

## Book Reviews

**Kanti Bajpai and Siddharth Mallavarpu (Eds.), *India, the West and International Order*, Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2019, 332 pp.**

*India, the West and International Order* is an edited book by Kanti Bajpai and his doctoral student, Siddharth Mallavarapu. Bajpai, a well-known scholar of international relations, is the director, Centre on Asia and Globalisation, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at National University of Singapore. Mallavarapu is Professor, Department of International Relations and Governance Studies at Shiv Nadar University.

As informed by authors, this is the first part of a multi-volume series on India's international and strategic thought. The idea is to identify intellectual resources, and to show how the notion of the international was envisioned, dating back from early nationalists up to contemporary times. The volume seeks to locate India's international thought within the growing debate on 'post-Western International Relations' while bringing it to the centre stage of global conversations on IR. Both authors have edited two anthologies on IR thinking in India titled *International Relations in India: Bringing Theory Back Home*, and *International Relations in India: Theorising the region and nation*, also published by Orient BlackSwan.

With some exceptions, Indian IR predominantly depends on the paradigms and theories of Western IR – realism, liberalism, constructivism, and postcolonial thought. The primary reason of such dependence is also not difficult to understand: producing knowledge that is different from what is produced by the West runs the risk of not being recognised as a part of the discipline. However, academic attempts to unearth an Indian dimension to the IR are not new. Indian scholars from across the disciplines have become vocal in their attempts to articulate non-Western visions of international order. Bajpai and Mallavarapu demonstrate that to be part of the global dialogue in IR, it is neither necessary nor sufficient to speak the language of the mainstream or West-oriented discipline.

The 332 page volume contains excerpts from the writings of nine key modern Indian personalities – Swami Vivekananda, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Rabindranath Tagore, Sister Nivedita, Annie Besant, Mahatma Gandhi, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, and Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi. The dominant theme in the volume is the nature and scope of

nation-state and nationalism as envisioned by those Indians whose intellectual imprints have been indelible.

Authors tell us that mainly three different types of international orders emerge from these writings. First, ethno-nationalists, such as Savarkar and Golwarkar, emerge as champions of Westphalian order – interstate system based on sovereign nation-states – which is underpinned by majoritarian ethno-nationalism (p. 38). Second, civic nationalists, represented by Vivekananda, Gokhale, Tagore, Sister Nivedita, Besant and Mahatma Gandhi, who do not disguise their discomfort with Western modernity and its political system of nation-states. They would desire Indians to live in small communities governed by traditional values and norms. This order is to be based on *dharmic* guidelines. The authors have drawn interesting parallels between India's dharmic notions with the Chinese theory of *tianxia* based on pre-defined roles and responsibilities (pp. 39-40). Maududi's Islamism represents the third type of international order which would be governed by Islamic values and principles.

While there is an academic interest in recovering visions of internationalism on account of growing debate on India's role in the emerging international order, in some ways this recovery assumes greater significance given the efforts to redefine the nature of Indian nationalism in post-Hindutva political milieu. For instance, Sister Nivedita's reading of Indian history is at variance with how votaries of Hindutva would read prominent events and personalities in medieval India. For her, “[i]t is a mistake to think that India has not in the past been a well-organised nation. Ashoka, two and a half centuries before Christ, Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya, four centuries after Christ, and Akbar and his immediate successors, have all been men who understood the idea of Indian Nationality” (p. 108). This is important observation since Mughal emperors including Akbar have come under increasing attack from the right-wing groups for being ‘anti-national’. At a moment when India's constitutional identity enshrined in ideals of federalism seems under stress, her interpretation of Rama is also fairly appealing: “It is not the picture of Rama winning the allegiance of the tribes that impresses us so much as that of Valmiki, dreaming two thousand years ago, of the statesmanlike federation” (p. 108).

Vivekananda's teachings about Vedanta philosophy, his message to Indian men to become powerful and courageous in order to fight the British, his invocation of India's cultural greatness, and his emphasis on the spiritual basis

for human freedom, love and compassion, resonated with his audiences both in India and the West. However, his ambivalence toward violence and rejection of absolute non-violence have been matters of intense academic discussion. Reading Rabindranath Tagore in the era of hyper-nationalism is a liberating experience. For him, the real problem is not political but social. He counters the notion that nationalism can ever be a religion. Mahatma Gandhi wrote in very simple language, but his message remains powerful, far-reaching and relevant. His assertion that “[i]t is a superstition and ungodly thing to believe that an act of a majority blinds a minority,” (p. 194) has an eerily prescient ring of contemporariness.

Reading two prominent Hindutva ideologues, Sawarkar and Golwalkar, at a moment of inexorable ascendancy of Hindutva can be an eye opener. Many of Golwalkar’s views can frequently be heard by prominent ministers of the ruling party at the centre; ‘Others’ must be sufficiently indigenized and homogenized to merge their different identities into a single ‘nation’.

The role of Maulana Abul A’la Maududi in developing a blueprint for the establishment of an Islamic government or caliphate is well documented. He played a pioneering role in the Islamization of Pakistan during the military regime of General Zia-ul Haq, and his influence extends well beyond Pakistan’s boundaries. His writings provide enough insights as to why he is credited with transforming Pakistan into a place where religious sectarianism, anti-Indianism, militarism and jihadism have become rampant. Championing blind adherence to the Quran and the Sharia, he forecloses any possibility of cultivating a questioning spirit. Maududi’s disdain for non-violence is clearly apparent in his arguments; he vehemently criticises a Turkish scholar-politician Khalidah Addeb Khanum, who visited India for giving public lectures, for suggesting that Mahatma Gandhi “is a perfect model of modern Islam,” even going to the extent of questioning her understanding of Islam (p. 304).

It remains unclear why the authors have not included another important Muslim intellectual of British India – Muhammad Iqbal. Probable reason could have been his role in the Partition: Iqbal is regarded as being the spiritual inspiration behind the Pakistan Movement, insisting that Muslims should live separately from Hindus to safeguard their social, cultural and political rights.

Readings of extracts in the volume remind us once again that the nature of Indian nationalism has been a matter of intense debate and controversy beginning with the struggle for independence. The political rise of Hindutva has given the people of India a historic opportunity to re-define their national identity and reconstruct its nationalism. To remain true to its ethos reflected in the Indian Constitution, Indian nationalism should remain civic, pluralistic and inclusive as most of the thinkers have argued passionately.

Overall, *India, the West, and International Order* is an important academic endeavour. At the heart of the book, and its underpinning throughout, is the question: What is India's role in shaping the international order? It addresses a significant topic and is a valuable addition to research in the field of India's intellectual engagement with the Western thinking on politics and international relations. This is the kind of work that only someone with Kanti Bajpai and Siddharh Mallaparvu's deep knowledge of IR theory could have authored.

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