellectual climate in which Indian nationalists lived was not isolationist. The great leaders of Indian thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries like Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore looked far back to India's past, but stressed the unity of all universe and showed keen interest in the world outside. The early leaders of the Congress, Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Banerjea and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, inspired by a study of European history and political institutions, saw the salvation of India in close association with Britain. Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi based their teachings on old Indian currents of thought, but never advanced isolation from the rest of the world.

Prasad 1962: 6–7

Although Indian IR really took off only in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it did partake of some of the intellectual excitement that was part of the anti-colonialist Indian experience. It was acutely conscious of India's third world location, given the significance of non-alignment both as doctrine and policy in the Nehru years; a large part of the initial effort was to explicate its various nuances to audiences both at home and abroad. The early years of Indian IR also witnessed the presence of some well-known international scholars who visited India for varying durations of time. Hans Morgenthau, Quincy Wright and Hedley Bull all visited India and clearly made an impact on their Indian counterparts. Unfortunately, this stream of scholar visitors dried up subsequently, partly perhaps due to India's economic outlook that also became more and more inward looking. Today the trend is rather different again, with a number of scholars from even the traditional Anglo-American world visiting and curious to inform themselves more about developments in India.

However, a word of caution about interpreting what some might argue as a more 'banal cosmopolitanism' which informs the IR academia in India today (Beck 2006). While there is clearly a surge in the intellectual interest about India in the external world, there also needs to be a corresponding Indian curiosity about the world outside home. Clearly, there is a greater willingness to acknowledge traditions of thinking within India, to re-open the archives and examine alternative currents of thought or echoes of universal principles in local debates.

While the new trend is clearly welcome, given the earlier epistemic toll of colonialism, one also needs to guard against any nativism or 'reverse ethnocentrism' which extols the virtues of the local and remains hostile to anything outside that frame (Spivak 1985). It is in this context that I identify and examine four arguments, with implications for better appreciating the intellectual history of Indian IR and the possible directions it may take in the not so distant future.

Four Arguments About International Relations in India

Argument 1: The Early Case for Inclusivity in International Relations Theory

One of the early audits (little more than three decades ago) of Indian IR appeared in a contribution by K. P. Misra titled 'India's Contributions to International Relations Theory'. It struck me as particularly intriguing, given that the intervention consciously draws attention to 'theory' rather than international relations more generically, especially given the strong area studies provenance of Indian IR. It makes some interesting claims regarding international relations in India and its influences and the need, generally speaking, for a more inclusive understanding of what international relations does and whom it excludes. Misra argues that '[t]heories based on the principles and practices of only powerful countries are bound to be introverted in nature. They will remain only partial theories and thus will be able to explain the international reality only partially' (Misra 1980: 226–227).

Two formative influences have been important as far as the Indian unfolding of IR practice has been concerned. Misra distils these influences when he suggests that '... the two most influential streams of thought have been the positivistic philosophical framework of Kautilya and the moralistic philosophy enunciated and practiced by Buddha and Ashoka' (Ibid.: 219). He goes on to observe that '[o]f the two, the latter—the moralistic philosophical tradition, had a deep impact on Gandhi. To an extent this also influenced a whole set of India's nationalistic leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru whose role in shaping the country's international behaviour was singularly important' (Ibid.: 219).

Misra is particularly concerned about the implications for IR theory stemming from the emergence of new states in the international system. While conceding that the newly decolonized world is also not monolithic in character, he does make the case for their being taken more seriously even when it comes to theorizing international political life. He points out that:

the policies, and arising out of them the roles, of the new states of Asia, Africa and Latin America in international relations in recent decades perhaps do not permit us to create a close knit and coherent theoretical model of international relations but they do call for an effort to evolve a broad framework in the light of their international behaviour.

