CHAPTER TWO

INDIA’S STRATEGIC PRACTICE: THEORY MEETS HISTORY

The perceived incompatibility between the fields of IR and history rests on the assumption that there exists an irreconcilable divide between the theory and the narrative. Different intellectual traditions have fostered divergent approaches even though the subject under focus may be the same. Although differences exist, which is why they have evolved into distinct fields, these have been exaggerated to the extent that the possibility of complimentarity appears absurd to many scholars in both areas. As the introductory chapter demonstrated, the lack of a sustained engagement between disciplines has engendered stereotypical representations that have served to further entrench ill-informed opinions about other disciplines. IR’s isolationist tendency has only compounded the problem that affects other disciplines to a somewhat lesser extent. In many ways, the theorist’s call for interdisciplinarity ought to be the most vociferous of all, given that her claim to scholarship lies in her ability to present a comprehensive picture.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the possibility of a fruitful dialogue between the two mutually wary disciplines of IR and history. The exercise would afford us the opportunity to look at the manner in which IR academics have engaged with issues of historicity and contingency, and the impact such engagements (or their lack) have had on the state of the discipline. Finally, it would specifically locate this interface within the context of India, arguing that cultural interpretations of India’s strategic practice do not necessarily translate into greater sensitivity towards historical specificities. The apparent engagement with history has only gone on to further reinforce orientalist caricatures that have long outlived their colonial contexts. In a series of negations that this chapter will undertake, it is hoped that a more nuanced and historically contingent interpretation of India’s strategic practice would emerge.

IR THEORY AND HISTORY: STRANGE BEDFELLOWS OR DISCIPLINARY PARTNERS?

The incorporation of history into the study of international politics developed into an influential intellectual tradition that highlighted the importance of subjectivity and
context, as against the general sense of disengagement that the association with the natural sciences had brought to IR. (Hollis and Smith 2003: 3) The state of the discipline was not the same everywhere, and the fact that international history emerged in Britain after the First World War and not in the US, where the discipline of IR took root, partially accounted for the divergent trajectories the discipline charted in the two countries.36

There are several points of divergence cited by theorists and historians as to why their respective fields cannot benefit from the other. The idiographic-nomothetic distinction is seen by many as the basic cause of disjunct between the two fields. The parsimony of theory contrasts with the richness of history. There is a marked difference in the manner in which the historian and the social scientist approach their respective subjects. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita points out that while

‘...the social scientist is more likely to emphasise general explanations of social phenomena...the historian is more likely to emphasise particularistic, unique features of individual episodes of social phenomena’. (Mesquita 1996: 52-53; see also Gaddis 1990: 423)

The historian is ever mindful of particularities that inform her explanation of specific episodes in history, preferring ‘explanatory tents to temples.’ (Gaddis 1997: 81) On the other hand, the social scientist regards these very particularities as variables within a larger theoretical framework, and her research interest lies in seeking to establish the correlation between them. (Levy 1997: 23; Ingram 1997: 63) Thus, the task that the social scientist sets herself,

‘...is not so much to explain particular events, but to identify relations among critical variables that explain classes of events or phenomena...The historian is more likely to be concerned with giving meaning to events rather than defining the relations among variables...Historians emphasise discourse, meaning, context, and complexity-internal validity...Social scientists tend to emphasise regularities, replication, and parsimony-external validity.’ (Mesquita 2002: 13)

36 That international history originated in Britain and not in US was not a coincidental development. Rigid compartmentalisation in US did not allow diplomatic historians to explore other fields, whereas in Europe the absence of exclusive areas of specialisation allowed for productive cross-fertilisation between fields. (Hecht and Schumacher 2003: 6) While British IR tends to be mindful of Western philosophical content, the US school is more universalist. Yew notes that ‘Though distinct, they both collaboratively ensure that particularism and universalism are two sides of the coin of western domination’. (Yew 2003: 11)
The theorist's imperative to abstract from the complex reality and distil neat mono-causal explanations clashes with the avowed aim of the historian to reveal the descriptive detail through multicausal accounts.

Although actual differences in goals, methodology and strategies separate the two fields of IR and history, they cause misinterpretations when understood in absolute terms. Historians do not rely entirely on narrative, indeed they cannot. Preston King clarifies that ‘... it makes little sense to think of it [history] as consisting exclusively of ‘unique’ events, since exclusively unique events are unknowable.’ (King 2000: 19) When they attempt to faithfully describe and reconstruct a sequence of events, historians are in effect attempting to establish certain causal relations. Diplomatic historians very often prefer to thematise their data rather than simply periodise it. Some of the most notable works in diplomatic history have offered new insights into the working of IR.37

Likewise, many IR theorists have sought to bridge the gap between IR theory and history. Long before interdisciplinary research sparked a renewed interest in history, IR scholars had sought to make their theorisations historically contingent and open-ended rather than timeless and static. Carr, a classical realist, steered clear of ahistoricism in his analysis of the inter-war period. The permanence of power did not determine the course of history, and Carr regarded the state system that formed the very basis of his study as nothing but the product of circumstances. He argued that, ‘few things are permanent in history, and it would be rash to think that the territorial unit of power is one of them’. (Carr 1946: 229) Carr’s firm belief in the role of historical contingency and subjectivity in theoretical formulations is evident from his assertion that,

‘The political process does not consist, as the realist believes, purely in a succession of phenomena governed by mechanical laws of causation; nor does it consist, as the utopian believes, purely in the application to practice of certain theoretical truths evolved out of their inner consciousness by wise and far-seeing people. Political science must be based on recognition of the interdependence of...’

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37 Among scholars who straddle the fields of IR and diplomatic history with commendable ease include Paul Kennedy and Paul Schroeder. Schroeder argues that differences between the two fields are negotiable, for which ‘the sign... [he is] trying to post on historical terrain for political scientists is not “Keep Off-Private Property”... but rather “Thin Ice”.’ (Schroeder 1997: 72) Understandably, for the sure-footed political scientist comfortable with abstractions, the open-endedness of contingent explanations that the terrain of history represents could well be treacherous. For more on the role of theory in history, see Jack Levy 2001: 73-74.
theory and practice, which can be attained only through a combination of utopia and reality'. (Carr 1946: 13)

In *What is History?*, the entangling of facts and values is further highlighted by Carr.

‘Somewhere between these two poles- the north pole of valueless facts and the south pole of value judgements still struggling to transform themselves into facts-lies the realm of historical truth. The historian...is balanced between fact and interpretation, between fact and value. He cannot separate them.’ (Carr 1987: 132)

Similarly, Morgenthau argued that theory is applicable only to particular historical and cultural contexts, devoid of which it holds no eternal wisdom that is valid down history.

He further clarified that realism

‘does not endow its key concepts of interest defined as power with a meaning that is fixed once and for all... The kind of interest determining political action in a particular period of history depends upon the political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formulated.' (Morgenthau 1967: 8-9)

The respect for history and its place in IR theory was evident in the works of scholars belonging to the British Committee such as Herbert Butterfield, Martin Wight, Hedley Bull and Adam Watson who were concerned with studying the historical origins of international politics. (Wight 1977; Butterfield and Wight 1966; Bull 1977) One of the objectives of the Committee was ‘to make past history continuous with present experience, and to see how far the more long-term views or surveys of the historian might affect one’s appreciation of the present day.’ (Cited in Vigezzi 2005: 53) Asserting the need for greater historical content in IR, Bull and Watson argued,

‘We certainly hold that our subject can be understood only in historical perspective, and that without an awareness of the past that generated it, the universal international society of the present can have no meaning.’ (Cited in Vigezzi 2005: I)

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38 Morgenthau rejects the positivist contention of science as a value neutral and objective branch of knowledge. For more on the contrasting roles of the theorist within classical realist and positivist approaches, see Bain 2000: 454-457

39 The British Committee for the Theory of International Politics (1954-85) - under Butterfield and its three coordinators Wight, Watson and Bull - was an eclectic group of fifty members drawn from diverse backgrounds, like historians, journalists, theologians and jurists. The realist orientation underlying the approach of the Committee was evident in Butterfield’s opposition to the idealism surrounding the League of Nations. (Vigezzi 2005: v-vii, 19)
Wight’s emphasis on the centrality of history and theory within IR is underlined in the homology he devised, according to which politics is to international politics, as political theory is to historical interpretation. ⁴⁰

Although history was located at the centre of its deliberations, the Committee was undecided on whether to focus on its general trends or to be more mindful of its particular trajectories. What is worth noting is that there were no perceived incongruities between historical contingency and the notion of continuity. Despite the fact that the Committee was concerned with the various state systems that existed down history, its realist orientation did not prevent the members from arguing that a strict differentiation between the international system and international society was not feasible. The system was believed to be operating on a particular set of rules, whereas the society added the richness of social interactions amongst states to this bare setup. The two concepts were not perceived to be antithetical to each other, having developed alongside in history. ⁴¹ (Vigezzi 2005: 5-10)

The works of the British Committee members, such as Butterfield and Wight’s Diplomatic Investigations and Bull’s Anarchical Society, became the basis for further theoretical enquiries by the English School. Robert Jackson defined the English School as ‘a variety of theoretical inquiries which conceive of IR as a world not merely of power or prudence or wealth or capability or domination but also one of recognition, association, membership, equality, equity... the normative vocabulary of human conduct.’ (Jackson 2000: 271)

The English School is today seen as the via media between realism and idealism. Its core concern of the international society draws upon both the anarchical features of the

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⁴⁰ Cynthia Weber argues that Wight’s homology was not intended to restrict the ambit of international theory to diplomatic history alone. In asserting the international theory was anything but a well defined field, Wight sought to interpret its frontiers as a constantly changing construction rather than a pre-ordained representation. (Weber 1998: 466)

⁴¹ The difference between the norm-based international society and the rule-governed international system is played out in the writings of Bull and Waltz. For Bull, balance of power vitally depended on self-restraint on part of the states that desired it for its order maintenance. Waltz, on the other hand, attached no such normative significance to it, arguing instead that the balance of power was the objective outcome of the calculus of anarchy, and hence had little to do with the self-restraint of states. (Albert and Hilkermeier 2004: 62)
international system as well as cooperative elements of world government.\(^{42}\) (Buzan 2001; Hurrell 2001) So far, the main thrust of the School has been to uncover the nature and function of international societies and to trace their histories and development. (Buzan 2004: 10; Little 2003: 458-459) Indeed, classical realists with their emphasis on norms and values bore greater affinity to early English School writers like Bull, than to neorealists who were greatly influenced by rational choice theory. As Albert and Hilkermeier note, the 'English School becomes a way of preserving the classical heritage of IR from the ravages of rational choice theory.'\(^{43}\) (Albert and Hilkermeier 2004: 61)

IR theory began to drift away from its historical moorings with the advent of policy realism. Policy oriented realists such as Morgenthau and Kennan preferred, as Jack Levy puts it, to 'use' history rather than 'learn' from it, by limiting its scope in theory to illustrations and anecdotes. It was deduced that distancing itself from history would insulate IR theory from the vagaries of historical process and be conducive to abstraction.\(^{44}\) The contrast with the English school is evident from Morgenthau's assertion that 'politics was governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature'. (Morgenthau 1948: 4) On balance, whereas the classical realists fared better than the structural realists with their 'first image' analysis, they were more deterministic that their English school counterparts, who infused greater historical content into their theoretical studies.

