Re-imagining IR in India

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Abstract

The poor conceptualization of Indian IR can be explained by local factors such as its disciplinary location and pedagogical issues but its mainly because Western IRT has acquired a Gramscian hegemony over the epistemological foundations of the disciplinary core of Indian IRT – termed as ‘traditional IR’ in this article. It discusses the ‘disciplinary gate-keeping practices’ of Western IRT and the intellectual dependency of Indian IRT, which does not acknowledge India’s own history and philosophical traditions (e.g. Kautilya) as a source of IRT. Scholarly endeavors inspired by feminism, critical theory, development studies, and postcolonialism – termed as ‘new IR’ – are yet to be owned by Indian IR. This article argues for creating alternative sites of knowledge construction and explains how Indian ‘ways of knowing’, for example, a ‘non-dualistic mode of thinking’ in contrast to the modern ‘self-other binary mode’ of understanding realities can address the problematics of contemporary IR.

There is no Indian school of IR and any assessment of Indian scholars’ contribution to IR theory depends upon what counts as ‘IR theory’. The article starts with a critical overview of the state of the art of the IR discipline in India by analyzing disciplinary, pedagogical and discursive reasons to explain its poor conceptualization. This assessment is, however, predicated upon a very narrow disciplinary vision of IR, which for analytical purposes, is termed as traditional IR. The next section analyzes scholarly endeavors emanating from development studies, postcolonialism and feminism that lie outside the disciplinary core of (Indian) IR to reflect on issues being debated within the postpositivist domain of the ‘mainstream’ IR. To the extent these debates are yet to be owned by Indian IR and these intellectuals acknowledged as part of its scholarly community, it might be termed as new IR. Finally, the article argues for creating alternative sites of knowledge creation in IR by devising different set of tools.
and exploring a new repertoire of resources that have, thus far, been de-legiti-
mized or rendered irrelevant for knowledge production in IR.

Re-imagining IR in India is not about creating an Indian school of IR but
redefining IR itself. This problematizes the basic formulation and idiom of our
query: why there is no non-western IR theory in India by highlighting its
implicit binary character, which is not merely descriptive but hierarchical: the
‘dominant’ west and the ‘dominated’ non-west. From this standpoint, even if
scholars were to succeed in creating an Indian school of IR, it would at best,
earn a small, compartmentalized space within the master narrative of IR (read
the western IR\(^1\)). The challenge, therefore, is not to discover or produce non-
western IR theory in India but for the Indian IR community to work towards
fashioning a post-western IR.

1 The state-of-the-art

When India became independent in 1947, its ruling elite believed that India
was destined to play a major role in Asian and world affairs commensurate
with its geographical placement, historical experiences and power potential.
Such self-conscious aspirations should have helped the growth of an IR disci-
pline but nearly six decades later, it has yet to earn the status of a separate dis-
cipline. There are no undergraduate programs and only four universities offer
a Masters programme though it is home to probably the world’s single largest
school of International Studies – School of International Studies (SIS) at
Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). While India’s ‘social science research
capacity’ has been in a state of ‘crisis’ due to several economic, political, and
demographic factors (Abraham, 2004; Chatterjee et al., 2002), a detailed
analysis of IR’s poor state points to a different direction.

1.1 Disciplinary location

IR’s relationship with the parent disciplines of Political Science and Area
Studies has tremendously stilted its growth. The Indian conception of IR,
known as ‘International Studies’ is a peculiar product of conceptual conflation
of Area Studies and disciplinary-oriented IR (Rana and Misra, 2004: p. 74).
Areas Studies are multi-disciplinary and IR is only one of the disciplines they
embrace, but they were wrongly equated with the latter based on a somewhat
simplistic assumption that the areas being studied were ‘foreign’. Funding for

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\(^1\) Admittedly, the term ‘Western IR’ is problematic for its essentialist overtones. As used in this
article, it mainly points to the shared epistemological foundations of IR rooted in the
Anglo-American traditions – the birth place of IR – in a historical sense. In its subsequent evol-
ution, it has predominantly been referred to as ‘an American social science’ (Hoffman, 1977:
pp. 41–60; Crawford and Jarvis, 2000). Waever recounts the growing differentiation between ‘conti-
nental and American traditions in international thought’ (1999: pp. 80–83), and for a larger debate
IR within the rubric of Areas Studies was a fundamental mistake as the latter ‘had, in fact, ‘emasculated’ IR instead of advancing it’ (ibid.).

IR’s disciplinary location in Political Science departments also caused its severe marginalization. Even in the large and better reputed departments, ‘the academic space available to this area of scholarship . . . has relatively shrunk . . . alarmingly so’ (ibid.: p. 76). Unlike Political Science that is more deeply rooted in political theory, the theoretical component of Indian IR remains thin. Most syllabi consist of an amalgam of diplomatic histories of major powers (read Europe) during the First and Second World Wars followed by the Cold War, and India’s foreign relations with little attention devoted to fundamental concepts and theoretical debates in IR. The sub-fields of IR including Security Studies, Peace and Conflict Studies, and International Political Economy mostly remain confined to optional courses at the Masters level and others such as Ecology, Globalization, and Gender Studies are rarely taught. This has resulted in a very narrow intellectual base of the discipline.

1.2 Pedagogy concerns

Institutional strategies for teachers’ training and production of textbooks in English, Hindi, and vernacular languages, at the national and regional levels, have been lacking. Unlike other social sciences where students graduate in the same discipline, most students are introduced to IR as a separate discipline at the M. Phil and Ph. D level only. They often come with a frame of mind that ‘they are coming to an inferior social science’ (Bajpai, 2004: p. 28). If asked why they are switching their field, their response frequently is that IR ‘has no theory’ or, is ‘contemporary’ and therefore, of practical interest while many believe that reading newspapers and current affairs magazines is good enough to study this subject.

Lack of funds and infrastructure has severely impeded IR’s growth. For nearly 37 years, no funding was available for this discipline with the sole exception of the Department of Political Science at Baroda University (besides SIS at JNU), even though Area Studies programmes were regularly funded. State funding for higher education is highly centralized in the University Grants Commission that is selective in what it supports while being driven by political imperatives of distributive equity. The Indian Council for Social Science Research operates under similar constraints. Local philanthropy and indigenous capital of the corporate sector has not been tapped to fund international studies though this is beginning to change. Foreign funding for IR was also not encouraged mainly due to Nehru’s aversion to ‘outside’

2 The Observer Research Foundation, a think-tank based in Delhi with another office in Chennai, is supported by the Reliance industries. Another centre, the Delhi Policy Group receives support from the Sriram Group of Industries.
interference in India’s foreign affairs (Behera, 2003). The situation has changed considerably in the past two decades but the quantum of such funding remains small; confined to research institutions based in New Delhi and a few other metropolitan centres; and, is predominantly devoted to producing ‘policy-relevant’ research.