Misra 1980: 215

Misra also alludes to the problem of treating a national interest formulation namely, non-alignment in the Indian context '... as an integrated and coherent international doctrine' (Ibid.: 219). However, he does argue that '[o]ut of the broad philosophy and framework of non-alignment some other concepts have also grown which have a good deal of relevance for the theory of international relations' (Ibid.: 223).

Misra's account reflects many of the tensions which continue to persist while thinking about international relations in India today. These relate to the asymmetry

between the West and the East or the global North and the South, the need to distil a complex history and derive from that inheritance some key principles (while avoiding the risk of essentializing) which might be of relevance from the perspective of theorizing international politics more generically, as also the tensions between official practice and autonomous theoretical thinking.

Argument 2: 'Resistance to Theory' in India

Another set of arguments relating to the development of the field of international relations in India draw from the work of Kanti Bajpai. Three key reasons are cited for the somewhat stunted growth of Indian IR. The first relates to the residues of history, namely India's colonial past. Bajpai argues that:

[f]rom the colonial power's viewpoint, the last thing Indians would get was any sort of control over external policy. London might be willing to share some degree of responsibility for internal administration, economic management, and social affairs, but to do so for external matters was tantamount to gaining independence.

Bajpai 2005: 21

An equally contributory factor to the inhibited development of Indian IR has been alluded to earlier. Simply put, '... Nehru's expertise in international affairs, in the long term, was as much a constraint as an encouragement in the development of International Studies' (Ibid.: 22). A third and perhaps most compelling logic for the nature of the Indian variant of international relations had to do with its relation to the State. International studies in India has suffered because of the strong perception that state officials possess the best knowledge relating to the actual dynamics and workings of international politics. Second, there is a tendency to be less critical of the state '... to the detriment of a critical-minded field of study' (Ibid.: 24). Finally, there is the thorny but vital issue of accessing relevant data for one's research. The state is the custodian of this data and often shows a reluctance to share this data among its academics, especially when they could well be critical of state policy.

More fundamentally, Bajpai observes that there is a considerable degree of 'resistance to theory' in Indian IR (Ibid.: 25). Three arguments help substantiate this claim. First, Bajpai suggests that during the 1950s and the 1960s when Indian IR was making its early beginnings, the theories then in vogue did not find an audience in India for various reasons. To begin with, '... systems theory seemed to be primarily about the interactions of the Great Powers and said little about those outside that ambit, except as objects of the Great Power system' (Ibid.: 26). There was uncertainty about the worth of embracing Integration theories, considering that 'India had just become independent and sovereign, and to the extent that integration connoted an abridgment of independence and sovereignty, Indians were sceptical' (Ibid.: 27). When it came to theories of nuclear deterrence again, '... India did not possess nuclear weapons, nor was it likely to in the near future, and the constraints of nuclearisation on the exercise of force did not therefore apply' (Ibid.: 27). It appears that the only theory that did have some purchase was political realism (Ibid.: 27).

Things however appeared to have changed in the intervening years in some respects. Bajpai argues today that:

the influence of the early years has declined; there is a greater interest in theory even as the desire to be policy relevant remains alive. The theory menu in front of Indian scholars is much larger and more exciting, and the interest in Indian contributions to non-Indian IR publications is growing. Among Indian scholars, there is also a better understanding of IR as a field distinct from area studies. The relationship to the Indian state has improved: state functionaries have a better understanding of the role of academics in a democratic society.

Bajpai 2009: 126

All these developments augur well for the future of IR thinking in India.

Argument 3: Postcolonial ‘Dualism’ in Indian Writings in International Law

A third argument relates directly to the intellectual history of a rich and vibrant sub-field of international relations in India, namely international law. Focusing on the relationship between ‘law and periphery’, B. S. Chimni provides us an incisive account of the ‘dualism’ that had come to characterize Indian international law scholarship. This had to do in large measure with ‘the compromising nature of the post colonial state—that could neither enhance the welfare of subaltern groups nor consistently pursue policies of anti-imperialism—and the tight embrace of established traditions, methods and rules of international law turned into an Achilles heel’ (Chimni 2010: 25). What makes international law particularly relevant, from the perspective of Indian thinking in international relations, is that it remained particularly self-conscious and keen to carve out a distinct third world sensibility. As Chimni suggests:

... it is worth affirming at the very outset that the story of international law scholarship in post-colonial India is not only one of failures and disappointments but also a story of profound interventions, not the least of which has been the successful articulation, over many generations, of Third World approaches to international law (TWAIL).

