CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: NEW DIRECTIONS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

This study has perhaps thrown up more questions than answers, partly because of the limitations of research undertaken. Quite like the answers to its research questions, this work falls in the grey zone between the supposedly polar opposites of the material and the ideational, the general and the particular, theory and history. Research that ‘falls between two stools’ does not necessarily convey ambiguity of position, chiefly because the interstices between theories and approaches remain little researched upon. The grey zone is indeed the zone of interdisciplinarity.

This study has experimented with several permutations of disciplines and theories in an attempt to address the lacunae of ahistoricism, Eurocentrism and presentism within IR. It found that an admixture of theories, which by themselves reflected these inadequacies, offered a richer and more varied account of how power operated in different societies. For instance, while realism sets the overall context in terms of explaining why a particular actor assumes power, constructivism explains how identities are not a priori attributes but constructed in the process of mutual engagement among actors. Likewise, postcolonialism and the philosophy of history alert us to the need to recognise the particularities of history operating beneath the massive cycles of the dynamics of power. However, the biggest schism exists between IR and history, and unless theory learns to accommodate the element of contingency, hybrid studies would continue to fall in the interstices between disciplines.

The concluding chapter is divided into four broad sections, each of which presents the findings of this study along some of its key coordinates, namely; the enormous but understudied transformative potential of soft power, the scope for interdisciplinarity within IR, a critical appraisal of the representative images of Indian culture and history, and lastly, the possible areas for further research that could address the lacuna within culture studies literature. Based on the findings from two contrasting case studies, the first segment highlights the centrality of socialisation and normative persuasion within Akbar’s accommodationist grand strategy. The second section examines the capacity for
generating interdisciplinary and cross-theoretical studies within IR, particularly on non-Western societies. The third part outlines the state of culture studies on India; critiques the enduring conventional representations of India; and calls for a historically nuanced understanding of India's strategic practice. The final segment suggests, by way of departures from conventional approaches, possible leads into understudied domains that are likely to further enrich the field of IR theory.

THE STUDY IN BRIEF
This study has looked at the 'internal' politics of geography: the manner in which the inner contours of polities shaped their response strategies; the manner in which strategic thinking evolved under conditions of endemic conflict, compelling states to institutionalise practices that enhanced order and stability in the system. This aspect of geopolitics is equally and perhaps, more important than the oft examined 'external' facet in understanding the historical processes through which strategic practice developed in India. Seen from this perspective, attempting to work backwards from the territorial consciousness that developed under the modern Indian state is fallacious, just as the exercise at extending ancient and medieval strategic traditions to the contemporary context would be unviable.

As the study demonstrates, the social context in which the Mughals came to power was one in which a monopoly over force was not possible to achieve, much less maintain. The military balance of power, which is the independent variable of this study, determines the type of grand strategy that a ruler opts for and sets the tone for policies at the highest level. For instance, the high levels of social militarisation prompted Akbar to adopt an accommodationist grand strategy. (Kolff 1990: 3) The fairly even distribution of retaliatory power meant that the Mughals could not resort to sustained coercion against their adversaries. However, beyond establishing the correlation between the existing balance of power and the chosen grand strategy, a hard-nosed realist interpretation is not very helpful in explaining the manner in which Mughal power shaped the identity of its subject elite.

I specifically argue that socialisation has a systemic function to play, in that norms are constitutive of identities and hence cast an independent impact on behaviour.
The independent effect of the ideational aspect of power is brought to the fore through the intervening variable of distance. In Mughal India, the Rajput principalities comprising the core areas around the political centre came to experience accommodationist policies of Akbar, whereas the peripheral kingdoms of the Deccan were marginalised from these co-optive strategies. Going by the results, the core areas experienced lesser incidence of warfare as a dispute settlement mechanism with the imperial power than the peripheral areas, which saw a greater occurrence of wars.

The variable of distance thus produced two variations in strategy, namely socialisation and coercion, both of which emanated from the grand strategy of accommodation. Socialisation required the hegemon to make his authority identifiable to the target elite through a complex blend of material and ideational factors, thereby eliciting its willing cooperation. As a long term strategy, it entailed an array of tactics that pre-empted the resort to force and made relations more stable, in contrast to which, a coercive strategy was far more volatile, entailing the issuance of threats and frequent military campaigns. While coercion as a strategy worked within the logic of immediacy and short term goals, it proved expensive and unsustainable in the long run.

As the first case study demonstrates, stability in Mughal-Rajput relations was facilitated to a great extent by the complimentary belief systems and military ethos that the Mughals and the Rajputs shared. (Gordon 1994: 182, 204) The Rajput tradition of honourable service to the master as the mark of loyalty served Mughal interests well. Rajput princes were offered high offices that made them participants in governance, a sophisticated strategy that had not been executed before Akbar. Their regular presence in the Mughal court also brought their domestic issues to the attention of the emperor who took keen interest in Rajput politics of succession. Moreover, the mobile imperial capital was not only an impressive mode of projecting power but it also enabled Akbar to maintain contact with local rulers. (Gommans 2002: 108; Chandra 1993: 32-33)

The second case study on the five Deccani kingdoms illustrates the working of a coercive strategy within the broad rubric of accommodation. It reveals a different set of dynamics in motion, wherein the material dimension of Mughal power was more pronounced than the ideational aspect. Unlike the Rajputs, the Deccani kingdoms based their cooperation with the Mughal state on a shifting calculus of interests rather than on
perceptions of legitimate dominance. The practices through which the Mughal emperor exercised power over the Rajputs were singularly absent in the Mughal dealings with the states in the Deccan. Measures to establish control at the periphery were restricted to bargaining tactics and did not graduate to more advanced levels of control that enculturation entailed. The lack of socialisation, evident in the limits of power projection and lucrative employment, is evident in the political fluidity and constant realignments of power equations that marked Mughal-Deccan relations.