Thus, countering the importance of history has been a strong strain of policy relevance that has today come to define the objectives and the agenda of IR. The field of IR, split between scholars engaged in policy relevant research and others pursuing

\(^{42}\) Buzan identifies two core features of the English School- the three concepts of international system, international society and world society; and its pluralist approach. International society is about institutionalisation of shared interests and identity amongst states and puts the creation and maintenance of shared norms, rules and institutions at the centre of IR theory. (Buzan 2004: 6-7)

\(^{43}\) Christian Reus-Smit's exploration into the affinities and differences between the English School and constructivism that highlights their internal diversity and contestations is instructive. For more on the axes of internal debate within the two schools, see Reus-Smit 2002.

\(^{44}\) Intellectually, the US showed a pronounced tilt towards empiricism and the application of the scientific method- a proclivity that went on to stimulate not just the field of IR but the rest of the social sciences as well. The touting of economics as a true science prompted political science to emulate it in a similar pursuit of scientific rigour. These had repercussions on its specialised branch of study of international politics, for political science was regarded as 'the mother or stepmother of international relations'. (Hoffmann 1977: 46)
theoretical concerns, is marked by the singular absence of internal dialogue.\(^{45}\) (Haber \emph{et al.} 1997: 34) Excessive concern with contemporary affairs has made IR scholarship reactive, leading Christopher Hill to lament that

‘...there is good reason for the historian to say that international relations is a subject essentially concerned with the period for which the archives are not yet open, and that our task is to write (as Peter Hennessey says) ‘the first draft of history’.’’ (Hill 1994: 9)

His call for IR scholars to ‘resist the siren song of policy relevance’ is echoed by Steve Smith who warns that ‘[d]ismissing work as being irrelevant to policy choices ... has become] a powerful disciplining device.’ (Smith 2003: 142; Hill and Beshoff 1994: 21; George 1997: 51) Given IR’s policy orientation that informs much of its research output on contemporary affairs, it is imperative to reclaim the discipline’s forgotten association with history. The following section takes a long view of the dynamics between the two disciplines and the prospects for further engagement.

\textbf{‘Multiple races and many finish lines’\(^{46}\): Towards a non-linear view of history}

For a field that has long been charged with nurturing a historically impoverished view of the world, IR theory has done little to address the lacuna. Mainstream theories such as neorealism have shown little respect for premodern history, although the roots of realism can be traced to philosophers such as Thucydides and Machiavelli.\(^{47}\) (Elman and Elman 1997: 9) Liberalism has been no less oblivious of the significance of history to theory. Despite a professed scholarly interest in the role of non-state entities in international politics, it has failed to explore the range of political organisations that existed prior to, and in many instances, existed alongside the modern state system. It is evident that within their respective theoretical confines, each theory has mined history for instances that

\(^{45}\) The disconnect is most visible in policy circles in which policy makers have tended to gravitate towards either the sequential frame of reference that historians espouse or the systemic understanding that political scientists follow, rarely employing both in tandem. (Gaddis 1987: 20)

\(^{46}\) Rudolph 1987: 732.

\(^{47}\) Rudolph argues that the temporal divides that render Western history intelligible make little sense when applied to the Asian context. No drastic changes of comparable proportions appear to have taken place in the region around 1500, after which the modern period is believed to have commenced in Europe. Consequently, the time periods in the Asian context would be longer if changes across time are to be recorded. (Rudolph 1987: 733)
validate its claims. Given that a historical understanding of international political thought would reveal the different types of political orders that existed in the past, it would help, as Edward Keene argues, to

'...illuminate what is different about the specific kind of international order in which we live today. A continuist approach will inevitably fail in this endeavour because it is dedicated to the...goal of eliding differences in languages, vocabulary and historical context so as to make concepts and theories comparable across time...'. (Keene 2005: 18)

The quest for historical cases has been driven by the search for similarities between previous political orders and the present state system. Quentin Skinner cautions that to 'demand from the history of thought a solution to our own immediate problems is to commit not merely a methodological fallacy but something like a moral error.' (Skinner 2002: 89)

The key concept that has ensured a 'continuist approach' within IR is that of the 'tradition' which stretches back to the ancient period. According to John Gunnell, 'The tradition' is a retrospective analytical construction which produces a rationalized version of the past'. (Gunnell 1978: 132) The notion of the 'great tradition' from ancient Greece to contemporary times, which Gunnell refers to as 'a piece of academic folklore', is most prevalent in political theory, spin-offs from which are evident in IR theory as well. (Gunnell 1978: 133) The idea that ancient Greece was the wellspring of European political thought is a relatively recent construction that unseated the earlier formulation of the Ancient Model in the early nineteenth century.48 The impetus for the shift came from the Romanticists who privileged the particular and the local over the general and the universal that Enlightenment stood for. Ancient Greece came to be seen as the repository of Europe's childhood when unhindered imagination and purity were at play.49 Bernal notes that over the centuries,

48 The Ancient Model projected ancient Greece as an amalgam of different cultural influences, particularly of the Egyptians and the Phoenicians who colonised the primitive tribes and introduced progressive practices such as literacy and irrigation. However, the influence of the Romantics ensured that this phase of colonisations of ancient Greece was downplayed. As a result, the Greeks were no longer seen as recipients of cultural attributes from the East but were now portrayed as the progenitors of civilisation itself. There was a sudden spurt of interest in all aspects of Greek culture: art, poetry, and particularly philosophy, which historians in the 1780s concurred, was the beginning all philosophical thought. (Bernal 1994: 122)

49 Ironically, till Renaissance the notion of 'childhood' carried derogatory connotations of cultural superficiality, evident in Plato's references to Egyptian priests deriding Greeks as children. In mid-
'Ancient Greece has served two functions. It is seen as the first universal civilization and at the same time as the cultural ancestor of the Europeans. This gives Europe a universal character as the continent that is not merely the vanguard of world progress but is the essence of the world itself.' (Bernal 1994: 127)

In international politics, Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes are arrayed to form a formidable phalanx of thinkers, constituting a grand tradition to which later writers such as Carr and Morgenthau contributed. In the retrospective positioning of philosophers in an exalted lineage of international politics, the subtle point often missed is that the classical thinkers focussed mainly on what is today construed as internal politics. (Schmidt 1994: 353-56; Walker 1995: 322) As Steven Forde argues,

'Though this [classical realism] tradition has been immensely powerful, it is to some extent an artificial construct; these thinkers [such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Rousseau] did not by and large think of themselves as adherents to a tradition, but as innovators.' (Cited in Jeffery 2005: 74)

The compulsions behind constructing a grand tradition are rooted in contemporary concerns. Collini et al. make the point that in 'writing history backwards', proponents of lineages are more interested in substantiating their own theoretical claims by pointing out its historical antecedents. (Cited in Schmidt 1994: 363) Rejecting the interpretation of intellectual development in terms of linear progress, Dryzek and Leonard offer an alternative approach to the subject of disciplinary history.

'Given the historicity of political life, theoretical progress in political science will not be of the “vertical”- or transhistorically successive and successful-kind found in the natural sciences. Instead, our progress can only be a “lateral” accumulation of potentially useful research traditions, each of which is contextually constrained in its problem-solving power.' (Dryzek and Leonard 1988: 1257)

In this regard, Oakeshott's distinction between 'practical' and 'historical' past is a resourceful tool through which the invention of traditions within IR can be understood.  

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80 According to Krygier, a tradition constitutes three elements, namely belief in its historical legacy, an authoritative presence, and its inheritance by succeeding generations rather than the mere discovery from a forgotten past. (Jeffery 1998: 62)

81 Oakeshott argued that 'wherever the significance of the past lies in the fact that it has been influential in deciding the present and future fortunes of man, whenever the present is sought in the past, and whenever
Viewed in terms of enduring legacies that impart a sense of continuity to the discipline, divergent voices from within are seen as threatening the very foundations of IR.