Chimni 2010: 27

It is crucial to note that the first generation of Indian international law scholars were keen to ‘... reaffirm the civilizational unity of India and sustain the idea that India should play a central role in world politics’ (2010: 28). Distinguishing between the first and second generation of TWAIL scholarship, Chimni argues that in TWAIL I ‘... the relationship of international law with deep structures did not receive an adequate response in the absence of a profounder understanding of the economic and political structures of global capitalism’ (Ibid.: 40). This changed with TWAIL II which ‘... underlined the structural and discursive constraints in the international system and emphasized the need to shape and adopt an alternative critical vocabulary’ (Ibid.: 43).

The story of Indian international law provides room for some optimism about the possible maps for inducing a degree of self-confidence in developing a distinctively

third world sensibility as far as international relations is concerned. If ‘... despite its weaknesses Indian international law scholarship has, since the middle of the last century, been at the forefront of articulating a third world approach to international law and made seminal contributions to different branches of international law’ there is hope for other traditional areas of IR inquiry as well. An important lesson to learn from the international law experience is to explore more deeply our own epistemic resources and communicate key ideas with a degree of confidence to a wider world outside (Ibid.: 49). Figures like R. P. Anand of the first generation, who received their training at Yale, had a particularly significant influence in providing a sound philosophical armature and orientation to the study of international law from its inception in India. Most critically, they helped foster a conducive climate for intellectual dignity and self-esteem in scholarly pursuit outside of the confines of the Anglo-American academia.

Argument 4: A Case for Indian Political Theory

The fourth argument here about international relations in India draws tangentially from reflections within the precincts of adjoining political theory scholarship in India. Rajeev Bhargava contends with similar issues in the domain of political theory and asks, ‘[i]s there an Indian political theory?’ (2010: 56–78). Answering in the affirmative, he suggests that ‘... certain world historical developments ... include clear signs that the period of second colonization might be coming to an end’ (Ibid.: 68). While Bhargava is suspicious of strong endorsements of a sociology of knowledge stance in evaluating the influence of the West and the earlier diffidence of the non-West, he points out that:

[o]nce we realize that political reflections have not been structured in the sub-continent in the manner in which it has been done in the West, it is not difficult or preposterous to support the claim that a critical tradition of political theory does not exist in India or at least that political theory in India is underdeveloped.

Bhargava 2010: 56

Further, he adds that ‘[w]e first mistook the ideal world of western political theory as lived reality of the West and then began to imagine this “real world” as our own habitat or one where we shall live’ (Ibid.: 61).

Clarifying his stance on the sociology of knowledge question, Bhargava argues that he is ‘... not committed to the strong programme of sociology of knowledge for which concepts and theories are rigidly located with an immovable allegiance to specific interests’. He concedes that ‘... many concepts and theories possess a degree of flexibility and mobility that makes for multiple applications in contexts different from which they emerged’ (Ibid.: 67). But more significantly, the crux of the matter is his claim that:

... the rejection of the strong programme of sociology of knowledge helps to see that concepts and theories can be decontextualized, relocated, and then invested with different meaning and intonation. This complex practice of decontextualization and recontextualization must

be pursued. To understand **how** to decontextualize, we need to rely on available theoretical traditions. To know **what** precisely to recontextualize, we must have a strong practical grasp of our own social practices.