**Contextualising the Case Study**

So what lessons does the Mughal case study offer for India's strategic practice? Although the Mughal period is not an era that is taken to be typically representative of Indian history by any criteria, it does throw up some interesting reflections of the country's traditions of kingship and authority. Gleaning from the specificities of the two case studies of Akbar's grand strategy undertaken in this study, certain broad conclusions can be arrived at.

Above all, Akbar's strategy reflected the overriding compulsion to indigenise his power: its sources, its ostensible representations and its actual exercise. His realisation that perceptions of legitimacy required him to 'go native' as it were in many overt ways was shared by many prominent and ambitious rulers in the past. Akbar consciously fashioned his image on the lines of the traditional Hindu king. The all-important notion of 'balance' was personified by the Hindu king, thereby locating the institution of kingship firmly within society rather than above it. The position of the king was a paradoxical one; while his intrinsic divinity was recognised, it was at the same time limited by the spiritual domain of the priest. (Heesterman 1998: 18-22) This complex status of the king continued into the medieval era without radical changes. As the third chapter explains, Akbar's image was a careful replication of the medieval Hindu king whose vital function entailed protecting the realm of norms and beliefs. The association of his persona with the sun as the source of light, his daily appearances for the benefit of the gathered public and his representation as a paternal figure and a spiritual guide to his people, were all initiatives that went on to indigenise his authority according to existing traditions.
Furthermore, his choice of accommodation reflected the innately inclusive nature of Indian identity, which did not delimit communities on either racial or religious grounds. Delimitation and exclusion, as Marie Lal argues, became the basis of India’s identity during the colonial period when the search for the country’s untainted essence commenced. (Lal 2006) Expansion and consolidation in a territory that was politically fragmented into kingdoms and ruled by locally entrenched elites necessarily entailed a degree of accommodation. Although some of Akbar’s conciliatory tactics were in line with the policies his predecessors had pursued, his personal interest and curiosity in other religions and cultural practices went on to fashion the intensity and scope of his policies of accommodation.

This leads us to the question as to which strategic tradition would accommodation come under. Broadly speaking, Akbar’s accommodationist grand strategy would come under the moralist tradition, and there are several reasons for this. For one, accommodation is based on a non-zero sum view of security, implying that the security of the state does not necessitate the extermination of the enemy. (Johnston 1995: 113) By differentiating between the enemy and the conflict situation, the policy of accommodation allows greater scope for negotiations, making the prospects of an impasse less likely. Furthermore, the moralist tradition places a high premium on ethical and moral concerns which eventually inform the conduct of war. This abiding concern with the calibrated use of force and with ethical dimensions of war-making is discernible in Akbar’s conduct with not just the Rajputs whom he eventually won over, but also with the Deccani states with which cordial relations could never be established during his lifetime. The compelling preoccupation with the moral dimension, which placed a restraint on the use of unethical and insidious tactics to achieve war objectives, ensured the calibrated use of force and served to contain the escalation of the conflict. Although the resort to war was exercised after co-option had failed, remedial conciliatory measures were quickly resorted to once the outcome of the war was settled.

The Power of Ideas
Power needs to be studied in all its facets since the interlinkages among them may be many. Power may be defined primarily in materialist terms, but it is seldom exclusively
exercised as such. Ideas and perceptions have far greater pull and effectiveness in eliciting support than raw force, urging hegemons to consciously develop and enhance this particular dimension of their power. The acceptance of material preponderance need not imply the rejection of the normative dimensions of control. (Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990: 289) The study does not seek to delineate the influence of ideas outside the influence of material resources in the form of threats and incentives. However, it would be of considerable research interest to study the extent to which ideas reinforced material power, although in specific instances, it is a matter of speculation if history would have taken a different, more volatile course had ideational power been neglected. The study underlines the resilience of ideas that outlast shifts in particular balance of power configurations. (Wendt 1987: 356) Not only were practices associated with Mughal legitimacy observed by the British after the downfall of the empires, but the power of ideas continue to persist in the colonial caricatures that are faithfully kept alive long after the overlay of colonialism ended.

This brings us to the issue whether the extent of stress on ideas must necessarily follow the military assertion of power after a certain stage of control is achieved. Personal attributes of leaders and the personality factor certainly go a long way in explaining why certain statesmen took greater efforts at developing their ideational resources than others. In the case of India, emperors before the Mughal dynasty had presided over relatively stable empires, and these massive political entities were not built at the total neglect of cultural and normative appeal. However, the level and scale of enculturation achieved under Akbar was a new phenomenon. (Foltz 2001: 21-25) The fact that Akbar intensified his efforts at amalgamating the local political elite can be partially explained by his personal attributes as an idealist who was interested in probing the possibility of a syncretic culture.