There is no well-knit community of Indian IR scholars. Though they interact, they do not seem to have cumulatively tried ‘to build a coherent edifice of work in well defined areas, related to key IR disciplinary concerns and problems in some kind of a dialectical correlation’ (Rana and Misra, 2004: p.111). Seminars are held on topical issues while collaborative work on disciplinary themes, even within a department, is rare. The academic culture of peer review is conspicuous by its absence and lack of mutual acknowledgement is most evident in the footnoting protocols of the discipline. There are only a couple of refereed journals to which IR scholars can contribute and those too hardly ever address theoretical debates or epistemological issues. This is exacerbated by the ‘perniciously growing tendency of producing … banal edited volumes [which are] adding to the confused disparateness and non-accumulativeness of scholarship’ (ibid.: p. 102). Career opportunities are very limited and with a heavy workload, teachers find little time to pursue their research. The Delhi-centric character of IR discipline has proved to be another serious impediment. Those trained in the capital show little inclination to migrate to regional universities due to their poor resources especially library facilities, which also frustrates local scholars’ efforts to pursue research.

1.3 The practice of international relations
For nearly two decades after independence, Nehru completely dominated policy-making as well as intellectual analyses of foreign affairs. His extensive knowledge of international issues resulted in the expertise in IR being concentrated largely in the Ministry of External Affairs. With no alternative intellectual pool emanating from the universities, the South Block gained experience to emerge as a dominant force resulting in a lasting divide between academia and bureaucracy. This was also because the structure of the Indian Foreign Service does not permit lateral entry by academicians nor allows civil servants to move into academic institutions. This has begun to change recently with the constitution of a National Security Advisory Board having a separate and functional secretariat though the thick walls of suspicion between academia and government officials persist.

1.4 The discursive domain: traditional IR
The lack of a discipline-oriented growth of Indian IR has been exposed in vigorous state-of-the-field critiques (Rana, 1988a, b, 1989; Rajan, 1997).
Theorizing has also run aground due to an overwhelming insistence that social science must be relevant though this is not unique to IR or to India. Social sciences in India, including IR, have also contended with the dominance of western theoretical frameworks (Misra and Beal, 1980; Bajpai and Shukul, 1995; Ray, 2004).

Two schools of thought seek to explain the lack of state-of-the-art theorizing in Indian IR. Simply put, the first argues: ‘we don’t theorize,’ and the problem does not lie with the western frameworks *per se*, while the second proffers: ‘we do theorize’ but it is not recognized ‘as theory’ by the predominantly western IR community. It is important not to view either argument in absolute terms as the two overlap at critical junctures. Bajpai draws upon Rana’s vision to argue the first viewpoint that a call ‘on behalf of ‘Indian’ IR ... that ignored the writings on IR theory being produced in the US and Britain, howsoever parochial... would be not just well nigh impossible but vulgar and self-defeating. [he] wished to help produce an Indian IR and a tradition of IR theorizing that fully comprehended, critiques and if and when necessary, transcended its Western origins’ (emphasis added) (1995: pp. 12–13). Bajpai agrees that the ‘western’ character of IR is not a problem but unlike Rana lamenting the lack of Indian scholars’ interest in IR theorizing, he is far more optimistic (Bajpai and Mallavarapu, 2004). Harshe endorses that Indian IR has ‘enormous potential to theorize and scholars dispersed in different places have done wonderful work.’3 The second school of thought, articulated by S.D. Muni, agrees that Indian scholars have theorized IR but criticizes theoretical and ‘political’ practices of using the ‘West’ as a referential point.4

To revert to the first argument: all intellectual endeavors situated *within* the western systems of thought that seek to apply them ‘creatively’ in their specific local contexts qualify as an exercise in IR theorizing. Indian IR has produced a lot of such work defined as ‘exceptionalist’ or ‘subsystemic’ theorizing by Acharya and Buzan in this volume. This includes the literature on issues such as nuclear deterrence (Singh, 1998; Subrahmanym, 1994; Tellis, 2001, Basrur, 2005; Karnad, 2002); regionalism in South Asia (Sisir Gupta, 1964; Muni, 1980; Wignaraja and Hussain, 1986; Bhargava *et al.*, 1995) and conflicts and peace processes (Phadnis, 1989; Ali, 1993; Samaddar and Reifeld, 2001) among others. Another genre of writings pertain to Indian perspectives on global issues like international order (Behera, 2005; Bajpai, 2003), globalization (Harshe, 2004), and international law (Chimni, 1993). Some neo-Marxist writings include Dutt’s formulation of ‘proto second tier imperialism’ (1984), Vanaik’s writings on globalization (2004), and Harshe’s work on imperialism

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3 Email correspondence with the author in August–September 2005.
4 A conversation with the author in January 2006.
(1997). These examples are clearly illustrative, not exhaustive; they do highlight Indian IR’s theorizing though mostly at the sub-systemic level.

Muni questions the very idiom of this assessment by asking who decides what qualifies as ‘sub-systemic’ or ‘systemic’ theorizing. He agrees with Cox that ‘theory follows reality,’ and, western theories of IR are dominant because they rode on the back of western (read American) power. Underlining the role of ‘disciplinary gate-keeping practices,’ Tickner notes that ‘IR reinforces analytical categories and research programs that are systematically defined by academic communities within the core, and that determine what can be said, how it can be said, and whether or not what is said constitutes a pertinent or important contribution to knowledge’ (2003: pp. 297, 300; Aydlini and Matthews, 2000). This can be best illustrated with reference to the philosophy and theoretical formulations of non-alignment.