Bhargava 2010: 68

In terms of a programme for Indian political theory, Bhargava is of the view that 'the more urgent question now concerns the internal structure of concepts evolved in India and what happened to them with the advent of colonial modernity' (Ibid.: 69).

International relations in India also stands to gain by a similar epistemic politics of *recontextualization*. For far too long we have somewhat uncritically accepted theories which do not necessarily speak to our immediate concerns here. While it is important to have a good grasp of the claims of existing bodies of theory (minimally to avoid re-inventing the wheel), we must eschew a tendency to quickly graft existing theories onto other contexts unimaginatively, often generating unsatisfactory accounts of what best explains political behaviour in this part of the world. The 'lack of fit' between mainstream IR theories and local contexts might not be a reason to lament. It might indeed provide a good opening to re-examine often taken for granted associations between key variables.

Some Recurring Themes in Indian IR

IR thinking has traditionally veered around issues of foreign policy (Prasad 1962; Appadorai 1969; Bandhopadhyaya 1979; Jetley 1985; Kapur 1994; Mansingh 1999; Dixit 1998; Dutt 1999; Rajamohan 2007; Mehta 2009). It is no surprise then that a fair amount of IR commentary, particularly in the early years, dealt with India's external orientation as an independent postcolonial state. Distinguishing between both generic and particularistic elements of foreign policy, Angadipuram Appadorai argued that:

the really noteworthy features of India's foreign policy, in a broad sense, are three: the policy of nonalignment; her desire to follow the Indian tradition that the right means must be adopted to achieve a desired end, however much she herself might fall short of the ideal; and her approach to questions of war and peace with what may seem an undue emphasis on negotiation as a means of securing agreement on points of difference.

Appadorai 1969: 194

Bimla Prasad argues that:

the feeling that India was the natural leader of the Afro-Asian world was, however never accompanied by any desire to dominate over the countries of the region, or to interfere in their affairs. The Congress was absolutely free from any imperialist or expansionist urge even before

the advent of Gandhi and Nehru and, in its early years, repeatedly advocated a policy towards India's neighbours based on the principle of non-interference in their affairs. In the era of Gandhi and Nehru this healthy trend was further strengthened.

Prasad 1962: 278–279

K. P. Misra was of the view that:

a non-aligned country like India, which came of its own soon after the conclusion of the Second World War and which had the misfortune of being a party to about half a dozen conflicts with its neighbours, went through the experience which brought diverse lessons. Its freedom movement was unique[ly] internationally oriented largely on account of the vision of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Misra 1980: 225

A recognized classic in the field of UN multilateralism is M. S. Rajan's seminal work, *United Nations and Domestic Jurisdiction* (1961). The work of K. P. Saksena on UN Reforms and C. S. R. Murthy's account of the Indian diplomatic practice in the United Nations (1993) built systematically on a deeper interest in India and global multilateralism. B. S. Chimni's work has also focused on the role of contemporary international institutions and has highlighted their complicity in advancing an 'imperial global state' (2004).

There are some oft repeated motifs in the early accounts of Indian foreign policy. Nehru's persona and larger-than-life presence clearly left an indelible impression on commentaries during the formative years of Indian foreign policy. Questions of ethics and foreign policy, the issue of means and ends, the justice argument relating to the accommodation of newly decolonized states in the international system, faith in multilateralism and detailed expositions of the concept and dynamics relating to non-alignment garnered a great deal of attention.

It is also not uncommon to see that 'high politics' (in the Morgenthauian idiom) dominated a great deal of IR thinking in India then and continues to do so even today. Questions related to traditional conceptions of state security generate considerable attention within scholarship. K. Subrahmanyam is a key figure as far as the Indian variant of strategic studies is concerned. He has several works to his credit and wrote regularly, both in the national and international press, often providing the underlying rationale for India's transition from nuclear ambiguity to being a declared nuclear weapon state. He also authored an important evaluation of the Kargil episode in South Asia's very recent history (Subrahmanyam 1972, 1986, 2000).