Ideational power thus ought to be studied in its own right. Ideas are formulated for their expediency but they also change the way people think about themselves. This, in turn fundamentally alters the bare conceptualisation of power we originally began with. With perceptions of legitimate authority entering the picture, it is no longer possible to conceive of power as an objectively measurable resource.
Probing commonalities and accepting theoretical likeness does not signify the absence of intellectual rigour, just as defending dogmatic positions is not a mark of committed scholarship. The discussion on the potential meeting ground between IR and other disciplines has yielded several ideas for the theorist to ponder over. Recent anthropological and sociological research on culture has witnessed a shift from the more essentialist anthropological frame of reference to the relatively flexible humanist understanding of the concept. (Reeves 2004) The change is yet to be registered within IR, which has tended to largely remain impervious to new research in other fields, maintaining its essentialist understanding of culture.

A look at the research orientation of articles in prominent journals on IR offers a fair representation of the field. Despite claims to heterogeneity in terms of published material, the focus remains confined to a limited range of subject areas such as international political economy and international organisation. The extent of isolationism that is practised within the discipline can be seen from the disciplinary background of contributors to some of the well-known journals on IR. For instance, the *International Studies Quarterly* has seldom stepped outside the ken of the disciplines of political science, international relations, economics and sociology, a trend that is reflected in the slant of other major journals as well. (Breuning *et al.* 2005:454-456)

Before conversations with other disciplines, IR first needs to begin a dialogue among its constituent theoretical schools. This study examines the potential for dialogue along two key axes involving theoretical perspectives that are widely held to be incompatible, namely between realism and postmodernism, and between realism and constructivism. Although in both these cases, realism is taken as the key referent on account of it being the dominant theory, it is deficient in studying the constitutive and reproductive dimensions of power, particularly the impact of culture and history on the dynamics of international politics. (Farrell 1998: 416) The study has highlighted the incongruity of seeing culture and international politics as phenomena that are operative at different levels, particularly so when compared to other disciplines that see no such contradictions. Indeed, the study seeks to emphasise that the research interests of comparativists and realists are not at odds with one another. The constructivist assertion,
on the other hand, allows greater scope to human agency in the historical process, since "structures and actors are seen to be mutually constitutive of each other.

Furthermore, the study highlights the need to locate supposedly 'neutral' notions within historical contexts. Concepts such as power and hegemony hold little meaning outside their socio-historical context, and to attribute contemporary connotations to these would be a fallacy. For instance, realist-constructivism sensitises the theorist towards the manner in which actors exercise 'different forms of power (authority, force, care, and so on) through different expressions (linguistic, symbolic, material, and so on) to produce different social realities.' (Mattern 2004: 345, emphasis original) In this regard, the philosophy of history holds important lessons for the IR theorist. The history of ideas enables the researcher to go back in time without the baggage of loaded contemporary meanings and concepts. (Skinner 2002: 89) The connotations implied by thinkers and writers of antiquity may have long since disappeared, but a historical enquiry shows the evolutionary path of a particular notion to be neither linear nor inevitable. The argument that contemporary dimensions of a given concept evolved out of very different connotations in history, offers an important corrective to IR theory which often associates concepts with a timeless and eternal quality. The tendency of IR to mine history for substantiations of our contemporary concerns also stems from such contrived linkages with the past. (Gunnell 1978: 133) This is particularly true in the case of Indian strategic culture, an area that has thrown up a clutch of colonial caricatures harking back to the ancient period.

The question that naturally emerges out of this disconcerting appraisal pertains to how history is supposed to correct the skewed picture. Building greater historical contingency into our theorisations about case studies has several ramifications. Firstly, it acts as a check against essentialist interpretations of state behaviour of the kind that are typical of many writings in culture studies today. This is where historical contingency and contextualism come into the picture when we undertake to study the impact of ideas. (Lawson 2006: 39) Not only were concepts imparted different meanings, as the history of ideas has shown us, but they also moulded identities differently.

Secondly, historical contingency allows greater room for critical perspectives to emerge and be heard within the discipline, particularly with regard to postcolonial
societies. Colonialism has left an indelible mark on the processes of state- and identity-formation in societies such as India. A contingent approach allows the researcher to problematise many of the cultural tropes that were accepted as naturalised verities. Placing them in the historical context would reveal the undercurrents of power that threw up these caricatures and the manner in which they were legitimised within the colonial discourse.