Jawaharlal Nehru is widely regarded as the founding father of non-alignment. He rejected power-politics and the Western concept of maintaining security and international order through balance of power that had ‘led in the past to world wars and which may again lead to disasters on an even vaster scale’ (Nehru, 1949: p. 232). He conceived non-alignment both as a principle – of exercising autonomy in foreign affairs – and as a mechanism or an ‘order-building’ instrument by trying to create a ‘third’ area of peace outside the two power blocs to secure a just and equitable world order. Nehru was joined by other third world leaders including Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia and Gamal Abdel Naseer of Egypt. The Non-aligned movement created a coalition of more than 100 states from Asia, Africa, Europe, Arab world, Latin America, and Caribbean that supported the decolonization process literally changing the world’s geo-political landscape. Non-alignment was perceived by the new nations as a ‘method of preventing the West from using its power to erect a post-imperial international system under which the entire non-Communist world would be integrated into a single political area through military pacts and alliances’ (Gupta in Rajan and Ganguly, 1981: p. 343)

Whether conceptualizations of non-alignment qualify as ‘systemic’ IR theory would, however, depend upon the criteria being used. If the first criteria: ‘it be substantially acknowledged by others in the IR academic community as being theory,’ is used; it will fail the test. Theoretical writings on non-alignment rarely figured in the core IR journals published from North America and Europe throughout 1950–1970s. On the contrary, most dismissed it as ‘variants of neutrality’(Armstrong, 1956–57). Disparaging references to these countries as ‘uncommitted’ or ‘neutral’, questioned non-alignment’s political legitimacy (Debrah, 1961; Dinh, 1975). Indian scholars had little choice but to write books on non-alignment distributed by Indian publishers (Khan, 1981; Jaipal, 1983; Bajpai, 1985), which probably never found their way to the west, or contribute to journals such as Indian and Foreign Affairs, Socialist
India, Seminar, Yugoslav Survey, The Indonesian Quarterly, Economic and Political Weekly, Africa Report – none of which are mainstream journals in IR. So, non-alignment figures on the horizon of IR theory only as per the second or third criteria: ‘it be self-identified by its creators as being IR theory even if it is not widely acknowledged within the mainstream academic IR community,’ or ‘regardless of what acknowledgement it receives, its construction identifies it as a systematic attempt to generalize about the subject matter of IR’. Despite offering an alternative world-view of how the global state system should function, non-alignment was never accorded the status or recognition as a ‘systemic’ IR theory because it did not suit the interests of powers that be.

Likewise, Nehru’s contribution in the evolution of Asian norms against collective self-defence, which in turn, helped strengthen the global norm of non-intervention has been seldom acknowledged (Acharya, 2005). His idea of non-exclusionary regionalism, the concept of Panchsheel or the Mandala theory of regionalism, got recognition in the core literature in IR. Exceptions figure only in the case of Indian scholars based at US or European universities or whose texts have been published and distributed by western publishers. Ayoob’s work on the state making processes in the third world and their security predicament is a case in point (1995) though this, too, got recognition largely in the context of the third world. It is clearly not easy to move from the domain of ‘particular’ to ‘universal’. Unlike Europe where ‘Western local patterns being turned into [general] IRT concepts is common practice’ (Acharya and Buzan in this special issue), this option is not available to the third world including India. Why? Because the disciplinary boundaries of IR theory are ontologically and epistemologically so constituted as to largely preclude this possibility. That is why the poor state of theorizing in Indian IR cannot be explained without examining its epistemological bases and boundaries.

The real story lies in the Indian IR’s uncritical acceptance of the State being a ‘benevolent protector’ rather than an ‘oppressor’ in the domestic/international domain. A sub-concious albeit complete internalization of the tenets, philosophical ethos, and legitimacy of political realism in its mental structures has tremendously stifled the scope of its intellectual inquiries. Together these characterize what was earlier termed as traditional IR. This kind of IR has steadfastly fought shy of critically interrogating the character and ‘efficacy’ of the Indian state. Its fundamental failure to historicize the Westphalia state, does not in turn, allow recognition that the neo-realist notion of state is that of a European nation-state while ground realities at home as indeed in most of the third world are radically different. The internal vulnerabilities of the state and the insecurities of its people, I have argued
elsewhere, are rooted in the very processes of emulating a particular kind of (Westphalian) state (Behera, 2000: pp. 21–31).

Realist notions of state-centric power politics have been thoroughly internalized by *traditional IR*. Characterizing it as a ‘submerged theoretical base’ of Indian IR, Rana and Misra point out that this has never been ‘an explicitly self-conscious activity [but] more the result of scholars being overly impressed and influenced by state practice. [Even] the idea of change echoes state practice. The state is concerned about . . . Realist expedients to effect change, not for change which attempts to transcend Realist premises’ (2004: p. 79). There has been no systematic questioning of the positivist logic underlying the realist paradigm. The third debate in IR is, by and large, eclipsed in (Indian) *traditional IR*. So, to do ‘theory’ remains essentially a positivist enterprise and creation of knowledge has relied on four main assumptions: a belief in the unity of science; distinction between facts and values, with facts being neutral between theories; the social world like the natural world has regularities, and these can be ‘discovered’ by our theories; and, the way to determine the truth of these statements is by appeal to these neutral facts (Smith, 2001: p. 227).

The discipline of IR has been least self-conscious about its axiomatic claims to modernity. Walker strongly critiques modernity in IR as it ‘ensconces itself in the theory of Political Realism’ for perpetuating the presumed impossibility of ever conceiving an alternative to the account of political community that emerged in early modern Europe (Walker, 1993). The lacuna in such ‘problem-solving theory’ as Cox terms it, is that it takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized, as the *given* framework for action (1986). The effect then is to ‘reify’ and ‘legitimize’ the existing order and make it appear as natural. The choice of how to do theory is not an innocent one as Fay argues: ‘to choose a positivist, interpretative or critical theory approach to social science is at once to choose a political practice’ (1975). *Traditional IR* has, however, eschewed any serious debate on the politics of knowledge perhaps driven by the positivist logic that knowledge is immune from the workings of power.

The theoretical endeavors of Indian IR are hemmed in by three concentric circles as depicted in Figure 1 or three sets of ‘givens’: the infallibility of the Indian state modelled after the Westphalian nation-state; a thorough internalization of the philosophy of political realism; and, a ‘positive’ faith in the wisdom of modernity. Bounded by these limiting assumptions, the terrain of *traditional IR* stands severely depleted as it has also impeded its undertakings in theorizing IR. Using Pierre Macherey’s formula for the interpretation of ideology, Gayatri Spivak notes that ‘what is important in a work is what it does not say. This is not the same as a careless notation [but] “what it refuses to say,”’(2000: p. 1445). Undertaking such an exercise in ‘measuring silences,
whether acknowledged or unacknowledged’ (ibid.) in Indian IR, is an eye opener because it exposes the enormous discursive power exercised by the rational and scientific ‘project of modernity’ in laying down the parameters of what belonged to the domain of IR and what did not and how to determine that, or perhaps, who determined that.