As a subset of an interest in Indian foreign policy, there was also attention devoted to India's equations with the major powers (the superpowers during the Cold War years) and ever since independence, India's relations with Pakistan and its immediate South Asian neighbours, and in subsequent years (post-1962) with China. Specific periods of these relationships also constituted one strand of reflection. For instance, M. S. Venkataramini scrutinized the 1947–58 period in terms of 'the American role in Pakistan'. Some broader portraits continue to carry as much relevance today as when they were originally written.

Venkataramini suggests that:

What is needed is to carry to the American people the message that certain actions that are represented to them as justified for global security reasons may devastate the lives and institutions of people in distant countries who have done no harm to the United States and that, in the long run, the consequences of such actions may turn out to be harmful to the United States itself.

Venkataramini 1982: 415–416

There has also been interesting work on South Asian regionalism. The involvement of major external powers has been viewed as particularly significant in this context. According to S. D. Muni and Anuradha Muni:

The existing regionalism theory suffers from a European cultural bias as Western Europe has been the main focus and concern of its formulation. Even while studying third world regions within the framework of this theory, the underlying assumption seems to have maintained that the European experience in regionalism will be followed and replicated.

Muni and Muni 1984: 2

Questions of ethnicity and nation-building in the South Asian context have also received close scrutiny in some accounts. Characterizing South Asia as 'a kaleidoscope of latent, overt and explosive ethnicity', Urmila Phadnis also has an issue with an uncritical acceptance of European usages in the region (1989: 12). She observes:

[a]s regards the statist approach; the European heritage of the term nation-state has pervaded global terminology as evident from nomenclature like the League of Nations, the United Nations, International Politics, the International Court of Justice. Strictly speaking, these are misnomers but the very usage of the term reflects the mood and orientations of the people who mattered, regarding these terms.

Phadnis 1989: 21

Her overall claim is that:

... the challenges of ethnicity and nation-building, operating in a highly complex nexus of society, economy and polity, hinge on issues of access and stakes in the power structure. In this context, the experiences of the South Asian states are instructive as well as illuminating. These polyethnic societies are characterized by greater ethnic diversity than perhaps any other region in the world. However, in terms of boundary delineation, levels of development, content, context, constraints, as well as the potential of the varied demands for recognition, power and status, uniformities as well as variations among the ethnic groups across the borders can be discerned.

Phadnis 1989: 29

The issue of third world conflict has received attention in the work of scholars like A. P. Rana. He argues that:

... Buzan's view of the eventual emergence of truly indigenous regional 'security complexes' with the removal of the European colonial and Cold War 'overlays' may prove to be premature, even sanguine. The uni-superpower of the world and its associates have reason to be concerned about their present inability to deal with the state of ethnic and other crises erupting

in Third World areas, and closer at home, even in Europe. There is an intractability about them which is disturbing.

Rana 1996: 145

Conflict in the Indo–Pak situation remains a particular subset of this attention. The prescriptions to ameliorate the conflict have also varied considerably. According to Pratap Bhanu Mehta:

in the final analysis we need a political culture in both India and Pakistan that understands that sometimes nationalism is the enemy of national interest; we need a political culture that is prepared to pay a short-run price for imagining a new architecture for the subcontinent, and we need a political culture that will allow both countries to transcend the sediments of history that are weighing them down. Unless all this changes we will remain trapped in current paradigms and assumptions.

Mehta 2003: 2017

An impressive corpus of work by Ashis Nandy, ranging from critiques of modernity to the inadequacy of ‘History’ as a vehicle to understand South Asian modes of cognition, the ‘illegitimacy of nationalism’ and the significance of ‘non-statist’ expressions of political imagination have a fundamental bearing on our conception of politics for any critically minded IR scholar (Blaney and Inayatullah 1994). Nandy remains arguably the best foil in the South Asian context against an ‘imperialism of categories’ which students of international relations also need to remain eternally wary of (1983, 1987, 1989, 1995a, b). The seminal work of Partha Chatterjee on nationalism, his critique of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and the implications of this from the perspective of decoding postcolonial politics also remains important for IR scholars, especially in the Global South (1986, 1993). In this context, mention may also be made of Neera Chandhoke’s interventions from the political Left on questions of global democracy and global justice that are of substantive relevance to serious students of world politics (2003, 2007, 2008).