Thirdly, as Buzan asserts, a historical perspective further enables the theorist to better explain the manner in which the sovereign state system evolved out of a system of imperial orders. (Buzan 2006) The empire occupies the central position in this study, both as a theoretical concept in which the internal and the external domains overlapped, and as an empirical case study on the manner in which power and political control were constantly negotiated in history. (Barkawi and Laffey 2002: 110-113) The empire as a concept not only allows for a more historically ‘deep’ discipline that is representative of the political experiences of the non-Western world, but also reveals the mutually constitutive elements of what has so far been considered as formal interaction between the centre and the periphery during the nineteenth and twentieth century. (Hardt and Negri 2000: 70)

Postcolonialism has held a mirror to IR, and it has revealed a disturbing picture of an essentially conservative discipline. As the voice of the marginalised, postcolonialism does not find an easy niche in IR that it can fill, primarily because macro theories are more concerned with the dynamics of power and domination, than with the specificities of marginalisation. The field of IR abounds with theorists who claim that little has changed in power relations down history, which in all likelihood, are going to remain the same in the future. In the din of conformism, what is often lost are some of history’s firsts, one of which is the unparalleled, almost universal phenomenon of colonialism.

Colonialism marked a disruption in the manner in which power was constituted and perceived, particularly in India which had a long political history prior to British rule. In terms of geographical orientation, the British power moved inward from the periphery to the centre, inverting the centuries-long outward Indian orientation of dynasties ruling from land-locked centres of power. (Schwartzberg 1992: 260) More substantially, colonialism was perhaps the first instance of power that was not indigenised, at least
officially. There is a growing body of literature that suggests how the growing
engagement with the local populace blurred the lines of distinction between the coloniser
and the colonised, despite the best efforts by the British to the contrary. (Barrow 2003;
Colley 2002; Wilson 2004; Pennycook 1998) But the British liked to believe that their
distinct status as a foreign power and a superior race was an asset to be preserved, and
continued to do so till the end of their rule.

The colonial era also marked the initiation of arguably the first culture studies on
India, a legacy that has been faithfully kept alive by culture specialists even today. The
series of detailed colonial studies on Indian society, culture and polity under official
patronage held significant implications for the way India's strategic thinking was
conceptualised. The carefully constructed set of stereotypes had the effect of creating an
imagined analytical tradition that gradually acquired the credence of a historical tradition.
(Jeffrey 1998: 67) Structuralist theories such as realism have little space for the critical
study of such elaborate imaginings that took on the dimensions of a tangible reality.
Postcolonialism, with its avowed intention of uncovering the subtleties of colonial power,
would be conducive to the enquiry of an interested theorist.

CULTURE STUDIES ON INDIA: RETHINKING REPRESENTATIONS

It is imperative to understand that when it comes to formulating cultural explanations of
state behaviour, culture and history go together. Culture studies on India have yielded and
reiterated standard orientalist caricatures. Although certain culturalists like Tanham and
Rosen appear to be basing their claims of extensive historical references, this recourse to
history is both selective and anecdotal. It is a classic instance of 'using' history rather
than 'learning' from it, where contemporary nuances of concepts are taken back in time
to demonstrate their resilience. This requires the retrospective positioning of historical
events and occurrences in a manner that conveys a sense of continuity with the present.
(Keene 2005: 18) Ironically, history is reduced to being both, a repeated reiteration of
what already existed, and an inevitable route to the present when the cultural landscape
reveals itself with unparalleled clarity. Culture then is moved out of the ambit of history-it
does not owe its existence to any particular historical antecedent, predating and in that
sense, existing outside history itself. Culture maintains its pristine form, untarnished by "countless messy historical occurrences.

More often than not, culture is assumed to be located in certain characteristics that are believed to have withstood the influence of alien cultures brought in by invading armies. Culture thus transmutes into an independent, unassailable entity that is indestructible by external forces. Such a theory presumes the existence of an indigenous people who become the living repositories of their distinct cultural heritage. Reeves emphasises the need to move 'beyond the notion that there is a place and obvious space for everything and it can all be bottled, pickled, canned and put on a shelf forever marked 'culture'." (Reeves 2004: 85) Hence, the abiding 'human focus' of culturalists- both in the articulation of culture by notable personalities in the past, and in its presence as the 'mind-set' aiding and conditioning its people- is hardly surprising. For this very reason, studies on postcolonial societies must be overtly cultural in order to acknowledge and confront such tropes. (Pandey 1999: 8, Chowdhry and Nair 2002: 19)And they must also be genuinely historical, because to hollow out history from such studies (as these self-confessed culturalists have done) is to hollow out culture itself. (Rosen 1996: 33-34; Latham 1999: 146) Katzenstein rightly observed that he 'did not view culture as a child of deep continuities in history', and preferred instead to focus on the 'political processes by which norms are contested and contingent, politically made and unmade in history.' (Katzenstein 1996: 2) Culture here signifies not the essentialist frames of reference that become its 'markers', but the shifting norms and belief systems that inform identities in different time frames. The anti-essentialists offered an alternative reading of culture that stressed on 'processes' of identity formation than on a static identity itself. Brian Street defines culture as

'... an active process of meaning-making and contest over definition, including its own definition. This, then, is what I mean by arguing that Culture is a verb. (Cited in Reeves 2004: 83, emphasis original)

Before assessing what Indian history and culture have together thrown up by way of possible leads, let me begin with what India's strategic inclination has not been. This pertains to a set of colonial images that have endured past their time, and carry with them enormous strategic significance. These cultural images of India, well entrenched as they
are in the popular psyche and duly reproduced in academic writings, need to be critically "analysed: their colonial lineage, the motivations behind their formulation and their influence on subsequent cultural theorisations. What makes these tropes of special interest to us is the manner in which they were elaborately constructed to become authentic representations of reality. Indians came to see themselves through the representations the British had erected of them: as a passive, defensive, idealistic people incapable of strategising. Importantly, Indians came to believe in a reality that did not exist prior to, or independent of, the colonial portrayals. When knowledge is constructed in a manner that affects the construction of social reality itself (which is what reflexivity is all about), the motifs become the naturalised truth. Social reality then does not exist independent of its representations, and the subtle transformation of stylised images into actuality is complete.