So, IR is mainly concerned with power struggles among states. These are underpinned by two critical un-stated assumptions: theorizing in IR means producing scientific knowledge; and ‘Europe [later America] remains the covering, theoretical subject of all histories [read IR], including the ones we call “Indian,” “Chinese,” “Korean,” and so on” (Chakrabarty, 2000: p. 1491). With its constitutive ideas and practices rooted in the Eurocentric experiences and an abiding faith in the ‘liberating power of reason (logos) as it threw off the shackles of traditions (mythos)’ (Davetak, 1995: p. 31), the domain of IR was bounded in a manner that India’s various ‘traditional pasts’ got de-legitimized as a possible source of knowledge creation in IR. A positivist enterprise precluded a debate about what issues of inquiry could be included in IR and how its key concepts of nation-state, nationalism, sovereignty, and

Figure 1  Theoretical Parameters of Indian IR
territoriality could acquire different meanings. This may be briefly explained with reference to nationalism.

Several conceptualizations and critiques of nationalism by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore, M.S. Golwalkar, V.D. Savarkar, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh were at play in the political arena in pre-independence India. Most of these were not territorial in their vision nor conceptualized in rationalist terms as understood in the modern instrumental sense. Ghosh wrote: ‘For what is a nation? What is our mother country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, [power] composed of all the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation...’ (cited in Singh, 1967: pp. 70–71). He looked upon India as a living and pulsating spiritual entity and nationalism was envisioned as a ‘deep and fervent religious sadhana,’ a spiritual imperative essential for the emancipation of the motherland from the colonial rule. (ibid.: p. 74). Chatterjee had earlier popularized this notion by constructing ‘a nationalist consciousness through pure bhakti (devotion to god), especially the popular bhakti of goddess Kali, eulogizing her with the hymn, Bande Mataram [I bow to thee, Mother], so as to reveal her as the Bharat Mata (Mother India) . . .as a divine entity worth struggling for’ (cited in Ahmed, 1993: pp. 119). Savarkar argued that the Hindus ‘are not only a nation but race-jati. The word jati, derived from the root jan, to produce, means a brotherhood, a race determined by a common origin, possessing a common blood’ (1969: pp. 84–85). He rejected the idea of a nation state based on an abstract social contract with individualized citizens dwelling within its administrative frontiers. From a very different vantage point, Gandhi’s ideals of Swaraj (self-rule) and Ramrajya (historical metaphor for an ideal state) were also rooted in the belief that society’s dharmically ordered heterogeneity was prior to, and to a considerable degree autonomous of, state authority. The Gujarati text of Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj makes a significant distinction between a genuine nation formed as praja (community) and a nation of individuals merely held together by state power characterized as rashtra (Gier, 1996: p. 267). A most powerful critique of nationalism came from Tagore: ‘What is a Nation? It is the aspect of a whole people as an organized power. This organization incessantly keeps up the insistence of the population on becoming strong and efficient. But this strenuous effort after strength and efficiency drains man’s energy from his higher nature where he is self-sacrificing and creative. For thereby man’s power of sacrifice is diverted from his ultimate object, which is moral, to the maintenance of this organization, which is mechanical’ (2002). Thus, nation ‘controls the life of the individual insofar as the needs of the needs of the State or Nation make it necessary’ (cited in Fenn Jr., 1929: p. 321). Gandhi too forewarned that ‘modern state does indeed swallow up individual persons, even as it is, ironically celebrating
their autonomy, and that it has also destroyed the intimate ties of traditional community life’ (cited in Gier, 1996: p. 263).

Traditional IR does not debate the philosophical underpinnings, political strategies and goals of these diverse conceptualizations of nationalism nor are India’s historical traditions and political philosophy taught as part of the IR syllabi. There are linguistic difficulties involved in capturing the spirit of some of these concepts such as jati, praja, rashtra, swaraj, sadhana, bhakti, shakti, but not insurmountable. While western scholars may not possess the requisite cultural sensibilities or decide that it is not necessary to understand the ‘Indian ways of thinking’, it does not explain the silence of the traditional IR. Unless it may be argued that these problematiques do not belong to the domain of IR because many of these ideas especially the spiritual connotations of nationalism could be dismissed as metaphysical formulations that have no place in the rational and scientific world of IR. This illustrates the ‘epistemic violence’, to borrow a term from Gayatri Spivak, of political realism (2000: pp. 1438–9). ‘The episteme,’ Spivak quotes Foucault to point out, ‘is the ‘apparatus’ which makes possible the separation not of the true from the false, but of what may not be characterized as scientific’ (ibid.: p. 1459). A positivist enterprise deploys this kind of ‘apparatus’ to exclude various understandings of Indian nationalism from the domain of IR. Significantly, empiricism of a positivist IR takes a back seat because whether Indians conceptualized nationalisms in different ways as a matter of ‘historical fact’ is of little consequence. What matters is that the spiritual notions of nationalism cannot become part of a scientific, realist IR. The exercise of what is ‘excluded’ cannot be fully understood without understanding what is ‘included’. Political realism recognizes only one kind of nationalism a la European style that led to the creation of modern nation-state, which provides the bases of the IR discipline.

Nehru’s modernist nationalism had won in 1947 and shaped India’s political character thereafter. All ‘older’ conceptualizations of nationalism were now of ‘historical interest’; left to historians to debate. Even when they acquired a new life say Hindu nationalism in the late 1980s or new – sub-national – nationalisms such as Naga, Assemese, Sikh, or Kashmiri nationalisms were born, they became a subject-matter of Indian Politics. With their battleground being inside the state, they were of little interest to IR except when they challenged India’s territorial integrity. Second, in the Nehruvian vision of a modern and industrialized India, economics acquired a special significance. ‘We want experts in the job,’ Nehru wrote in his autobiography, ‘who study and prepare detailed plans’ (2004b: p. 608) and, the Indian state indeed helped create a critical mass of very able economists and world-class institutions. IR had no such luck ironically because Nehru himself provided the much needed and much valued ‘expertise’. Third, the foundational
principles of the scientific spirit and rationality underpinned the entire enterprise of state making. Nehru believed that the lack of modernity in colonial India had nothing to do with any essential cultural failings of Indian civilization. [but] the consequence of a particular political circumstance [after] whose removal . . the Indian nation would take the first significant step towards coming in tune with the ‘spirit of the age’. . It also followed that by looking for its Present not in its own past, but Elsewhere, in the universal representation of the ‘spirit of the age’, the Indian nation was only attempting to work back into the trajectory of its ‘normal’ development’ (emphasis added) (ibid.: 137–138).

Doing so, however, conceded vital ground in that the ‘Master Narrative’ could only be written ‘Elsewhere’, and by accepting or presuming that ‘India only had to find its place therein,’ it had perhaps precluded the possibility of India ever writing the ‘Master Narrative’ itself. In Nehru’s ‘search of the Present’ that took him to ‘foreign countries’ termed as ‘necessary, for isolation from it means backwardness and decay’ (Nehru, 2004a: p. 624), India’s ‘future’ was also getting mortgaged by colonizing its future thought processes and forcing a self-understanding only in terms of concepts and categories coined in the west.