In the space of the last decade, there has been a concerted effort by scholars within the region to evidence scholarship from within India in the sphere of international relations. In 2005, Kanti Bajpai and I co-edited two volumes which brought together several writings by Indian scholars covering a wide range of issue-areas. One of the crucial objectives of this endeavour was to affirm the existence of a community of scholars engaging IR theory from India. The effort also consciously sought to avoid the ‘Delhi-centrism’ that has been a dominant refrain in the unfolding of the discipline in India. These contributions engaged consciously various strands of contemporary IR theory in the light of the lived empirics of the region.

The first of these volumes derived its title (*International Relations in India: Bringing Theory Back Home*) from an earlier intervention by Bajpai. The opening three entries in the volume all speak to concerns related to the development of international relations in India. Sequentially, the first of these contributions has been discussed earlier in this chapter, with arguments advanced by Bajpai about why international relations in India demonstrates, among several other attributes, a concerted ‘resistance to theory.’ In my

chapter, I examine inflections and conversations relating to states, nationalisms and modernities in India and tease implications they may carry in the manner in which puzzles are posed in international relations from this milieu. A third of the Indian IR disciplinary history interventions is by A. P. Rana and K. P. Misra, written originally for an international symposium in 1988. The chapter makes a very persuasive case for taking theory far more seriously than has been the case in the past, if the Indian variant of international relations is to be enriched (Bajpai and Mallavarapu 2005). The volume reflects a wide variety of theoretical engagements by scholars with distinct normative commitments. Feminists, liberals, neo-Marxists, postcolonialists and realists all apply their approaches to various facets of international political life.

International Relations in India: Theorising the Region and Nation (2005), the companion volume also modelled on similar lines, built and drew on a wide variety of scholarly writings by Indian scholars. Conceptual dissections of third world conflict, the competing bases of nationalism, debates between realists and culturalists on foreign policy, neorealist claims about the Indo–Pak conflicts, non-alignment discourses, the impact of colonial legacies on Indian geopolitics, the fluid and unsettled nature of territoriality in the region as well as an account of what Indian state responses to terrorism tell us about prevalent IR discourses were all integral to the collective. Assembling both these volumes represented to our minds as co-editors, a modest beginning in reaffirming community and showcasing the nature of Indian engagement against the backdrop of the global palate of international relations.

In 2008, another co-edited volume focused on ‘the search for an alternative paradigm’ in the South Asian context (Behera 2008). Drawing on contributions from South Asia, the book addressed some issues again relating to IR practice in the region. Specific theoretical pieces relating to Structure-Agency debates in the context of India’s strategic orientation (Sahni 2008), questions of external and internal conflicts in South Asia (Chatterjee 2008) along with an account of the weaknesses of liberal IR theory from the South Asian standpoint also featured prominently in the volume (Ramakrishnan 2008).

In 2011, E. Sridharan added to the growing body of reflection on South Asian contributions to IR theory by editing two volumes in this regard. The first volume focuses more specifically on the available modalities of regional cooperation, the blurring lines between the domestic and the international and the influence of political economy configurations on regional cooperation in South Asia (Sridharan 2011a). The second volume has a stronger focus on the applications of IR theory to the strategic make-up of South Asia and focuses as well on the social construction of ‘images, identities, world-views and normative frameworks’ in this context (Sridharan 2011b). On the whole, both these volumes add significantly to our existing repertoire of writings on IR theory and, most importantly, consciously advance academic collaboration among scholars in the region across generations. An added virtue of this collection is that many of these studies have involved periods of fieldwork in the South Asian region, giving a rich empirical feel to the volume, quite apart from its laudable theoretical ambition.