History as a discipline has had its fair share of self-reflection, although IR in the main has remained relatively unaffected by the debates raging within between ‘traditionalist historians’ and ‘critical historiographers’. Critical historiographers like Alan Munslow and Keith Jenkins criticise the supposedly objective search for the truth, arguing instead that ‘history is made’ by historians rather than discovered through evidence-based methodology. (Vaughan-Williams 2005: 117-120) The traditionalist penchant of historians such as Arthur Marwick and Lawrence Stone for ‘interpretive closures’ contrasted with the ‘relativist perspective’ put forward by the critical historiographers. The works of Derrida and Foucault were influential in shaping the preoccupations of critical historiographers in this regard. Derrida argued that Western political thought was structured around sharp dichotomies that were not neutral projections. Deconstruction questioned such fixities, embracing instead an approach that problematises and dislocates established modes of enquiry. Thus, history can never be permanently sealed off and sanctified in a way that the call for the ‘end of history’ signified. (Vaughan-Williams 2005: 125-130)

It is evident that history has not been innocent to the dynamics of power, furnishing intellectual justifications for the rise of the West vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Historical scholarship, termed as ‘the intellectual artefact’ of the nation-state, predictably espoused the nation-state as the unit of analysis, apart from privileging European history as the primary reference point in the construction of world history. (Bentley 2006: 20)

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52 Alan Munslow spelt out the six central principles on which the traditional approach hinged- Past is considered ‘real’ and ‘truth’ relates to reality through referentiality and inference, ‘facts’ derived from evidence are a priori distinct from interpretation, ‘fact’ and ‘value’ are clearly separable, ‘history’ and ‘fiction’ can and must be differentiated, the knower is removed from what is known, and ‘truth’ is not perspectival. (Cited in Vaughan-Williams 2005: 119)

53 Sankaran Krishna makes a similar point when he argues that the ‘powerful coalescence of scientific rationality, an interstate system hierarchized on the principles of social Darwinism, the belief that territory and identity must somehow be aligned, and the modulation of history into a script that demands replication has eviscerated our imaginations of all but the nation.’ (Krishna 1999: 230)
James Blaut argues that the history of human progress is explained in terms of the diffusion of inventions from the dynamic Europe to the static non-western world. The proponents of this view, whom he terms as the diffusionists, viewed the world as binary opposites that comprised of a progressive Europe and the peripheral non-Europe, leading to the development of 'tunnel history'. Tunnel history, which privileged events in Europe to explain world history, was merged with diffusionism to explain the outward spread of progressive European elements to stagnant societies through colonialism. Moreover, comparative history went on to highlight the disparities between the two worlds, which as Subrahmanyam puts it, began by accepting that 'the dynamic of world history is the dynamic of European history.' (Subrahmanyam 1993: 145; McNiven and Russell 2005: 141; Blaut 2000: 7) Rudolph notes,

'Most of the great practitioners of huge comparisons, among them Hegel, Marx, and Weber, have understood Asian social, economic, and political systems as flawed or degraded performances in a historical race in which all competitors run toward the same finish line- whether the finish line is nation-state, bourgeois capitalism, or universal rationalization.' (Rudolph 1987: 732)

A more accommodative IR theory could incorporate the writings of eighteenth century thinkers like Denis Diderot, who although Eurocentric in his approach, was nonetheless opposed to studying the European state system at the exclusion of the political systems that existed in the rest of the world. (Keene 2005: 9) Pandey articulates the postcolonial critique of history's exclusionist agenda.

'To take account...different kinds of articulations of the past [other than the nation-state] is to open up the area of historical enquiry: to accommodate the malleable, contextual, fuzzy, 'lived' community...and to recognize how the community (the subject of history) is forged in the very construction of the past-in the course, one might say, of a historical discourse.' (Pandey 1999: 49)

According to Blaut, classical Eurocentric diffusionism was grounded on five fundamental propositions:

1. Progressive cultural evolution in Greater Europe is self-generated, autonomous, natural and continuous.
2. Progressive evolution results from European rationality and is source of all European progress.
3. Non-European societies do not change due to internal causes, but from diffusion.
4. Main form of interaction between Europe and non-Europe is outward diffusion of progressive innovations.
5. Natural consequence of this diffusion is the flow of wealth into Europe, a sort of partial repayment for Europe's gift of civilisation. (Blaut 2000: 7)
Western influence on IR is unmistakable, and a reliable indicator of its dominance is the discipline's research output. For instance, despite the increased focus on cross-regional and international subjects in general, journal articles with a regional focus were twice as likely to study Western Europe as Asia-Pacific. (Breuning et al. 2005: 456) Moreover, majority of the contributors hailed from a US-based institution, a dominance that even the combined strength of countries classified as the 'periphery of the core' such as the UK, Australia and Canada failed to challenge. It goes without saying that contributions from the ‘core of the periphery’ (China, Russia and Brazil, for example) and the ‘periphery’, as far as the prominent journals are concerned, are dismally negligible.\(^{55}\) The voices from the margins are few, and even fewer participate in the conversation that shapes the language and terms of debate within IR. Ironically, the call for greater sensitivity towards historical particularities and the rejection of Eurocentrism only goes on to further highlight Western dominance on the discipline. (Elman and Elman 2001; Monkonnen 1994)

However, differences between the fields of IR and history have narrowed in recent years, with IR theorists becoming more mindful of complexity and contingency in their case studies.\(^{56}\) As Robert Gilpin points out, ‘believing that the past is not merely prologue and that the present does not have a monopoly on the truth, we have drawn on historical experience.’ (Gilpin 1981: 11) Beier and Arnold make a similar call to rescue IR from disciplinary orthodoxy, arguing that ‘... we must do more than simply forsake the discipline, we must strive to become undisciplined.’ (Beier and Arnold 2005: 58) Friedrich Kratochwil points the way forward in making the orientation towards history more meaningful. He regards a historical fact as significant for its ‘emplotment in a narrative’, in relation to other such facts. ‘Emplotment’ of facts highlights the point that ‘although history is past and seems therefore objective [and] fixed...actual historical reflection shows that...history is malleable because it is always remembered and part of a

\(^{55}\) The data is drawn from a study that focuses on the research output of top three prominent US-based academic journals (International Studies Quarterly, World Politics and International Organization) over a period of ten volume years (1995-2004). The criteria of comparative rankings, among other counts, are also based on previous studies on research output in major journals. (Breuning et al. 2005)

\(^{56}\) Some of the theorists who have sought to bring greater historical depth to their studies include Buzan and Little 2000; Watson 1992; Alexander Wendt 1999; and Hobden and Hobson 2002.
story'. (Kratochwil 2006: 14, emphasis original) The act of recollecting the past is in itself an empowering experience that goes beyond making people mere repositories of an exalted tradition. History then becomes an 'encounter with the self' that reminds people of their sense of agency (of what they can potentially do) and their sense of identity (of who they are and where they came from). It is no coincidence that historically, renaissances and revolutions have forged deep ties with the past and drawn sustenance from history.57 (Kratochwil 2006: 15)

Paradoxically, increased historical content in IR literature has not always answered the charge of ahistoricism within the field. As Hill argues, the conflation of the history of IR and that of the sovereign state tends to focus on the developments of the West during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. (Hill 2006) Periods which witnessed the dominance of anarchy are studied for their similarity to the present international system. Consequently, certain periods of history such as the ancient Greek era are often studied for their apparent commonalities to the present order, whereas entire historical periods and continents are glossed over for being 'remote and alien' to the contemporary context. (Buzan and Little 2000: 2) A fixation with presentism and eternal concerns is to Stephanie Lawson, one of 'the crimes of anachronism' that IR theorists end up committing.58 (Lawson 2006: 41) IR's engagement with history is informed by the traditional approach that seeks to uncover historical truth through objective means, and it is this perpetual search for objectivity that Nietzsche was critical of. He regarded 'suprahistorical perspective' as

'a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself...a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development.' (Cited in Drolet 2004: 78)

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57 The tendency to turn to history in search of lessons is an old one. Victorian literature reveals the preoccupation of a number of writers such as Carlyle and Walter Scott who turned to the Middle Ages for solution to the excesses of the Industrial Revolution such as rampant squalor, unemployment and congested towns. Medievalism idealised the past, when such degenerate conditions were absent and despite its nostalgia, it was a pragmatic approach that turned its back on the spirit of the modern man. (Chapman 1986: 38)

58 However, presentism is not a bane that dogs IR theorists alone. Historians have also tended to organise and align historical data as a response to concerns that they perceive in the present. This was particularly true of diplomatic histories written during the Cold War period. (Gaddis 1987: 12)
Openness as the means to recover historicity rather than arriving at fixed interpretations signifies the ‘problem of history’ that IR would find instructive to contend with. (Vaughan-Williams 2005: 136) Nowhere is this ‘problem of history’ more evident than in the treatment of postcolonial societies such as India within IR.

Shunning the ‘suprahistorical perspective’ must then begin with a rethink on applying notions with Western connotations to non-Western contexts. Rudolph asserts that the European and Asian polities differed vastly in terms of sheer scale. The European polities approximated regional kingdoms that were territorially compact, providing conditions conducive to the growth of associated notions of monopoly over force, unified sovereignty and a national identity. It is then of little surprise that the nation and the state fused within European political thought. On the other hand, Asian polities, which she describes as ‘transethnic empires’, straddled vast tracts of land of continental proportions. (Rudolph 1987: 736) Imperial control extended over multiethnic populations, which were often held together by some form of loose hegemony. As Pradeep Barua notes,

‘...there developed in India a concept of sovereignty that emphasized the multiple rights of different groups and sectors in society and not the existence of a unitary concept of the state.’ (Barua 2005: 21-22)

To attempt fitting this disparate state of affairs within the neat categorisation of a cohesive nation-state would be a contorted depiction of history. (Rudolph 1987: 736)

What explains IR theory’s fixation with similarity and its unease with difference? The answer lies in the positivist influence which is most marked in the field’s search for unchanging laws that dictate and explain all phenomena and state behaviour. The formulation and testing of such immutable laws of IR require consistent and invariant patterns that would be subject to generalisations. Predictably, orders radically different from the espoused system did not fit into such explanatory schemes and over time, the factor of contingency gave way to a trans-historical interpretation of IR. Divorced from the varied reality that history epitomises, mainstream theories developed several

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59 Rudolph’s position was in line with Burton Stein’s who argued that social control in India was left to self-regulating kinship, religious and territorial institutions that formed the network of alliances on which the king’s power was based. ‘The Indian king was an overlord, not a manager; he demanded submission to his claim of superiority, rather than obedience to his orders; he did not distribute directives over the ruled.’ (Stein 1975: 77)
theoretical blind spots. (Buzan and Little 2000: 18-22) For instance, none of the theories is equipped to explain the evolution of the international system, since its existence is simply stated as a given rather than deduced. Theories which assume that the modern international system came into being in 1648 at Westphalia commit the conceptual fallacy of treating the notion of the international system and its Westphalian model as one and the same. References to history, if at all, are confined to European origins of the international system, thereby mistaking the model for the concept itself. (Buzan and Little 2001: 24-28)