To recapitulate our argument thus far, the disciplinary character of Indian IR cannot be understood without a thorough examination of its umbilical relationship with the Indian state, born as they both were on 15 August 1947. Unlike other social sciences, which study India’s ‘traditional pasts’ to understand their respective notions of the ‘Present’ and as a legitimate source of learning; Indian IR takes the Indian state as a given starting point of all its scholarly endeavors. It has ‘no pasts’ to look into because they have been discredited or rendered irrelevant. Following the footsteps – metaphorically and substantively – of its ‘Master Creator’ (read western IR) wherein ‘the realist power ritual administers ‘silence regarding the historicity of the boundaries it produces, the space it historically clears and the subjects it historically constitutes’ (Ashley cited in Tickner, 2003: p. 300), Indian IR has also shied away from critically interrogating the story of its birth. Unless it does so, it cannot come to terms with exclusions that have long been taken for granted, accepted, and internalized even as they have denuded its intellectual terrain.

The impoverishment of traditional IR’s political thought becomes further evident on its chosen ground – political realism – that does not recognize or own Indian political philosopher, Kautilya as ‘the father of realpolitik’. Kautilya is not taught in any ‘principal IR theory courses’ and though Arthashastra has much to offer for theorizing IR, the universal applicability of his ideas is not acknowledged – almost universally. Kautilya’s theory of Mandala (sphere or circle of influence, interest and ambitions) stipulates that
every king or a vijigeeso (aspirant to conquest) is to regard his realm as located at the centre of a concentric circle of kingdoms or mandalas (rings), which represented alternately his natural enemies and possible allies. Each kingdom’s similar aspirations spur a struggle for existence, self-assertion and world domination among vijigeesoos resulting into matsya-nyaya (the logic of the fish), that is, should there be no ruler to wield punishment on earth the stronger would devour the weak like fishes in the water. The mandala theory assumes and is prepared for a world of eternally warring states by stressing ‘perpetual preparedness’ or the doctrine of Danda (punishment, sanction) (Sarkar, 1919: p. 402; 1921: pp. 83–89). International relations conceived in this political tradition derives from a purely secular theory of state with power as its sole basis permitting no ethical or moral considerations.

Kautilya is, thus, the forerunner of the modern fathers of the realist traditions in IR as Arthashastra predates? Hobbes ‘state of nature,’ Machiavelli’s ‘Prince’ as well as Kenneth Waltz’s anarchic international system and the ‘security dilemma’ of modern states. Sarkar gives a detailed account of how ‘the diplomatic feats conceived by the Hindu political philosophers could be verified almost to the letter by numerous instances in European and Asian history, especially in ancient and medieval times when Eur-Asia was divided into numberless nationalities’ (ibid.: p. 407). This political philosophy is ‘neither exclusively oriental nor exclusively medieval or primitive’ (ibid.) however, the disciplinary subject matter of traditional IR only offers silence on Kautilya. Much like India’s ‘pre-colonial pasts’, the ‘pre-modern’ world of Kautilya is disowned or excluded by traditional IR’s modern worldview. He has to be either dismissed (Gowen, 1929: p. 192) or suitably modernized. Resurrecting Kautilya is possible only by viewing him through modern sensibilities. So, Kautilya is reduced to becoming an ‘Indian Machiavelli’ and his ideas hold value because they approximate those presented in Hobbes’s Leviathan or Machiavelli’s Prince and not vice-versa. A modernist reading of Arthashastra imposes western concepts such as ‘external’ and ‘internal’ sovereignty into the ‘pre-modern’ pasts of kingdoms and empires, which in view of the former’s historical (European) specificity, mean something completely different. Shookra-neeti, bearing on the freedom of the rashtra, or the land and the people in a state, laid down that ‘great misery comes of dependence on others. There is no greater happiness than that from self-rule,’ (Sarkar, 1919: p. 400). Kautilya also stated that under foreign rule ‘the country is not treated as one’s own land, it is impoverished, its wealth carried off, or it is treated as a commercial article’ (ibid.). But then the doctrine of swarajya, aparadheenatva (independence) is automatically implied to embody the western conception of external sovereignty. Seen in this light, Indian history can make sense, if at all, only on the terms set by the west and through western theoretical frameworks.
If it fared poorly in relating to its ‘pasts’, traditional IR’s understanding of realpolitik outside the state was also wanting. With its political imagination limited by a state-centric and military-dominated notion of power-politics, Nehru and the IR scholarly community did not come to grips with the other, bigger challenge of reordering the world in the economic domain fought with the intellectual tools of a development discourse. ‘The true power of the West,’ traditional IR has yet to fully realize ‘lies not in its political and technological might but in its power to define’ (Nandy, 1998: p. ix). The defining principle of that era was modernization that projected a developmental sequence through which all cultures of societies must pass ‘as natural and universal’, thereby, defining the key problematique of the third world – underdevelopment. The fact that nearly six decades later, many still characterize themselves as ‘developing’ countries shows how deeply the western definition of the third world has penetrated their collective psyche. Nehru’s vision was also to create the right kind of modernized (read industrialized) India. The goal was ‘given’; only the specific national path remained to be determined. Even after the creation of a sovereign Indian state, the ‘Master Narrative’ continued to be written ‘Elsewhere’ and the in-built, inequitable equations persisted because in the ‘modernized states system equality is achieved only at the price of assimilation to Western liberal modernity [where] equality necessarily requires “sameness”…[and] difference is translated into inferiority’ (Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004: pp. 107–108). This hegemonic framework ‘retains the idea of a “pecking order” of cultures, and the implicit idea of dialogue remains a “dialogue of unequals”’(ibid.). The trajectory of ‘evolutionary universals’ was never systematically questioned by IR scholars – a task left to (left-oriented) economists. This was despite Nehru’s belief that ‘ultimately foreign policy is the outcome of economic policy’ (1950: p. 201) and, scholars of the modernization tradition arguing that the ‘logic of modernization extends beyond the domestic “political system” to encompass and transform international relations’ (Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004: p. 108).

To recapitulate, bound by its fundamental ‘givens’, traditional IR has truly been ‘boxed in’ – metaphorically and substantively. While it is not our intention or purpose to dismiss the entire genre of Indian IR literature that remains grounded in the realist paradigm, it is important to understand that the structural reason why traditional IR in India has not, indeed, could not produce a non-western IR theory is because it has fought that intellectual battle on a turf chosen by the west, with tools designed and provided by the west and rules-of-game set by the west enforced, as they were, by not just its political and military might but more importantly, its all-pervasive discursive power. That is why Indian scholarship of traditional IR has remained on the margins of the larger discipline. And yet, it may be argued that the situation looks bleak only as long as traditional IR stays within the stifling confines of those
concentric circles. What is needed then is to create alternative sites of knowledge construction by stepping out-of-this-box.