Thus, any attempt at an alternative approach must begin with the onerous task of dismantling these obvious 'givens'. Although this is by no means a novel exercise, carried out as it has been with great deal of deftness and sensitivity within subaltern and postcolonial literature, it is yet to be undertaken within IR. (Pandey 1999: 9; Prakash 1994: 1; Prakash 2000: 129-130) This disconnect reflects the innate resistance within IR to open itself up to new research orientations. Constructivism, which seeks to problematise the status-quo by focussing on the reflexive loops between knowledge and social reality, creates an opening that is conducive to such a critical enquiry.

Having established the colonial constructions as an instance of reflexivity, we can get back to the task of negations we had started with. One of the popular claims put forward by strategic culturalists on India pertains to caste as a broad template informing the strategic outlook of the country. We have seen scholars such as Tanham, Rosen and Latham resorting to the caste argument to assert that India has an essentially hierarchical view of IR. It is further argued that the caste system was responsible to a great extent for a fractured Indian society that was intrinsically too weak to defend itself from foreign invasions. (Tanham 1996: 42) The trouble with a casteist interpretation is that caste as an inflexible institution is taken to be the representative trope of Indian society, which itself is driven by the search for the 'pure' quintessential Indian culture. To locate the essence of India in the caste structure is to render a reductionist and ahistorical reading of Indian culture, a tendency that culturalists in particular need to guard against.
The other prominent strain of argument discernible in many of the notable works on India’s strategic culture concerns its idealist, other-worldly orientation. Culturalists argue that Indian philosophy reposes faith in the pre-determined course of fate which human agency can do little to alter. The inability to influence the course of their own lives prompts Indians to turn to ‘other-worldly’ pursuits such as meditation and religiosity, away from the mundane material concerns of this world. This particular argument, traceable to the colonial research in Indian history, is flawed for its distorted reading of Indian philosophy, which in fact lays stress on adherence to individual duties and responsibilities. (Inden 2006: 213-15) There are other caricatures that together contributed to the image of an effeminate Indian who lacks agency. They relate to the intransigence of caste as a collective identity and the Indian sense of cyclical time that were seen to be impeding purposeful individual action and rational judgement. Although it is not appropriate to dilate on the issue at this juncture, it would suffice to say that scholars need to approach the subject of Indian culture critically, certainly more so than the orientalists did.

Finally, given that the desire to see continuities with the past is universally common, numerous patterns tracing the ancestry of ideas show up across the world, which are evaluated for their relative worth. Thus, in the exalted Western tradition that has come to dominate the discourse on political and military thought, lesser traditions are placed in juxtaposition as partial and momentary interventions. The absence of a tradition altogether, taken as a statement of incoherence and lack of enlightened thinking, becomes lamentable. The intellectual exercise is eventually about the dynamics of power; about who dominates the discourse, who celebrates their history, and which construction becomes the archetype of a tradition. In a Eurocentric framework that has celebrated the West as the seat scholarship, it is of little surprise that thinkers and strategists from the margins do not figure.

**Discerning India’s Strategic Traditions: Culture Meets History**
The rationale behind any study is to go beyond negations and suggest an alternative approach to the study of the subject. Indeed, repudiations are employed in the process of building a particular case, which in turn renders the entire exercise of negation
meaningful. That said, it would be appropriate at this juncture to suggest an alternative reading of India’s strategic practice. The existing historical research material does not point in the direction of a single Indian strategic culture that unfolded with logical coherence over time. A more suitable and relatively flexible approach would be in terms of strategic traditions that reflected and informed inter-state relations in pre-colonial India. In strategic terms, the realist tradition that focussed on the calculated acquisition and exercise of power is juxtaposed with the moralist tradition, which stressed on the ethical dimensions of power such as peace and justice. However, what can be stated in unambiguous terms is that Indians down history have known how to strategise and work around security problems in diverse ways.

While political fragmentation was widely prevalent, it would be flawed to draw a direct correlation between it and political chaos. Indeed, although ancient India was fragmented into multiple kingdoms, the hierarchy of kings under which the smaller rulers submitted to the supremacy of the more powerful one, had rendered some semblance of order to the state of political anarchy. (Inden 2006: 155) Indeed, fragmentations formed a chequered board on which Kautilya based his well-developed network of alternating relations of alliance and enmity. This goes on to underline the fact that Indians undoubtedly did strategise, and the endurance of Indian empires stands testimony to the sharp military acumen of its strategists.