A related assumption that has largely remained unquestioned is the anarchical nature of IR. Realists base their entire calculation of rationalistic state behaviour on the assumption that an international system cannot be anything but anarchical. Similarly, liberals too take anarchy to be the starting point of their study of peace and war. However, the principle betrays a singular lack of historical depth. Adam Watson argues that dichotomous notions of absolute anarchy and hierarchy are extreme scenarios that exist only at the theoretical level. Rather, a more nuanced understanding would indicate a spectrum of systems within which all historical and contemporary international systems would fall. Since a spectrum allows for varying permutations of control and autonomy, it offers an appropriate framework to trace the evolution of a particular system and is thus open-ended in its possibilities. (Watson 1992: 4)

Having made a case for an interdisciplinary approach that bridges the gap between the subfields of realism and constructivism on one front, and between the fields of IR and history on the other, this study seeks to capitalise on the benefits of such an endeavour. If history matters and so do the contingent forms that political units may take from time to time, then the study of empires in the time span of a country's evolving strategic practice is both logical and necessary. The emphasis on the sovereign state system marginalised one of the most enduring political systems in history from the discourse on international politics: empires. The study of imperial systems would make the history of IR more representative and balanced. This study extends the agenda set by

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60 Andreas Osiander contests the conventional view that the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 marked a neat break with the past, arguing that the advent of industrialisation marked a far more radical transition in terms of the integration of economic networks it entailed and the political means that were devised to administer them. (Osiander 2001: 281)
Doyle and others who have sought to rectify the imbalance in IR studies caused by presentism and Eurocentrism, to explore an understudied domain— that of India’s strategic practice.

**APPLYING IR THEORY TO INDIAN HISTORY**

Frederick Turner’s observation that ‘Each age writes the history of the past anew with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time’ sums up the scholarship on India’s strategic practice and the course it has taken over the decades. (Cited in Elman and Elman 2001: 62) Indigenous writings on statecraft and diplomacy date back to ancient India when Kautilya strategised and theorisations kept pace with the changing times. In the medieval period, the Islamic theory of state was incorporated to yield yet another exposition of India’s strategic practice, one that placed the state squarely within a heterogeneous society.

Notwithstanding the sustained interest of ancient and medieval historians and theoreticians in matters concerning strategic practice, it is the later writings by Europeans that left an indelible impact on the manner in which India came to be subsequently studied in the initial context. Theorisations on India’s strategic practice emerged primarily during the colonial period when systematic study of a hitherto ‘unknown’ country was undertaken. Indology and its attendant variants were intrinsically linked to the colonial project and hence emerged as an organised body of knowledge covering areas ranging from religion to language. Given its multi-faceted nature, colonialism is a truly interdisciplinary phenomenon spanning fields as diverse as geography, psychiatry, anthropology and history. Thus no particular discipline, howsoever rigorous and comprehensive it may be in its approach, can hope to study colonialism in isolation from other fields of enquiry. (Hall 2000: 24)

The rationale behind selecting the colonial period as the starting point of our analysis of India’s strategic practice is not all that straightforward. The colonial writings represented myriad voices within, articulating divergent perspectives on the land and the people the British ruled. (Teltscher 1995: 2-5) Epitomising the internal pulls and contradictions that marked colonial rule over India, the writings contain no single work that can be taken to be representative of British views on India, and to which a certain idea of strategic significance can be traced back. However, the colonial influence on
India’s strategic outlook is undeniable, given that a number of images associated with India did not exist prior to the advent of the British. The set of colonial writings on seemingly disparate subjects may not appear to be of immediate relevance, especially given the case study under focus. However, it would be a gross misperception to treat works of the colonial period as part of the already existent body of literature on India, both indigenous and external. These writings were distinct both in their approach and impact from earlier interpretations. Unlike previous accounts of foreign travellers, which reflected a sense of curiosity to investigate an unfamiliar land, much of the colonial literature was an exercise in power. With the benefit of hindsight, it can be argued that the influence of previous accounts waned over time as they were not part of an overarching project of the kind which extended the supportive apparatus of the British empire to the colonial writers. It must be added that while some aspects of colonial constructions are highlighted, others are recessed in IR literature on India’s soft power.

Much of the existing literature on the area is an exercise in reductionism that gives a static account of India and its evolving strategic patterns. Studies on the strategic approach of Indians down centuries typically range from orientalist writings to inward-looking revivalist literature. Although both approaches offer contrasting strategic images of India, they converge on one crucial detail. India as a subject was presumed to be amenable to essentialisation. The diverse experiences of millennia were distilled to arrive at an unchanging and unitary essence that signified India’s worldview. A look at current theorisations on the subject would set the context within which it can be then understood. Hence, a study of the relevant literature must necessarily begin with the orientalist discourse as many of the images it threw up about India carry strategic import. These images persist not only in current works on Indian strategic thought, but also in the perceptions of India’s decision-making elite.

Some of the earliest writings that held important implications for India’s strategic practice and shaped much of the literature on the area that followed belonged to the orientalist school. In early nineteenth century, the term ‘orientalist’ was part of

61 Thapar identifies three key trends that characterised studies into ancient Indian history spearheaded chiefly by the Orientalists, the Utilitarians and the Nationalists. The Orientalists, for whom the Vedic period epitomised a utopian state the search for the idyllic society was spurred by domestic developments. Industrialisation was threatening to erode the cultural moorings of Europe, and the ancient Orient had
philology, especially with regard to Asian languages. In the 1830s, it came to refer to a British scholar who studied Indian culture and laws and argued that these should be observed in the governance of the country. The Orientalists, who offered some of the first European accounts of India, displayed a scholarly interest in exploring the culture and traditions of India and highlighted the distinct aspects of the country that set it apart from the West's. India came to represent the uncorrupted idea of human existence that Europe had lost in its march towards modernity. As J.J. Clarke notes, this projection of the image of the ideal polity onto India 'was deployed as a means of treating what were seen as deep-seated ills at the heart of contemporary European culture.' (Clarke 1997: 60)

The Orientalists were most active from 1772 and 1830 and established the College of Fort William in Calcutta where Asian languages such as Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Sanskrit were taught. One of its staunch supporters was Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of India, who was instrumental in the creation of an Indianised civil service that was proficient in Indian languages. The establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 under William Jones, who was an East India Company official himself, marked a significant step in that direction. (Kopf 1995: 141)

The body of colonial thought was meant to justify imperial rule in India to its administrators and imbue their mission with a sense of purpose. Accordingly, the British scholarship approached its subject with paternalistic concern, characteristic of a power that was aware of its responsibilities of reform and upliftment. (Franklin 2006: 13) Lord Curzon asserted that the British should do well

achieved great cultural advances, which though forgotten had to be retrieved to show the way for the degenerate people of Europe and India. (Thapar et al. 1969: 3; Alam and Alavi 2001: 45)

62 Max Mueller's adoption of the Sanskritised name Moksha Mula was symbolic of the Orientalist identification with ancient Indian culture. (Thapar et al. 1969: 3) Amartya Sen identifies three distinct approaches through which India came to be observed and understood: exoticist, magisterial and curatorial. Unlike the exoticist approach which looked for exotic and the strange aspects of Indian life, and the magisterial which saw India as a subject country, the curatorial approach was informed by a general interest in classifying and studying various dimensions of Indian culture. (Sen 1997: 4-5)

63 As Kopf notes, the College of Fort William was 'the first European-created institution for higher learning in India to welcome Indians as faculty members and to encourage cultural exchange between Europeans and South Asians.' (Kopf 1995: 154)

64 Macaulay clearly stated the purpose of the colonial mission in his Minute on Education thus, 'We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern,
‘...to remember that the Almighty has placed your hand on the greatest of his ploughs [...] to drive the blade a little forward in your time, and to feel that somewhere among these millions you have left a little justice or happiness or prosperity, a sense of manliness or moral dignity, a spring of patriotism, a dawn of intellectual enlightenment, or a stirring of duty, where it did not before exist. That is enough, that is the Englishman’s justification in India.’ (Cited in Metcalf 1994: 168)

Uday Mehta explores the strategies that liberal thinkers employed to justify exclusionist colonial practices in India within liberalism’s egalitarian universalism. One of the most effective colonial strategies was that of inscrutability: the unfathomable and chaotic quality of India which frustrates the rational observer. The charge of inscrutability was no random accusation by the exasperated rationalist, but constituted the cornerstone of colonial discourse. The designation of inscrutability places the onus on the object that resists comprehension without incriminating the observer. Its inability to represent itself in a manner that is comprehensible to all provides Britain with the justification to represent India and recompense for its deficiency. Taken together, inscrutability implied maintaining a measure of distance from the confounding details and opacity of the Indian way of life. (Mehta 1999: 68)

The second exclusionist strategy of civilisational infantilism resorts to the reverse approach: intensified engagement with the historical and cultural specificities of India that lays bare its insufficiencies.65 We see here the deployment of culture as a tool of exclusion, which divided colonies into two classes. Whereas colonies in America and Australia were ‘of similar civilization to the ruling country; capable of and ripe for representative government’, other colonies like India had cultures that were dissimilar to the British, making them unfit for self governance. India could develop only under the

65 The simultaneity of both strategies is reconciled by the standard against which India figures in the schema of progress. The standard that informs India’s position in the civilisational hierarchy is that of specificity: as an illustrative example. India mattered for its specificity, as an instance of backwardness and not for its singularity in terms of its particularities. Detailing per se is not a concern for a liberal thinker like Mill, since he is interested in fitting India within a general framework, rather than take the schema apart with its uniqueness. The context for specificity is the schema of progress within which all societies are instances of one stage or the other. Therefore, historical detail matters only insofar as it demonstrated a general law and its historical significance. (Mehta 1999: 111)
cloak of authoritarianism, and the course of action before colonial administrators is presented by what J.S. Mill called ‘a choice of despotisms’. (Mehta 1999: 71) Colonial practices that sought to reconcile liberalism with imperialism are similarly studied by David Strang who argues that the connotations of sovereignty within the system of imperial powers were very different from the manner in which it was interpreted and applied to in the case of their colonies. As Strang points out,