A trend which is visible in disciplinary conversations in international relations, both globally and in the subcontinent as well, is the acknowledgment of the value of

historicizing many of our current predicaments. Two recent illustrations of this 'turn to history' trend relate to the work on Nehru's strategic worldview (Raghavan 2010) and an account of Mughal strategic practices (Vivekanandan 2011). It is not hard to fathom the possibility of more studies along these lines by Indian scholars in the years to come.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to address three questions. The first related to clarifying what is meant by the term Indian IR, the second issue related to exploring arguments about the lineage and trajectory of international relations in India, and the third set of issues related to giving a snapshot or glimpse of the content and modes of argumentation that have tended to animate different generations of scholarship in Indian IR. With regard to the first question, my usage of 'Indian IR' is confined to those who study international relations living in India. Many of these scholars were acutely conscious of India's colonial past and its emergence in the international system as a new actor, along with other decolonized states. Second, given that the accent on state-building was strong, particularly in the foundational years of the Indian state, it also manifest itself in terms of an absence of sharp critique of official policies and a general status quoism, particularly in the first generation. The first generation was not unaware of the internationalist influences in the anti-colonial nationalist movement, but with the passage of time the orientation tended to become more inward looking. The second generation of IR scholarship which I trace to the late 1980s and early 1990s onwards had begun to take theory more seriously and sift through the relevance of claims to the South Asian milieu. It also appears less diffident when it comes to opening up its own traditions of political thinking and is keen to re-examine the work of hitherto neglected figures in Indian political thought.

With regard to the second dimension, I examine four distinct clusters of argument that seek to provide us an audit or big picture perspective of the nature of Indian IR. The first argument articulated by K. P. Misra makes a strong plea for greater inclusivity in terms of the cast of players as far as the study of international relations is concerned. The second argument is best represented in the work of Kanti Bajpai and examines the contingent peculiarities that left an indelible imprint in which the discipline of international relations shaped in India—these contingencies relate to the specific history of British colonization of India, the larger than life role of Nehru and its implications for IR scholarship in India, and the nature of the compact between the state and its scholars. A third argument which I have outlined relates to the complex dilemmas and motivations of a subfield of international relations, international law and its unfolding in the Indian setting. B. S. Chimni points to a peculiar dualism that has informed the development of international law in India, flowing from its colonial past and the post colonial state's aspiration but inability to mount an anti-imperialist set of policies. However, notwithstanding this problem, Chimni argues that international law provides a sound illustration of the efforts to develop a distinct third world sensibility best reflected in two generations of TWAIL scholarship. A fourth and

final argument draws from the work of Indian political theorist Rajeev Bhargava and makes the case for a *recontextualization* of political theory in the light of Indian realities. Rejecting a strong sociology of knowledge stance, Bhargava concedes the possibility of interrogating received wisdom afresh in the light of renewed empirical attention to Indian practices and a fresh look at available archives.

Finally, I have attempted to showcase elements of Indian scholarship with regard to some fairly staple issues in Indian IR. These relate to foreign policy, ethnicity and nation-building in South Asia, regionalism, India and the major powers and bilateral equations with Pakistan. I have also drawn attention to the spate of recent works which seek to consolidate elements of Indian thinking in international relations. A welcome trend in recent years has been the move to history within both the global as well as the Indian variant of international relations. My sense is that this augurs well for Indian IR, because it takes us back to fundamental issues of where we come from and what best explains our political behaviour both at home and internationally. Without being complacent about these developments, there is room for cautious optimism about the next wave of Indian IR scholarship (Mallavarapu 2009). Better resourced and definitely better connected to the larger world outside, Indian IR is at as interesting a conjuncture as India itself is in.

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Endnote

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