Sovereignty in India was a nebulous concept that did not entail the clear demarcation of the king’s political realm. Consequently, classical Indian tradition did not distinguish between the use of force in the external and the internal realms by the ruler. (Wink 1986: 15) Since theoretically, the authority of the king was universal (the king was seen as the microcosm of the entire cosmos), making a distinction between the internal and the external domains was self-limiting. The logic of the all-encompassing authority of the king extended to the use of force as well. A dualistic understanding of the use of force (of seeing internal violence as sedition and external force as war) was likewise

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133 The two traditions trace their lineage to the two conflicting notions of the state that the classical texts threw up: the *niti shastra* texts conceive of the state as a managerial, unitary and bureaucratised entity capable of attaining power (*artha*). In the alternative *smriti* conception, the basis of kingship is primarily ethical and religious (*dharma*) supported by a network of personal relationships. (Stein 1975: 81-82; Singh 1995)
absent in Indian theorisations. Thus, the strategies employed in war against external enemies were indistinguishable from those against internal opponents. (Brekke 2006: 120-121)

A long view of a country’s strategic past also reveals that certain traditions were formulated on the manner in which political space was to be organised and defended. These traditions are best seen as successful and optimal responses to the challenges to state power prevalent at a particular time. Kautilya’s ‘circle of kings’ was one such response, given the fractured political environment he wrote in. A response strategy at variance to Kautilya’s calculative king focussed on the just ruler whose primary role was to maintain the rule of dharmā on which his society was based. The two contending philosophical strains are discernible in the epics and texts down the ages, although the extent to which each succeeded in influencing the strategic practice of kings is a matter that has already been analysed in this study.

To sum up, culture transmutes and transforms in every age. To assume that a single culture operated for the whole of India and that there was no tradition of strategic thinking is a dangerous proposition. A tradition that suited the imperatives of a particular time period did not appear appropriate in another, causing it to recede behind a more astute strategy. The interplay of these response strategies is rooted in culture insofar as the language and the metaphors employed belong to a particular cultural milieu. (Hudson 1997: 28-29) The cultural tropes and practices resorted to for the legitimisation of power are resonant of a certain way of life unique to that society alone. The nature and profile of that society itself may change over time, and so would the terms in which power is conceived of and exercised. History, in that sense, permits us to conceptualise culture in dynamic terms.

As far as the argument that India lacked traditions of strategising is concerned, is it inconceivable for a country with multiple kingdoms to devise multiple means of vanquishing its opponents? At any point of time in history, the Indian subcontinent consisted of a number of local, regional and pan-Indian empires varying in scale and strength. It was but natural that each responded to military challenges in ways that suited its conditions and capacities best. Moreover, disruptions through invasions and historic battles were not unique to India, and every country that today claims a coherent strategic
tradition has undergone periods of change. To search for eternally valid rules of strategy continuing unbroken down history is to commit the fundamental fallacy of treating history as the preserve of a 'pure' and unassailable culture. Scholars such as Tanham and Rosen do precisely that- work their way backwards from the presumption that there exists a 'national' culture 'out there' that can be discovered and deciphered. Such an approach is very orientalist in its delineation of certain cultural characteristics as representative tropes and their subsequent dissection. If the cultural turn in IR has persisted with the reiterations of stereotypical images of eighteenth and nineteenth century scholarship on India, then culture studies has taken a turn for the worse indeed.

One can put forward a set of tentative assumptions on how culture may have impacted strategic thinking in India. It gradually gave rise to a consciousness of the antiquity of the country, and this awareness was reflected in myriad ways in the writings of different ages. For instance, rulers through history routinely exalted the greatness of this land, the conquest of which was seen as a feat of the mighty. It has variously been described as the land of plenty inhabited by people with pleasing countenance. The appeal had a lot to do with the fertile plains in the north and the trade routes that Indian straddled. But the association of the subcontinent with significance, enormity and achievement was an abiding subject of interest for writers in both ancient and medieval India. The consciousness assumed patriotic dimensions under the nationalists who took recourse to history to demonstrate their pride and loyalty for the country. One of the most popular motifs of that time was the ‘Golden age’ under the Gupta dynasty, representing the best and the finest of Hindu rule. This flavour of national pride also surfaced in the writings of Gandhi and Nehru who attributed India’s greatness to its ancient civilisation, resilience and the spread of its culture to other lands. (Nehru 1946: 62)

A notable attribute of India’s philosophical literature (taken to be the mainstay of its culture by strategic culturalists) is the marked paucity of treatises devoted to military affairs. If a researcher were to embark upon a search for historical military texts, she would come upon few other than the *Arthashastra*. (Lal 2003: 37) However, a more nuanced search would reveal that the extant epics and Vedic texts contain rich references to military and political affairs, strategising and war-making. That the bulk of such material is couched in ostensibly religious and sacred literature perhaps indicated the
Indian tendency to view security in more holistic terms than what a narrow frame of reference would permit. This was particularly the case with the moralist tradition rather than with the realist one, which tended to produce treatises such as the *Arthashastra* that dealt directly with state security.

Although the identification of a distinct strategic culture may be difficult in India’s case, its underlying emphasis on firmly locating the state within the larger social milieu is instructive. Given below are some the key elements of India’s strategic practice that have resurfaced time and again to determine its course through history.