‘...imperialism did not refer back to the identity or purposes of the Western polity, because non-Western states and peoples were seen as fundamentally different from their Western counterparts. One could be a liberal domestically and an imperialist in Asia and Africa.’ (Strang 1996: 34-35)

All colonial ventures of exploration, classification and categorisation of India’s social as well as natural spheres were part of the larger imperial project of knowing the subject country well in order to control it better. Both endeavours were informed by the same purpose of how the available resources could be exploited to serve British needs. (Roosa 1995: 141) The journal Asiatik Researches, of which Jones was the editor, carried out extensive surveys between 1788 and 1839 of the natural and human resources in India. It published 174 articles on the flora and fauna of India and another 172 articles on Indian history and languages. The colonial urge to institutionalise knowledge stemmed from an underlying mistrust of the native, dependence on whom, it was feared, would be to the detriment of the system. This prejudice assumed structural proportions with the organisation of knowledge that went on to progressively insulate the processes of administration from the influence of the Indians. (Alamgir 2006: 429) According to Bernard Cohn, the British conducted a number of ‘historical modalities’ to systematically build up a repository of knowledge about the colonial people. One of the modalities sought to amass knowledge of political practices and traditions followed by preceding rulers to facilitate better and efficient governance of the country. Another line of enquiry concerned piecing together India’s civilisational history in a manner that justified colonial rule. (Cohn 1996: 5-6; Pinch 1999: 397)
However, colonialism was not initially imbued with this sense of purpose that went on to inform its subsequent ventures. That colonisation till about the nineteenth century was not the outcome of a calculated strategy is evident from Seeley’s remark that ‘we seem…to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind’. (Seeley 1971: 8) This ad hoc nature of colonialism is brought into sharper focus when it is juxtaposed with the more organised phenomenon of imperialism, the distinction highlighting the heterogeneous ways in which power was exercised during the colonial period. As Young points out,

‘Colonization was pragmatic and until the nineteenth century generally developed locally in a haphazard way…while imperialism was typically driven by ideology from the metropolitan centre and concerned with the assertion and expansion of state power.’ (Young 2001: 16-17)

The post-Renaissance period saw a sea change in European historiography, with emphasis now on empirical evidence, chronological sequencing of historical events and on establishing causal relationships. These concerns were duly reflected in the British approach to the subject of Indian history. The larger context to the entire intellectual venture was social evolutionism, wherein India drew its identity in relation to Europe by embodying its past in the scale of evolution. (Thapar 2000a: 156-158) Peter van der Veer argues that much of nineteenth century British historiography was marked by ‘little Englandism’, wherein mainstream history was believed to be immune to colonial experiences. This trend was set against the ‘big Indianism’ of Indian historiography which projected India as possessing an inherent ability to imbibe external influences without losing its essential character. (Veer 2001: 8) In the next segment, we will examine the influence Orientalist philosophy had on the manner in which India’s strategic history was interpreted and imagined.

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66 Internal differences on the degree and nature of British involvement in the governance of the country belied the image of the British as a monolith in India. While the Orientalists favoured internal reform of Hinduism through the introduction of modern ideas, the Evangelicals believed in the moral upliftment of the Indians through the teaching of Christian tenets. The Orientalist approach meant that the measure of distance to be maintained in dealing with the colonial people was in the danger of being violated.
Overlay of Orientalism and the Scripting of India’s Strategic History

The inherent power and appeal of ideas was grasped and tapped early by Eurocentric writers, who tended to justify colonialism in ideational rather than in material terms. Colonies were seen as steeped in ascriptive identities, and reined back from development due to their regressive traditions. The mission of colonialism, and later modernisation was to introduce progressive, rational ideas in these traditional societies. The notion that ideas were potential catalysts of change that could release societies from the stasis they found themselves in was central to the orientalist discourse. As Said noted,

'Orientalism staked its existence, not upon its openness, its receptivity to the Orient, but rather on its *internal repetitious consistency* about its constitutive will-to-power over the Orient. In such a way, Orientalism was able to survive revolutions, world wars, and the literal dismemberment of empires.' (Said 2001: 222, emphasis added)

The quality of internal consistency implies that the identical set of Orientalist images about the Orient applied to all disciplines along the familiar markers of despotism, irrationality and traditionalism. (Simons 2004: 272) This power of representation that the British appropriated yielded a coherent and interrelated set of images about India that Indians came to believe in. With the erstwhile colonial subjects internalising these representations as true to form, the 'Self is presented back to the Other in the categories of that Other'. (Clammer 2003: 21) This tendency is particularly evident in the ideological position of right-wing parties in India, which reinforce the exclusionist notion of a pre-colonial national identity that was ironically propounded by the colonialists

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67 The general disdain for 'irrational' practices in India can be discerned in the sixteenth century writings of Thomas Roe and Francois Bernier. Disapproving of the respect astrologers commanded in Mughal India, Bernier wrote, 'The majority of *Asiatics* are so infatuated in favour of being guided by the signs of the heavens, that, according to their phraseology, no circumstances can happen below, which is not written above.' (Bernier 1891: 161) However, colonial writings made certain distinctions among the non-Europeans. The 'barbarous infidels' of the East led degraded lives because of the civilisational excesses evident in the blind pursuit of power and wealth. On the other hand, the 'savages' of Africa and the Americas were deprived of the fruits of civilisation, and hence were primitive. (Cooper 2006: 98)

68 The concept of the civilising mission originated in France's *mission civilisatrice*. According to Alice Conklin, 'to be civilised was to be free from specific forms of tyranny: the tyranny of the elements over man, of disease over health, of instinct over reason, of ignorance over knowledge and of despotism over liberty.' The rational man's avowed love for all things civilised went on to inform the higher objectives of colonialism in lands that were seen to be wallowing in depravity and irrationality. (Cited in Mann 2004: 4)
themselves. Thus, it would be instructive to begin by examining the caricatures that have crept into the strategic discourse on India before we turn to history for their refutation.

1. Caste and human agency in India: Indology presumed all civilisations were reducible to unitary essences, and the essence of Indian civilisation lay in the institution of caste. (Inden 1986) The caste system was seen as the cause behind a divided and weak Indian society and its vulnerability to repeated conquests by invaders. The domination of caste in major Indological accounts implied that the role of indigenous political institutions was undermined. India was depicted as a country where political institutions symbolising the unity of the state were subsumed by a conflict-ridden civil society and hence, could not foster an atmosphere conducive to strategising. The absence of united and purposeful action was to J.S. Mill, symptomatic of social backwardness. He asserted,

‘In savage communities... we seldom see any joint operations carried on by the union of many; nor do savages find much pleasure in each other's society. Wherever, therefore, we find human beings acting together for common purposes, in large bodies and enjoying the pleasures of social intercourse, we term them civilized.’ (Mill 1973: 46)

The upholding of the varna system as the basis of social order in India led the British to conclude that Hindus were tied down by the duties of their caste due to which they could do little to change their position in society. (Roosa 1995: 143) This bred a mentality of fatalism that made human progress impossible in history. Moreover, faith in predestined course of events and stress on afterlife made Indians otherworldly with no concern for material betterment. Inden succinctly summarises the orientalist position.

‘Indian civilization is... unlike the west, fundamentally a product of its environment... European civilization is the product of rational human action... [India] was from her very origin pre-conquered by caste and Hinduism and pre-condemned... to centuries of decline and stagnation. Her people, including their leaders, have, thus, not been true agents of their own actions, the makers of their history....’ (Inden 1986: 441)

Nicholas Dirks sees the reinforcement of caste in Orientalist texts as an instance of reflexivity. His correlation illustrates Said's argument that the texts 'create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe’. (Said 2001: 94) According to Dirks,
...colonialism seems to have created much of what is now accepted as Indian 'tradition', including an autonomous caste structure with the Brahman clearly and unambiguously at the head.\(^{69}\) (Dirks 1992: 61)

The works of British ethnographers such as Buchanan Hamilton's *The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India* (1838) and Herbert Risley's *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (1891) do not reveal the single, overarching caste structure that was to later become a colonial representation. If at all, they bring out the fact that social stratification was fluid and subject to sharp regional variations. Buchanan realised that internal distinctions prevented the *brahmins* from appropriating the top position of a relatively fluid social hierarchy. He found 'that in the early ages the term Brahman would not appear to have been hereditarily annexed to the sacred order.' (Cited in Waligora 2004: 148) Half a century later, Risley reiterated Buchanan's observation.

'Caste then, at least in the rigid form in which we now know it, is an institution of comparatively late origin.... [T]he testimony of the whole body of Vedic literature as interpreted by modern scholars is adverse to the existence of a clearly-defined hierarchy of endogamous castes....Even in the Epic era the system had not hardened into its later form....Brahmanhood is a matter of personal qualities and aptitudes rather than of descent.' (Risley 1891: 142-143)

The association of caste with race, absent in the Buchanan's observations, becomes evident in Risley's work, when he argues that castes were obsessed with maintaining their racial purity. For instance, although the artisans of Bengal belonged to the high status group in the ancient, pre-brahmanical social hierarchy, rigid notions of purity and sanctity were absent from their social observances, as was the primacy of birth that was to later determine positions in the caste structure.\(^{70}\)

\(^{69}\) Melitta Waligora makes a similar point, arguing that caste 'is a fact of Indian society, but not in an ahistorical, all-embracing, idealized, brahminical, fixed hierarchical manner. The way that 'caste' and the 'caste system' are conceptualised today is, to a certain extent, the result of colonial ideology and practice.' (Waligora 2004: 142)

\(^{70}\) Such pre-modern social hierarchies were not unique to India, and Europe saw the similar ostracisation of certain professional categories. In Germany till the nineteenth century, grave-diggers, executioners and tanners were branded as 'dishonourable people' who were not allowed to socially mingle with the rest of the population. (Waligora 2004: 156-157) However, scholars like Ashok Rudra differentiate between the modes of social control that maintained hierarchical order in Europe and India: whereas it was violence in the former case, it was the 'ideology' of dharma in the case of India that obviated the need to resort to violence. For more on related literature, see Embree 1985: 28-29.
However, it would be erroneous to argue that colonial policies alone determined the rigid contours of the caste system. The ritualisation of the caste structure by the priestly and warrior class as a means to protecting their privileged position in society was instrumental in demarcating the caste distinctions. (Sharma 1990: 98) This particular instance of reflexivity which began with British research into Indian society was a graduated exercise. The initial phase of studying the Hindu scriptures gave way to empirical research in mid-nineteenth century that focussed on the enumeration and classification of Indian population along ethnic and social identities. The categorisation of society into an overarching caste system was based on the information that such official investigations yielded. Whether or not historically the inability to repulse foreign invasion lay in India’s fractious society, the British emphasis on its caste-ridden, splintered nature ensured that no united and cohesive revolt to its power ever arose. This intention was articulated by the principal of the Presidency College in Calcutta, James Kerr in no uncertain terms.