2 The new IR

Such sites can be found if we engage with scholars using different vantage points of postcolonialism, hermeneutics, development theory, critical theory, and feminism to debate issues that lie at the heart of IR. This somewhat amorphous amalgam of scholarly traditions comes together, only as an analytical category, to make up what is termed as new IR. In India, writings of this genre are few and rarely recognized as part of IR though in mainstream IR, these are broadly positioned in the postpositivist domain. There are differences among the postpositivists but they all agree that the positivist ideal is methodologically unworkable and normatively perilous. They pay more attention to ontology while also recognizing the normative content and orientation of the discipline. What follows is a quick review of some possible vantage points that may be seen as part of the new IR.

Postcolonial thought has self-consciously examined the genesis, development and distribution of knowledge-systems and thrown light on their ‘uses’ as an instrument of ‘power and coercion,’ in the hands of the select few. They have yet to firmly establish themselves in IR since ‘postcolonialism came to the international via its discursive treatment of colonialism... This has not been a self-conscious move and indeed the word international hardly features in the lexicon of this discourse’ (Darby, 2003: p. 144). This is especially true of Indian IR though there are a few exceptions such as Abraham’s (1998) research on the making of India’s atomic bomb and Appadurai’s (1996) work on globalization who along with Bhaba highlights the hybrid, ‘in-betweenness’ that characterizes the postcolonial subject ‘allowing for the emergence and negotiation of marginal, subaltern, minority subjectivities’ (1994: p. 25).

Feminists have sought to reframe traditional IR constructs to explain how modern states and the international state system depend in part on the maintenance of unequal gender relations in division of labour and power play. They question the state-centric conception of security making security effectively synonymous with ‘citizenship’, which is historically and conceptually not a gender-neutral phenomenon. Unlike neo-realists focussing on threats from ‘outside’ the state boundaries, feminists highlight the structural violence of ethnic, class and gender hierarchies. In the Indian academe, anthropology, sociology, and history have integrated gender-aware analyses far better than international relations. Feminists’ theoretical constructions are only beginning to make their presence felt in IR (Rajagopalan, 2005; Chenoy, 2002) though women’s involvement in conflict and peace processes (Manchanda, 2001; Behera, 2006; Butalia, 2002) and the gendered nature of nationalism and state
(Menon and Bhasin, 1998; Hussain et al., 1997) have been much analyzed. Feminist methods bring important insights to new IR in rejecting the positivist division between theory and practice and conceiving research as a communal exercise where the people and the subject of the research are equally involved throughout the research process.

Postpositivist theorizing in IR has also highlighted the importance of culture and identity for understanding the global process because culturally specific notions of temporality and space are important sources of disjuncture between Western and non-Western models of knowledge. Modern Western belief systems are based upon an instrumental relationship between human beings (subject) and nature (object) that translates into the instrumentalization of knowledge or the view of knowledge as a commodity. Instead many non-Western cosmogonies view the self, community and nature as interdependent parts of a single whole, with which their understanding of the relationship between knowledge and the natural world, and of the social function of knowledge in general is markedly different (Tickner, 2003: p. 305).

This was underlined by Tagore in context of the eastern and western notions of man’s relationship with the nature as: ‘the West sees a break between the world of things and the world of man. The East sees kinship and continuity. The scientific man of the West sees the interaction of the natural forces. The Eastern seer finds an eternal will working and manifesting itself in these forces. .The West would subdue Nature. The East would seek unity with Nature . .For the one, the goal is conquest. For the other, it is the realization of the infinite’ (cited in Fenn Jr., 1929: p. 318).

While the traditional IR may not find Tagore’s insights meaningful or relevant; in the new IR, critical inputs are coming from indigenous people, social movements and grassroots level players who have questioned the conventional categories of knowledge as well as conventional methods of producing knowledge. The new social movements have offered new sites for ‘creating and regenerating subjugated knowledge’ (Parajuli, 1991: p. 183). ‘The choice,’ Ashis Nandy said, ‘is not between traditional knowledge and modern knowledge; it is between different traditions of knowledge’ (1987). The subaltern knowledge attempts to change the power relations between these traditions as it seeks to conquer not only political and economic autonomy but also the power to define themselves, their aspirations and the development process. Such local voices challenge the very basis of the positivist knowledge that there can be a single universalizing epistemology that will hold the answers to giving all peoples in all a better life; and that ‘experts’ and specialists, essentially from the west, had a monopoly to produce knowledge (ibid.; Sheth, 1984).
IR needs to develop ‘an increased sensitivity to its own cultural horizons and ideological functions,’ Walker argues because ‘any account of an emerging global order must recognize the plurality of cultures in the world’ (1984: p. 16). Among the earliest inter-disciplinary Indian critiques of Enlightenment modernity was the work pioneered at the Centre for Studies of Developing Societies (CSDS) by Rajni Kothari, Ashis Nandy, Dhirubhai Seth and Shiv Visvanathan among others.\(^5\) Rajni Kothari, as part of the World Order Models Project in the late 1960s, advocated structural transformation by taking into account the larger mutations of religious, ecological and aesthetic consciousness at the popular, cultural level in large parts of the world. His quest for a ‘just world order,’ led him to question the ‘managerial approach to the world order maintained through ‘an oligarchy of governing elites’ (1979–1980: p. 23).

Ashis Nandy’s critique of modernity, the Enlightenment project, the underlying psychological repercussions of colonialism and especially the nature of the modern state system, all go to the heart of issues that concern new IR (Lal, 2000). Nandy has challenged ‘all meganarratives built by the hegemonic classes in India’ that are representative institutions of the project of modernity including a totalistic political organization called the nation-state, the knowledge systems of techno science, the ideal form of social life, namely, westernized secularism and the utopia of linear progress and development (Nagaraj, 1998: p. xii). All these ‘were born in the twin working of civilizational projects of colonialism and modernity in India . .[which] reproduced and sustained each other’ (ibid.). His philosophical plea for ‘scepticism to be directed at the modern nation-state’ while stressing the need to take stock of the costs of the nation state system and the nationalism that sustains it calls for retrieving such thinking by Gandhi and Tagore as well as revisiting the image of the state as an ‘oppressor’ that was eclipsed in traditional IR. Nandy’s seminal contribution has inspired leading scholars worldwide to think of ‘international’ in a different light. It ‘challenges our habituated ways of thinking about the international as outside or between,’ even though he is ‘not usually thought of as a theorist of the international – partly, no doubt, because Nandy himself would reject any such compartmentalization of knowledge’ (Darby, 2003: p. 160). Nonetheless, it is productive to so position Nandy to put into critical relief the fluid and fuzzy terrain of new IR in a sharp contrast to the modern vision of traditional IR that subscribes to ‘the magic of straight lines’ (Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004: p. 191).