**Key Elements of India’s Strategic Practice:**

The prevalence of certain enduring political and social conditions has thrown up a set of identifiable characteristics of Indian strategic practice. These elements are by no means patently Indian and absent from the cultural histories of other countries, quite simply because cultures grow through the co-mingling of influences rather than in glorious isolation. However, the socio-political conditions that shaped the innate Indian proclivity towards certain strategies largely accrued from the two predominant realities that existed through much of India’s history.

**Political Fragmentation:**

Firstly, notwithstanding the periodic existence of large empires, ancient and medieval India was characterised by chronic political fragmentation. Small kingdoms were local strongholds of power dominated by the landed elite, and survived through indigenously recruited military force. Dislodging local rulers would have entailed disturbing the existing agrarian structure and subduing the growing military labour market, two costly ventures that ambitious rulers keen on expansion were not willing to risk. (Kolff 1990: 7; Gommans 2002: 63) As a result, we see the establishment of empires through the subjugation of regional kingdoms that mostly predated and existed alongside the larger political entities. The overwhelming reality of tackling well-entrenched adversaries at several fronts had a profound influence on the evolution of strategic traditions in India. A look at both the realist and moralist tradition would reveal that a continual preoccupation with multiple actors spawned multi-faceted response strategies. Although the two
traditions differed in terms of the goals that the state was expected to pursue and the means it was to adopt in their pursuit, both approaches prescribed to the calibrated use of force. The resort to force was to be the last measure after all other options had been exhausted, and likewise references to the use of brute force at the outset of an adversarial situation is rare in ancient Indian texts belonging to both genres.

The Kautilyan tradition's preference for alliance-building through the *mandala* theory, over a total reliance on indigenous military capability reflected the imperative to initiate collaborative strategies, failing which more insidious measures were recommended. (Watson 1992: 79) Ancient India as a conglomeration of many warring kingdoms presented an ambitious ruler with a political scenario that could potentially dissipate his resources and energies through constant war-making. The most efficient response strategy emphasised on accommodation and alliance-building. Assimilation was another strategy favoured by Indians although the mode employed varied in each era. For instance, the caste system was initially a means of absorbing the outsiders into Indian society. However, as our case study suggests, assimilation under Akbar had less to do with induction into the caste system than with the overlay of a secular identity revolving around the emperor, above other primary identities one of which was caste itself.

**The Social Context of Power:**

Secondly, power in India was not traditionally conceived in purely political terms but was inextricably linked to ritual authority. The king was not only the head of the temporal realm, but was also seen as the microcosmic embodiment of all elements of the universe. His position was at once circumscribed and sacred, and thus the location of the Indian state within society was far more complex than its European counterpart's. The complexity yielded a commensurate emphasis on the material and the ideational dimensions of power by both strategic traditions. Thus, we find Kautilya cautioning his king against neglecting his power over symbolism that was recognised and acknowledged by his subjects.

The fact that force was seen as one of the many means available to a ruler made moderation in conflicts a common strategy. Issues of security remained recessed within
broader issues of stability and good life, which often implied that these were couched in "acceptable terms. The notion of balance, whether personified in the king or implemented as a calibrated response to a conflict situation, frequently comes to the fore in Indian politics. (Inden 2006: 132-133) Although the modern Indian state conceives of its security in primarily militaristic terms, its emphasis on rhetoric and lofty ideals is perhaps the vestiges of an old tendency to soften and embellish the imperatives of security with the attainment of higher objectives.

The material conditions and the social context together created a proclivity towards seeking moderation and calibration in conflict situations. Thus, Indian grand strategies of any type, whether accommodationist, offensive or defensive, differ as they did in terms of the objectives they sought to pursue, tended at the very least to link the security of the state to the larger and loftier ends of good life, harmony and stability. At the rhetorical level, the ethical slant to security was in keeping with the image of the king as the keeper of societal values and the balancer of conflicting forces. At the operational level, the laying down of a wide array of strategies at the disposal of the state was logical, given the multifarious nature of threats to its security. While none of the prescribed measures were in any way uniquely Indian or novel, their arrangement into a taxonomy that prioritised negotiation, compromise and sedition over the resort to force is an abiding feature of India's strategic practice. This is not to tow the much-favoured culturalist line of argument that Indians are culturally programmed to exhaust options of peaceable co-existence. The claim that political fragmentation was a regressive condition in India that led to chaos can be traced to the normative appeal of the modern state for its total control over its territory. Fragmented territories with fuzzy boundaries separating domains were the norm in the ancient and medieval periods, and were as common elsewhere as they were in India.

The frequent resort to material incentives and seditious manoeuvres signified a tried and tested method that had met with greater success than any other measure had. The strategic traditions directed the king to vanquish and not annihilate his enemies, quite simply because the there were too many to engage with in the futile and costly endeavour. Instead, a political arrangement arrived at either through the issuance of threats or a convincing military victory entailed leaving the domain of the vanquished
undisturbed in return for his submission. Thus, we see the familiar picture of the king withdrawing to rule from his designated capital after extracting the assurance of recognition and submission from the local ruler. (Rudolph 87: 736) The modus operandi was in no way idealistic and politically naïve; just very practical and well-suited to the conditions ambitious kings had to deal with.