'It may be doubted if the existence of caste is on the whole unfavourable to the permanence of our rule. It may even be considered favourable to it, provided we act with prudence and forbearance. Its spirit is opposed to national union.' (Cited in Bandyopadhyay 1985: 63)

In a civilised society, reason came to replace violence in the negotiations among its members. Since civilisation implied a control over violence, it became coterminous with the state, which enforced restraint through its legal and coercive apparatus. The history of the state is the history of progress that came to associate pejorative connotations to the phenomenon of violence. It explains the association of violence with the uncivilised and the barbaric and perhaps is the reason why it is seldom dealt as such in historical accounts.71 Coercive ventures of the state such as battles and wars are distinguished from incidence of raw violence that lack direction, purpose and rationale. Battles are justified by the higher objective that a state strives to achieve by waging them, arguably a more peaceful and stable society. Violence, on the other hand, is the hallmark of anarchy- a condition that lies outside the pale of the state, and indeed, predates it. Gyanendra Pandey asserts that the notion of violence has been conventionally regarded as

71 For more on the imperialist discourse on barbarianism and civilisation, see Salter 2002.
belonging to the pre-historical period. Precisely because the state has very little to do with what falls beyond its limits, history has always recognised violence as the anti-thesis of civilisation and progress. (Pandey 1999: 6-10)

‘History proceeds on the assumption of a fixed subject-community, nation, state-and a broadly pre-determined course of human development or transformation. The violence that accompanies ‘progress’ and ‘civilization’... finds little place in the historical narrative.’ (Pandey 1999: 47)

Such a reading offers a homogenous picture of the community under focus, sustained by stable forces internal to it. The subject remains fixed and well-defined primarily because the destabilising force of violence is externalised to some outside source. Within the community, individuals together constitute a collectivity but are incapable of fundamentally disturbing its internal balance. Any resort to violence by individuals is rendered senseless and chaotic by the eternal truth that they lack agency against the state which is the monopolist of force. The price for the inclusion into the political community is paid with the power of agency which all members must surrender, and with it forsake any claims over a legitimate cause to rebel. (Pandey 1999: 47) Pandey succinctly summed up the colonial position on violence outside the state.

‘Violence is Civilization’s other, as it were. It is what Civilization and History are not. The phenomenon of violence belongs to a domain of pre-history...’ (Pandey 1999: 9, emphasis original)

The reason for this extended explanation of history’s fixation with internally ordered communities is to draw attention to the subject that conventionally falls outside its purview, namely that of anarchy which was said to have prevailed in India till the advent of the British. In historical accounts, the normal condition of a stable and harmonious society did not apply to pre-colonial India which was beset by anarchical conditions of internal strife and political disorder. The numerous kings who ruled over fragmented domains continually jostled for power, rendering the country vulnerable to outside attacks. In brief, pre-colonial India was not an evolved political community that was internally stable, but disturbed by an external source of violence. The irrational violence that was externalised from a civilised society was an internal phenomenon in the case of India; indeed, it was its endemic feature. Invasions thus came to be qualified as wars of conquest and not as destabilising forces of violence. Pre-colonial India was an
India of pre-history, anarchy and barbarism. Into this pre-historical setting of endemic violence came the British who introduced order hitherto unknown to this country. Pandey drives home the point, arguing that

'... with or without the restraining influence of caste, this was a society of uncivilized, pre-History and primitive passions. Violence, untamed, and pretty much indiscriminate, was the mark of the Indian past, until India came up against the civilizing influence of British administration and a western education in temperate manners.' (Pandey 1999: 8)

The portrayal of India as a country sunk in anarchy provided the legitimate opening for British intervention and the justification of the colonial cause. Colonialism was said to have ushered in restraint in Indian society, still external in the sense that it had to be enforced through laws and not yet internally cultivated by its members. When peace and stability prevailed under the colonialists, history began for India in the true sense of the word. By introducing the lawless people to authority, colonialism brought with it the fruits of civilisation, namely the all-powerful state whose progress history was to henceforth record.

2. A fractured and defensive society: Orientalism presumed that for time immemorial, India was politically fragmented into a number of warring kingdoms engaged in internecine warfare till the British gained control. The situation was rendered chaotic by the absence of an overarching authority which could have regulated relations between the smaller polities. The argument justifying British rule held the larger implication that given its fractured political history, India failed to develop a coherent tradition of strategic thinking. The necessary prerequisite of a unifying political entity that could strategise for the entire country simply did not exist. The British administrators pointed to instances in India's past to argue that the disunity, in conjunction with other factors such as the country's philosophical traditions and the societal position of the individual, contributed to the inability of the Indians to act decisively in a sustained manner.72 Karl Marx wrote in 1853 on the future of British rule in India:

72 However, colonial disdain for the incapacities of the indigenous people did not prevent colonial powers like the Portuguese from recruiting them in large numbers to fill their rank and file. (Scammell 1988: 482)
A country not only divided between Mohammedan and Hindoo, but also between tribe and tribe, between caste and caste... were they not the predestined prey of conquest?... Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society. The question, therefore, is not whether the English had a right to conquer India, but whether we are to prefer India conquered by the Turk, by the Persian, by the Russian, to India conquered by the Briton....’ (Marx 2003: 123-124, emphasis added)

Similarly, J.S. Mill argued that in the Orient, ‘success in life is seen or believed to be the fruit of fatality or accident and not of exertion....’ (Mill 2003: 116) Particularly to the Evangelicals like Charles Grant, reforms worked for Europeans because of their ‘manly character’, but would be ineffective in the case of the ‘effeminate’ Indians. (Mann 2004: 11) Unlike the West where the individual was the autonomous agent and the mover of history, in India the decision-making elite lacked the ability to shape the destiny of its people through effective strategising.

However, history reveals a different political picture which does not conform to the scenario of total chaos that the British claimed to have set in order. Inden points to the hierarchical structure in which warring kingdoms in early medieval India (from mid-eighth century to early thirteenth century AD) were arranged, wherein the lower-order kings submitted to and recognised the paramountcy of the ‘king of kings’. (Inden 2006: 129) A separate terminology that referred to the king enjoying paramount status existed, indicating the functionality of the hierarchical order. He is variously referred to as rajaraja (the king of kings), maharajadhiraja (the high king of great kings) and chakravartin (the overlord of the entire earth), an implicit recognition that his powers extended over the territories of the smaller kings who paid obeisance to him. With regard to the paramount king, the issue of what sovereignty implied is interesting. Both internal and external sovereignty overlapped and were eventually centred in his person. Within his own territory, he was to establish social order that prescribed to the hierarchical system, while externally it was his sovereign right and duty to maintain the hierarchy of kings, at the apex of which he was positioned. (Inden 2006: 132-133) There were several indicators of power along which this structure of power relations among kings was drawn. Besides the scale of difference in terms of territorial acquisitions, the paramount
king also possessed superior manpower (ministers and generals) and more assets (arms, horses and wealth) than the smaller kings. (Inden 2006: 146)

The visual representation of this hierarchical order of kings was meticulously created in the grand assembly of the great king in which the other smaller kings were assigned places according to their position in the order. The structure of the imperial court was a manifestation of the grand cosmological order given in the Puranas. The earth was depicted as comprising six concentric islands separated by water, at the centre of which was the island of Jambudvipa and atop that was the Mount Meru. Bharatvarsa located on Meru, replicated the realms of Jambudvipa where the centre became the seat of power and prosperity. The metaphors used in the Puranas to signify the earth placed great emphasis on the notion of the centre that, by virtue of its cardinal location in the hierarchical order, contained within it the energies of the entire cosmos. Therein lies the rationale behind the imperial replication of the cosmological order, manifested even in the minutiae of architectural designing of courts and palaces. The paramount king as the embodiment of the Cosmic Man (Purusha) aspired to make his kingdom a representation of the Bharatvarsha which contained within it the order of Jambudvipa, signifying the entire earth. The analogy highlighted the paramount status of the king in terms of locating his kingdom at the centre of India, from which he presided over the entire earth. (Inden 2006: 149-151)

3. Rationality and its absence in India: The distinction between the real and the apparent, the this-worldly and the other-worldly, and between the rational and the superstitious was played out in the power relations of the Occident and the Orient. The

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73 The position of the kings in the hierarchy was determined by the size of their territories expressed in numerical figures of the number of villages under their control. Thus, there were eight provinces or ‘half kingdoms’ of 50,000 villages which fell within four provincial kingdoms that together made up the imperial kingdom. (Inden 2006: 143-144)

74 Krishnaraja I was one such king of kings ‘whose pair of feet were worshipped (abhivand) by the multitudes of Great Kings who had assembled to serve (him)’. (Cited in Inden 2006: 135) The realisation of the three goals of dharma by the kings depended on the execution of rajadharma by the paramount king. If he failed to establish order in his kingdom and maintain the hierarchy of kings, the smaller kings would eventually succumb to the anarchical state of the ‘justice of fishes’ or matsyayana. (Inden 2006: 155)
Orient ruled in the realm of imagination whereas the Occident dominated the realm of reality. Thomas Macaulay conceded that

‘the department of literature in which the eastern writers stand highest is poetry... But when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded, and general principles investigated the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable.’