\(^5\) CSDS’s work has been equated to the early Frankfurt School Critiques of Enlightenment (Dallmayr, 1996).
While the postpositivist domain offers a more hospitable ground for fashioning a new IR, one must be conscious of its limitations because they also had ‘little regard for that other margin – the South’ (Krishnan cited in Darby, 2003: p. 148). Also instructive is the fact that ecology, feminism, and cultural studies have been successfully domesticated and professionalized as new specializations in the knowledge industry. Kothari rightly warns against such processes of ‘deep cooptation’, which is perhaps what he sought to avoid by launching the journal of *Alternatives* in 1975 that has since then proved to be a critical intellectual catalyst and almost become an indispensable institution for the leading luminaries from western and non-western world to provide alternative perspectives on international relations.

### 3 Re-imagining IR

Re-imagining IR is primarily about rethinking foundational knowledge of what constitutes IR. It calls for creating alternative sites of knowledge construction with an alternative set of tools and resources. Before suggesting such an alternative roadmap for the Indian IR, three generic issues need to be addressed.

The first pertains to the disciplinary boundaries of IR, which ‘are fundamental in determining who its legitimate speakers are, what rules of the game it condones, and what authoritative disciplinary practice consists of’ (Bourdieu cited in Tickner, 2005: p. 8). In critiquing the kind of knowledge Indian IR has produced thus far and urging its scholarly community to transgress its disciplinary boundaries by inviting in the ‘outsiders’ – postcolonial and development theorists, feminists, and cultural critics – we may be accused of committing *hara-kiri*. These propositions, critics will argue, may sound the death-knell of this discipline than infuse a new life-spirit into it. Throwing open the disciplinary gates of IR, no doubt, entails risks but taking such risks are not only worthwhile; they are integral to the process Indian IR must go through to redefine itself. Its existing boundaries are too narrow to allow any meaningful re-imagining and its ways of creating knowledge largely preclude the possibility of any new knowledge especially of universal applicability being created in the periphery, which are the present loci of Indian IR. Therefore, it may well be necessary to step outside the disciplinary core of IR to redefine its various problematics.

The second issue refers to privileging of ‘expertise’, invariably at the cost of devaluing ‘everyday life experiences’, in the practices of knowledge building. Said advocates ‘adopting the role of the traveller or amateur’ that involves being responsive ‘to the provisional and risky rather than the habitual, to innovation and experiment rather than the authoritatively given status quo’ (1994: p. 64) A critical reflexivity in our academic pursuits calls for ‘dismissing
the idea that experts are privileged knowers, by abandoning the role of gatekeepers and dismantling disciplinary gates, by asking who benefits from what we do as academics and by being more sensitive to our own lived experiences and those of “others” (Tickner, 2005: p.9). An over-emphasis on the ‘applied’ nature of social knowledge has already hampered theoretical research in Indian IR. In a globalizing world, such thinking tends to privilege production of increasingly professionalized and ‘market-friendly’ knowledge. At the other end of this spectrum are ‘growing number of voices calling for an opening up of the international to the grassroots’ (Darby, 2003: p. 153), which need to be taken seriously – an issue, we will shortly revert to.

The third issue involves the indigenization of academic discourses in IR. Having discussed the genetic ethnocentrism of this discipline, it is important to clarify that the intellectual endeavor of re-imagining IR does not advocate ‘mimicking the west’ (Bhabha, 1987) or ‘catching up’ with the west but to work towards making IR turn post-western. If Indian IR were to follow the trajectory laid down by the west, it can never catch up and will remain stuck ‘in the transition narrative that will always remain grievously incomplete’ (Chakrabarty, 2000: p. 1510). So, a call for indigenization is not aimed at producing ‘native’ Indian IR theory. Re-imagining IR cannot be a nationalist, atavistic or nativist project, which entails a ‘wholesale rejection of Western social science’ (Alatas, 1993: p. 312). Nativism is the exact reverse of universalism; both lack certain forms of self-reflexivity. Chakrabarty rightly argues that ‘one cannot but problematize “India” at the same time as one dismantles “Europe”…especially because “this equating of a certain version of Europe with “modernity”, which we are trying to problematize is not the work of Europeans alone; third-world nationalisms, as modernizing ideologies par excellence, have been equal partners in this process’ (2000: pp. 1512–1513).

The idea is to create spaces for alternative thinking on IR, which cannot be accomplished without a critical self-awareness and questioning of the a priori assumptions, procedures and values embedded in the positivist enterprise. It means that ‘the question of what we keep and what we discard from the heritage of modernity needs explicit and ongoing discussion’ (Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004: p. 201). Indigenizing also does not seek to reject everything modern (or western) or eulogize the pre-modern (or Indian) world. According to ancient Indian wisdom, every yuga or age has its own distinctive problems and needs to come to terms with them in its own way. The past can be a resource, or a great source of inspiration and self-confidence, but it can never become a model of blueprint for the present. Therefore, the scholarly community that may shape the contours of new IR cannot take the dharma of another age as its own.

Those re-imagining IR, however, must question the implicit yet ubiquitous usage of western standards to judge knowledge produced through
non-western modes of thinking or at non-western sites of knowledge making. That is because, ‘by defining what is “immutable” and “universal’, the West silences the visions of Other peoples and cultures to ensure the continuity of its own linear projections of the past and the present on to the future’ (Sardar, 1998: p. 23). Taking a cue from Thomas Szasz’s declaration: ‘In the animal kingdom, the rule is, eat or be eaten; in the human kingdom, define or be defined,’ Sardar argues that non-western cultures need to ‘define their own future in terms of their own categories and concepts and to articulate their visions in a language that is true to their own Self, even if not comprehensible ‘on the other side of the global fence of academic respectability’” (ibid.). What also needs to be questioned is the West’s assumed right to impart legitimacy on all knowledge systems, that is, determining which ‘ways of creating knowledge’ are legitimate and which are not and especially using the yardsticks and values of a particular kind of knowledge making enterprise – positivism – for judging the legitimacy of all other and often intrinsically different ways of producing knowledge. Nandy, therefore, insists that ‘an alternative that is genuinely an alternative cannot take the West as its reference point [as] for him, the West is more than a geographical and temporal entity; it is a psychological category. His alternative then is located beyond the West/anti-West dichotomy’ (Sardar, 1998: pp. 4–5). An argument for indigenization is, thus, not the same as calling for nativism but creating alternative spaces where we can ‘listen to’ the non-western voices, learn from them, and then use those insights together with those emanating from the western hemisphere of the world, to create a post-western IR.