This study will probably leave many questions unanswered, particularly those pertaining to the existing status of the strategic traditions mentioned above. Tracing traditions across eras is no less hazardous than delineating the essential elements of a strategic culture down history. Traditions last because the conditions supporting them do; they change or recede when those conditions are transformed radically. The dramatic transformation in India's case came with the advent of colonialism that, but for the brief period of lingering influences following the transfer of power, marked the sundering of existing power relations among the indigenous elite. Technological advancements coupled with the colonial overlay redefined the whole notion of the empire and the manner in which it came to be administered. (Shaw 2003: 329-330)

The empire was now more organised and elaborate than its ancient and medieval manifestations, and increasing regularisation in the functioning of the state apparatus implied that projecting power over distances was no longer a challenge as it had been in the past.

It is then of little surprise that the strategic traditions did not survive in any recognisable and functional form during the colonial period. The two conditions supporting their sustenance, namely the scenario of fragmented polities and the social context which invested symbolic significance to political power, underwent drastic change under colonialism. Territorial space came to gradually assume the contours of centralised control that is characteristic of a modern state. The imperatives of the colonial mission and the attendant process of bureaucratisation caused the British state to consciously distance itself from the Indian society. (Alamgir 2006: 429) Although recent research reveals the vulnerabilities and dependencies of colonialism that shaped the colonial state in ways it could not avoid, the disruption it caused in strategic affairs was far more definitive. (Hall 2000; Johnson 2003)
LOOKING AHEAD

The purpose of any study should be to go beyond being informative and indicate where it leaves the reader in terms of possible leads for further research. This is particularly so if a little-researched area is investigated. The history of India’s strategic practice remains an understudied area in the true sense, despite recent research that has presented an ahistorical and static image of the country’s strategic thinking. This study focuses as it does on both a historical case study on the conduct of inter-state relations and the orientalist caricatures that are reiterated in contemporary literature, leads off along several exploratory paths.

The possible synthesis between history and theory would be a fascinating area to probe, especially since substantial ground for it has already been laid. (Buzan and Little 2000; Elman and Elman 2001; Hobden and Hobson 2002; Puchala 2003) Interested researchers only need to cast a glance back at the interdisciplinary origins of IR and the subsequent evolution of historically nuanced schools of thought such as classical realism and the British Committee to realise that the recent turn to interdisciplinarity is not a new development. This is not to discount the emerging scholarship which has highlighted the historically impoverished nature of current research. At present, a researcher undertaking work in an area of no immediate topical concern finds herself working against the grain of contemporary research. Explorations into further interdisciplinary studies provide the theoretical foundation for the study of historical cases pertaining to strategic conduct under systems differently ordered than the present one. Interdisciplinary theories, by creating spaces for studies in history, generate greater theoretical acceptance and tolerance within the discipline.

Perhaps another area of related interest would be to undertake an investigation on the exercise of soft power in different historical epochs. The dimensions of soft power would diverge not only along the historical continuum, but also geographically. At any point of time, empires would have resorted to different means of projecting their power in response to their diverse socio-political conditions. Historical studies enrich theories by providing a wider template within which concepts can be studied.

This brings us to the debate on what role the IR theorist is expected to play, a question that is obviously linked to the larger issue of what function the discipline of IR
see itself as fulfilling. The turn to history does not necessarily entail tackling IR’s fixation with all things contemporary. After all, a theory can refashion its premises to accommodate the vagaries of history and still continue to fix its gaze on current issues. (Hill and Beshoff 1994: 9) There is nothing wrong per se in analysing contemporary events, which are no less political or international than occurrences in history.

The trouble arises when deciphering fast-paced events becomes the sole preoccupation of the theorist who learns to arrange her research interests around one keyword: relevance. ‘Relevance’ is an elusive word, particularly when it comes to the study of international politics. It is best typified as a fast moving target that moves with time. There are innumerable instances of empirical research work that have not lasted beyond the passing of topical issues themselves. For a discipline in which bulk of the research work in books and journals is read for its topical value and rarely referred to again once it is ‘past its time’, it is time for introspection. Although in principle IR theory encompasses the politics of all sovereign entities down history, ‘relevant’ issues concerning the present have de facto come to define the subject matter of the discipline. (Nicholson 2000: 186) The grip of presentism is most evident when research into historical cases are discouraged for their limited application to our current concerns. (Buzan and Little 2000: 2)

If the growth of other disciplines is indicative of anything, it is that for a field to evolve it must lift its gaze above the apparent and the transient and take a long view of history. Certain theories like neorealism claim to have risen above the particularities of politics, but their generalisations also rise above history. That happens when generalisation and contingency are seen to be incompatible, and the formulation of the former necessarily entails the sacrifice of the latter. When IR realises that history has more to offer than furnish evidence we pick and chose at our convenience, the discipline would evolve in the true sense. And when the theorist realises that she is not merely a policy specialist analysing the breathless pace of events, it would perhaps afford her the time to pause and reflect.