(Macaulay 1862: 107)

Poetry, seen as the product of the human imagination was incompatible with history which dwelt on the happenings of reality. The idealistic realm of possibilities (what could have been) clashed with the rational domain of actual events (what has happened). For Hegel, the Western man existed in the ‘sphere of Understanding’, in which reality was ‘an external, fixed objectivity’ independent of his existence. In contrast, the Indian living in ‘the state of dreaming’ was unable to make the distinction and reposed objective things with divinity instead. Consequently, ‘Things are as much stripped of rationality, of finite consistent stability of cause and effect, as man is of the steadfastness of free individuality, of personality, and freedom.’ (Hegel 2003: 220-221, emphasis original) Oriental religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism are associated with enigma, magic and fantasy, lacking the level of complexity and spirituality achieved by the Occident. Eastern religions ‘enslave the Spirit to the world of realities’ by stifling individualism, whereas the Protestant West allowed for its free expression and its transformation into reality. (Acikel 2006: 65) The dominance over the realm of reality was a superior feat as it could be controlled and thereby, the power of human agency could be demonstrated.

The advocacy of the West as the font of rationality and progress thus tended to ‘primitivise’ the discourses in the East. (Goody 1996: 37) Max Weber, for instance placed Europe at the apex of the scale of social evolution, marked off from the rest by its rationality. Weber’s concern with the emergence of modern institutions led him to locate its cause in cultural specificities of religions. Protestantism provided the enabling environment for the development of capitalist ethics and bureaucratisation in the West,

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* The distinction between poetry and history that can be traced back to Aristotle came into sharp focus in eighteenth and nineteenth century English thought which privileged action over thought. The conflations of history with factual accounts was evident in works of Mill and Macaulay. (Lal 2003: 34)
whereas the inherent traits of Oriental religions impeded its growth in the East.\textsuperscript{76} Weber 'asserts that none of the Asian religions 'provided the motives or orientations for a rationalised ethical patterning of the creaturely world in accordance with divine commandments.' (Weber 1993: 267)

In \textit{The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism}, Weber further argued,

'Indian geometry has no rational proof.... [All] Indian political thought was lacking in rational concepts... [T]he state itself... is known... only in the Occident. [The] concept of the citizen has not existed outside the Occident.' (Cited in Blaut 2000: 25)

The area in which the prowess of rationality could be tested and demonstrated was believed to be that of science. It is then little surprise that the colonialists seeking to belittle Indian understanding of rationality targeted its science systems. Macaulay, for instance was sceptical of the ability of Indians to make progress in science. He regarded Indian sciences as 'a study which nobody describes as useful in itself', and he would not be surprised if 'the natives should have become sick of learning this useless mysticism before we become sick of teaching it'. Indian advancements in astronomy were to him so appalling that they 'would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school'. (Macaulay 1862: 10-11) Orientalists who chose to study Indian astronomy did not differ much from Macaulay in this regard, considering the works on the subject as lacking credibility. Jones held that when it comes to the sciences, 'the Asiatics, if compared with Western nations, are mere children.' (Cited in Young 2003: 190)

It was not merely indigenous sciences that Macaulay regarded with contempt. He was equally sceptical of the level of literary consciousness that the Indians displayed. He held in his famous \textit{Minute on Education},

'I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works... I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalists themselves. I have never found among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.' (Macaulay 1862: 107)

\textsuperscript{76} Christianity was rational also because it conformed to the principal tenets of the natural sciences. The laws of nature were interpreted as acts of God. (Veer 2(6): 25-28)
Similarly, history comprised of nothing more than exaggerated accounts of 'kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years long' whereas geography resembled 'seas of treacle and seas of butter'. (Macaulay 1862: 109) Macaulay condemned 'wasting public money, for printing books which are of less value than the paper on which they are printed was while it was blank; for giving artificial encouragement to absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics, absurd theology; for raising up a breed of scholars who find their scholarship an encumbrance and a blemish.' (Macaulay 1862: 115-116)

He was thus wary of patronising indigenous science systems although he realised '... that the people are wedded to those systems, and that by withdrawing our patronage from them, we should disgust our native subjects.' (Macaulay 1862: 10-11) One of the paradoxes of colonialism, Gyan Prakash notes, was that '... the writ of rationality and order was always overwritten by its denial in the colonies, the pieties of progress always violated irreverently in practice... Paradoxes and ironies abounded, as did the jurisdiction of the gap between rhetoric and practice on the grounds of expediency and the exceptional circumstances of the colonies.' (Prakash 1994: 1)

The Western notion of rationality was an intrinsic part of the Enlightenment project that created an array of stark dichotomies which were seen to be mutually exclusive of each other in their roles and influences. The public realm was separated from the private as was science from religion. However, this was not always the case as reason and religion did not develop independent of the other and their trajectories often intersected. 77 (King 1999: 12-13) Rationality has been debated in stark terms that place the progressive West in direct opposition to other backward regions, within a 'rationality against ritual' frame of reference, and is one of the key qualities the West is regarded to possess that facilitated its rise. (Goody 1996: 14)

The justification has followed two traditions that concentrate on different time spans, namely on the syllogistic reasoning of ancient Greece and on the modern rationality of the Renaissance period. The development of formal syllogism in ancient

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77 Western suspicion of such procedures stems from its own experiences within the Christian faith. Deviant practices that explained phenomena in terms of factors outside the Biblical scheme of things faced outright rejection. The dismissive attitude to belief systems in the East can thus be seen as an extension of that very orthodoxy. (Goody 1996: 42)
Greece was due to the existence of certain historical circumstances. However, it did not make the possession of reason as a characteristic peculiar to the West, and cultural variants of rationality are to be found in all societies. (Goody 1996: 11) For instance, India evolved its own variants of syllogistic reasoning. The Nyaya-sutra worked out the five-part syllogism, which was further compressed into either the first three or the last three sections in Buddhist logic during sixth century CE. Jack Goody argues that the diffusion of writing contributed to the spread of formal syllogism to the rest of the world. But as he asserts,

'...even if we accept the diffusionist argument, India would have acquired formal syllogistic reasoning before western Europe...In other words, the East had as much claim to these Greek achievements as the West that was later to become the home for the development of industrial capitalism and of 'modern' knowledge systems.' (Goody 1996: 35, emphasis original)

Since all societies were by some measure rational, dissemination was not of the faculty of reason per se, but of rationalising techniques that made cumulative knowledge possible. Goody argued, ‘Logic’ in the limited meaning is developed in writing; logic in the broader sense is a pan-human phenomenon’. (Goody 1996: 35) The spread of writing and information enabled other rational societies to develop particular logic systems such as formal syllogism. A spread of this kind cannot be held to have had a totalising influence that is normally associated with the dissemination of an invention. Hence, it is imperative that rationality 'be given a more 'historical', less culturally enduring character.’ (Goody 1996: 47)

4. The Oriental Despot: The British regarded Indian history to be replete with examples of despotic rule by emperors. Oriental despotism entailed the usurpation of political power by the monarch to the detriment of the society. (IOLR/H/191) The Mughal

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78 Syllogistic reasoning or sequential reasoning as we commonly today in the familiar format (of A=B, C=B, therefore, A=C) developed in ancient Greece due to a number of enabling factors. The literate Greek culture facilitated the formalisation of reasoned arguments, further commentaries on which were also recorded in writing, leading to an accretion of literature. Furthermore, this body of literature was sustained through an educational process that used writing as its main medium of instruction. (Goody 1996: 17-18)

79 The five-part syllogism in the Nyaya-sutra was structured as follows- Proposition (pratijna), Reason (hetu), Example (drstanta), Application (upanaya) and Conclusion (nigamana). (Goody 1996: 25)
emperor was no exception, as Robert Orme elucidated in his impressions of a centralised system, in which the ruler at the apex was the only symbol of permanence in a transient order. He wrote,

‘The Sovereign reserved to himself the power of Life and Death... the Nabob... was called to court, kept there, or translated into another government, whenever the Ministry thought these changes necessary, and there was a time when they were so frequent, that a new Nabob left Delhi riding contrary to the usual manner with his back turned to the head of his Elephant and gave for a reason, “That he was looking out for his Successor”.’ (Orme 1782: 91)

Alexander Dow, in his introduction to Ferishta’s *History of Hindostan*, projected a similar image of India.

‘The history now given to the public, presents us with a striking picture of the deplorable condition of a people subjected to arbitrary sway; and of the instability of empire itself, when it is founded neither on law, nor upon the opinions and attachments of mankind.... The people permit themselves to be transferred from one tyrant to another, without murmuring....’ (Dow 1772, 1: xi)

Centuries of despotic rule had supposedly rendered the Indian people incapable of enjoying the benefits of a free government. It was widely agreed upon that till the reforms took effect, the British would have to rule with a firm hand and hence, the antidote to Oriental despotism lay in ‘benevolent despotism’. What is noteworthy is that historical evidence that pointed to the emergence of the state in India in the first millennium BC is not reflected in orientalist writings on Indian political systems. This omission is particularly glaring given the fact that the transition from chiefdoms to a

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80 One of the flawed assumptions that the Orientalists worked on regarding the Mughals was that the public and private realms were separate spheres that seldom intersected. The notion of a secluded space away from the public gaze enabled them to conjure up images of the Mughal haram as a cloistered domain of exploitation and bondage. However, as Ruby Lal points out, the two spaces overlapped in several politically significant ways to the extent that the line of demarcation between the court and the haram was blurred. (Lal 2005: 21)

81 Ironically, when it came to assessing the history of Europe, a philosopher like J.S. Mill grasped the nub of contextualism very well indeed. Mill was sympathetic towards the shortfalls of European history which its progression had overcome. The same could not be said of the Orientals whose past signified a level of backwardness that was reiterated in every age. (Chapman 1996) He added,

‘To find fault with our ancestors for not having annual parliaments, universal suffrage, and vote by ballot, would be like quarrelling with the Greeks and Romans for not using steam navigation, when we know it is so safe and expeditious; which would be, in short, simply finding fault with the third century before Christ for not being the eighteenth century after.’ (Mill 1942: 48)
monarchical state constitutes the central theme in the ancient epics of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. (Thapar 1986: 65)

5. 'Hinduising' and Brahmanising India: Orientalism systematised Hinduism through 'textualisation', i.e. the exercise of seeking the essence of a religion in certain sacred texts. Aided by brahmins who acted as informants, it was no surprise that the British venture of excavating India's past threw up a textualised and Brahmanised version of Hinduism.82 (Thapar 2000b: 27-28) As John Roosa argues,