The enterprise of re-imagining IR needs to generate an alternative set of resources. Two lines of inquiry are suggested to begin with; more, we hope, will emerge along the way. The first, already noted above, explores the role of everyday experience in theory building by examining ‘the relationship between lived experience, understanding and knowledge’ to show how ‘lived world is fundamental for understanding how knowledge of the world is constructed’ (Tickner, 2005: pp. 1–2). Theorizing in IR needs to ask fundamental questions such as what it means to know, who legitimately knows, where knowers are situated, how certain issues achieve importance as objects of study, and what the purpose of theory itself is (Sylvester, 1996). The challenge is to bring these voices into the domain of IR and explore how they become a source for IR theory.

A second line of inquiry calls for IR scholars to undertake a thorough re-reading of the Indian history and analyze the political thought of various Indian philosophers and political thinkers including Manu, Valmiki, Buddha, Iqbal, Aurobindo Ghosh, Dadabhai Naroji, Tagore and political leaders such as Gandhi, Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad among others. In view of our
analysis of Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*, the issue of ‘how to’ read history is of critical importance. There is much to learn from subaltern studies and postcolonial traditions. It is important to be aware and eschew modernist practices of imposing western concepts and categories into the distant pasts of diverse non-western societies because they ‘recreate only those structures which they want to see; intellectual projects become guided tours [and] we see only what we have been trained and told to recognize’ (Nagaraj, 1998: p. x). A scholarly understanding of the past must be undertaken with a healthy dose of socio-logical and geo-cultural reflexivity.

How India’s ‘pasts’ could serve as a resource or Indian ‘ways of knowing’ contribute towards creation of a post-western IR may be briefly illustrated with the following example. Modern IR privileges the claims of state sovereignty over all other kinds of political communities and assumes that ‘difference’ especially cultural difference is ‘debilitating to the purpose of establishing order’ (Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004: p. 94). Hence, its overwhelming emphasis on ‘universalization’ of state making processes – Westphalian state becoming the role model for all – and following the European footsteps in pursuing modernist development. Against this backdrop, an alternative worldview of IR may be generated by drawing upon Indian ideas and practices. These cultivate a political imagination that recognizes, understands and nurtures differences and creates alternative ontological possibilities of social and political spaces for interactions between communities, tribes, and ethnic groups criss-crossing the spatial (territorial) boundaries of nation-states. Hindu culture, for instance, juxtaposes numerous religious and cultural identities that constitute a singular family in which each enjoys the same respect, importance and tolerance. The unity of all religions is based upon the fact that they each constitute different paths to God. *Contrary to the Western model of universality, which is premised upon a self-other binary in which the other’s agency and identity must necessarily be negated, Hindu culture’s universality does not require the suppression of difference*, given that each of the particularistic identities that comprise it are viewed as legitimate and equal parts of a unified whole (emphasis added) (Tickner, 2003: p. 304).

This becomes clear from a comparison of the modernist notions of identity with traditional conceptions. A modernist identity is a historical–political construct based upon convergence of individuals and communities’ (abstract) interests for pursuing common political goals. The creation of a collective *self* inherently requires an *other* and so long as an ‘*us versus them*’ differentiation lies at the root of any identity assertion, it has an in-built element of hatred for the other. In pre-colonial India, peoples’ sense of belonging and solidarity
was based on habitat, religion, language and kinship where each aspect had a
distinct social role to play but it did not have to be prioritized (Kaviraj, 1995:
p. 116). A person was not characterized as first a Hindu or a Muslim, or a
monk. Select tenets of more than one religious faith could be simultaneously
followed because identity had different meanings in different situations. More
importantly, a dichotomy between the ‘self’ and ‘other’ did not exist as the
plurality of a pre-modern identity figured on a horizontal plane. Traditional
identities were not enumerated because they simply lacked the cognitive means
to generate a global picture of the spaces in which social groups lived. This
was accomplished by the British who introduced an entirely new cognitive
apparatus of figures, maps, and numbers – the census – that imparted a sense
of territoriality to identities by imposing ‘dualistic either-or oppositions as
natural, normative order of thought’ and taught people in the subcontinent
that ‘one is either this or that; that one cannot be both or neither or indiffer-

Recovering and exploring the dynamics of such a non-dualistic mode of
thinking may have significant ramifications for maintaining political order in
domestic and international domains in contemporary world. The plural
societies of third world are torn by conflicts because their socio-cultural diver-
sities are viewed as a political threat by the homogenizing impulses of modern
nation-state. What lies at the root of most such conflicts – between various
ethnic, linguistic, or religious communities and/ or between such communities
vis-à-vis the state – is a fundamental inability on part of their political leader-
ship to view differences and diversity as a source of strength rather than fear
and danger. Internationally, there are divisive ramifications of externalizing
the other in constructing a nationalist identity. A nationalist worldview inevitably
generates hatred for an alien community or foreign country and makes
these biases and prejudices a part of its national psyche. This is true of third
world states like India and Pakistan whose enmity is historically cast in their
conflicting religious ideologies and the sole superpower – USA whose peren-

defined the ‘other’ as the ‘enemy’, the other was met in the communist ‘evil empire’
of Soviet Union during the Cold War. Subsequently, Cuba, Iran, Libya, and
Iraq were labelled as the ‘rogue states’ and the ongoing ‘war on terror’ targets
the ‘axis of evil’. Even Samuel Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis that
strives to rise above the statist paradigm assumes that different civilizations
cannot co-exist peacefully. Bearing in mind the divisive nature of such think-
ing and politics, a non-dualistic mode of thinking that does not generate a

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6 Singh’s survey lists nearly 600 communities or roughly 15 per cent of all Indian communities docu-
mented, which see themselves as having more than one religious identity – of simultaneously being
'fear of the other' has far-reaching implications for contemporary international politics.

In international relations' disciplinary practices too, western IR and all other variants of non-western IR need not view each other in a ‘self-other’ binary mode. The purpose of alternative sites of knowledge construction is precisely to create non-hegemonic spaces where different traditions of IR can engage in a healthy dialogue and co-exist. Dismantling the hierarchies between western and non-western IR will go a long way in enriching the discipline of IR. Re-imagining IR in India is only the first step in that direction. It calls for charting an un-treaded path albeit a promising one though whether Indian IR chooses to traverse this road remains to be seen.

References