‘...ancient texts were seen as impartial and had priority over living bearers of that tradition as the present state of Indians was seen as depraved...Jones believed it was the duty of the British to return them to that golden age of ancient India.’ (Roosa 1995: 140)

According to colonial accounts, Indian civilisation developed in relative isolation from the rest of the world.83 Ancient India was taken as the essence of Indian culture and was privileged over its living representation. As Thapar notes,

‘Histories of the 'Hindu' religion have been largely limited to placing texts and ideas in a chronological perspective with few attempts at relating these to the social history of the time. Scholarship also tended to ignore the significance of the popular manifestation of religion in contrast to the textual...’ (Thapar 2004: 335)

The search for India's 'pure' essence in the ancient period is in Nietzschean terms 'a metaphysical extension which arises from the belief that things are most precious and essential at the moment of birth.' (Cited in Michael Drolet 2004: 74) This assumption stems from the anthropological approach that lays stress on the 'lived' nature of culture, in which the 'native' acquires central importance in its conceptualisation. In its extreme version, nativism that 'exceptionalizes the native and glorifies them to excess' regards others as mere settlers, and hence attributes alien status to them. (Reeves 2004: 10-11)

82 Indeed the strife between the Vaishnavite and Saivite cults in pre-colonial India had been of such extreme proportions that both could be regarded as distinct 'religions' with little in common. That conflicts tended to appear between specific groups and not distinct religions was borne out in the alliances that the early Muslim invaders struck with the natives. The collaborations were such that they did not conform to distinctions between the native and the foreign. (Oddie 2003: 160)

83 Subsumed within this image of a secluded monolith was the history of thriving Indian merchant networks that connected coastal India to Asia and Europe from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. (Markovits 2000: 5)
Julie Reeves employs the notion of the tourist to not only emphasise the perceived insignificance of the settlers to the identity of the native, but also draw attention to their status as the proverbial ‘other’ against whom that very identity is constructed. As she points out,

‘If the native represents all that is ‘pure, unique, and enduring’ in a culture or way of life, then the tourist stands for everything that is deemed impure and/or temporary on a mass scale. Where the native appears as a permanent feature in the local landscape, the tourist can be glimpsed flying overhead or breezing past on a bus, or setting up a corner shop.’ (Reeves 2004: 12-13)

The ‘native’ in the colonial Indian context was the quintessential Hindu who was repressed by the invading hordes of ‘alien’ Muslims. The hunt for the pure essence of Indian culture led the colonialists to look beyond the native, at certain classical texts of ancient India. The two key texts that for the British held the key to the identity of India were Manu’s *Dharmashastras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Translated in the eighteenth century by Jones and Charles Wilkins respectively, the treatises were taken to be representative of Hinduism, whereas practices and belief systems which did not conform to its essential character were seen as its corrupted versions. As Kopf notes,

‘The task of integrating a vast collection of myths, beliefs, rituals and laws into a coherent religion and of shaping an amorphous heritage into a rational faith known now as Hinduism were endeavours initiated by Orientalists’. (Kopf 1995: 142)

The search for the purified core of Hinduism was a fundamentally ahistorical enterprise that ignored the diversity of religious practices in India. (King 1999: 104) The codification of Hindu and Islamic laws that followed provided the administrators with a standard postulation of religious codes. Over time, this emphasis on texts as setting the standards of Hinduism brought rigidity into the observation of its principles and practices. Thapar observes that

‘[t]he evolution of Hinduism is not a linear progression from a founder through an organizational system, with sects branching off. It is rather the mosaic cults, deities, sects, and ideas and the adjusting, juxtaposing, or distancing of these to existing ones...’ (Thapar 2004: 340-341)
The idea of letting the texts speak for themselves was consistent with the sense of
detachment that the colonialists sought to ensure in their mission in India.\textsuperscript{84} Translation
of texts written by Indians about how they ought to be governed was not seen as
amounting to interference in their affairs. As Mia Carter notes, ‘Jones’s scholarship
functioned as a double translation: a transcription of Sanskrit and Brahmanic codes into
English, and a means of translating Hindu tradition into British legal discourse.’\textsuperscript{85}
(Harlow and Carter 2003: 249) However, these were abided by only in so far as they
were not ‘hurtful to authority of the government’ and were overruled if their observance
harmed British interests. (Roosa 1995: 140) Textualisation was the solution to the vexing
problem the British faced of contending interpretations of Indian laws. Jones wrote that
he could ‘no longer bear to be at the mercy of our pundits who deal out Hindu law as they
please, and make it at reasonable rates, when they cannot find it readymade.’ (Jones
1804: 264) In a letter to Cornwallis, Jones wrote that the British should strive
‘... to assure the Hindu and Mussulman subjects of Great Britain, that the private
laws which they severally held sacred, and a violation of which they would have
thought the most grievous oppression, should not be superseded by a new system,
of which they could have no knowledge, and which they must have considered as
imposed on them by a spirit of rigour and intolerance.’ (Jones 1804: 306)

As they saw it, the task of the British was emancipatory in nature. For the orientalists,
this was achieved by reminding the Indians of their golden past that was forgotten, and
for the Anglicists, their betterment meant the introduction of rational and superior laws
and institutions of Britain. The familiar colonial concern with emancipation resurfaces in
Jones’ writings when he insists, ‘I am conscious of desiring no advantage [in translating
ancient texts], but the pleasure of doing general good.’ (Jones 1804: 276)

\textsuperscript{84} The objectives of the Company found clear articulation in Edmund Burke’s arguments during the
impeachment of Warren Hastings in 1788. ‘The Company in India does not exist as a nation. Nobody can
go there that does not go in its service. Therefore the English nation in India is nothing but a seminary
for the succession of officers. They are a nation of place-men.’ (Carnall and Nicholson 2003: 148)

\textsuperscript{85} The colonial privileging of the Brahmanical order did not translate into official patronage to Sanskrit.
Indeed, the fate of the language during the colonial period was determined by two apparently contradictory
measures which in different ways furthered the imaginary construct of Sanskrit as the repository of
traditionalism. Sanskrit was suppressed within the colonial educational system by what Spivak called was
an act of ‘planned epistemic violence’. Simultaneous to this relegation was colonial privileging of the
brahmanical order with regard to ‘the performative use of Sanskrit.’ In both cases, the colonisers reserved
the right to determine and authenticate the exercise of what they deemed to be ‘tradition’. (Spivak 1999:
229-230)
The writing of Indian history in the manner that upheld the ancient Hindu civilisation as the bearer of the original Indian identity had several significant implications. The Islamic empires that ruled India during the medieval period were seen as foreign impositions that suppressed and eclipsed the authentic Indian culture. Kratochwil argues that 'Textualisation of 'recollection' not only entails the 'closure' of what belongs to the tradition and what is apocryphal, but also...the 'purification' of the texts themselves, expunging from them what seems foreign or accidental'. (Kratochwil 2006: 20) The dichotomising of Indian history along communal lines that constructed narratives based on the categories of the native and the foreign can clearly be traced back to the colonial discourse. As Thapar notes,

'...Mill's History of British India...laid the foundation for a communal interpretation of Indian history and thus provided the historical justification for the two-nation theory. He was the first historian to develop the thesis of dividing Indian history into three periods which he called Hindu civilisation, Muslim civilisation and British civilisation....' (Thapar et al. 1969: 4)

The communal reading of Indian history is further confounded by the fact that no clear date exists when Islamic rule could be said to have commenced in the subcontinent. Whereas the standard interpretation pegs the milestone at around the eleventh century AD, historical evidence presents a vastly different picture. The advent of Muslim dynasties into India deviates from the conventional date not merely by decades but by entire centuries. While the Arabs ruled over Sind as early as in the eighth century and the Turks wrested control of part of northern India from the eleventh century onwards, Muslim domination in the Deccan was to follow three centuries later. (Thapar et al. 1969: 9) Contrary to the colonial assertion that religious consciousness was highly developed in India, texts dating to as late as the sixteenth century point to multiple layers of overlapping identities. Internal heterogeneity within Hinduism and Islam grew around diverse sects, lineages and schools prevented the coalescing of distinct religious

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86 The assertion that ancient India epitomised the Hindu age does not stand up to scrutiny since a number of emperors belonging to prominent dynasties such as the Mauryas and the Shakas were Buddhist by disposition. Furthermore, the very term Hindu did not exist in ancient India, and certainly the modern day connotations attached to the notion did not apply to the people and practices of that age. (Thapar et al. 1969: 7)
communities of the kind that the colonial historians affirmed had existed. (Metcalf 1995: 958; Rusen 2002)

The stress on texts as being representative of a country’s eternal identity needs to be tempered with methodological issues in the realm of history of ideas. Texts should be contextualised in history to understand the import of their arguments rather than ‘be treated as though they were interventions in timeless grand debates about perennial questions of justice, equality etc.’ (Keene 2005: 14)

6. Spiritual India: With the colonial privileging of the Brahmanical interpretation of Hinduism, the religion came to be associated with spiritualism and idealism in contrast to the assumed rationalist and materialist approach of the West. It is true that at the level of epistemology, Hindu philosophy differs from the Western tradition. Whereas the Hindu tradition believes that knowledge can be attained by ‘transcending immediate experience’, Western philosophy relies on observation and inference to acquire knowledge. (Puchala 2003: 187) However, there existed a strong strand of materialism within Hindu philosophy that was morphed from Orientalist accounts on indigenous belief systems. As against the ritualistic representation favoured by Brahmanism, the order of Pancharatra Vaishnavism, which thrived for almost a millennium in north India till the thirteenth century, was firmly grounded in a realist philosophy. (Inden 2006: 213-15) Pancharatra Vaishnavism’s emphasis on human agency and on the commission of acts as the prime determinant of the worth of an individual is noteworthy. It did not make a stark differentiation between good and evil since both are integral to human nature. According to the Pancharatras, evil and its causes belong to the world that we live in. (In den 2006: 216, 218) 

Evil was not perceived as an absolute entity external to the self, but was seen in relative terms as a ‘lower self’ that had to be conquered. Thus, the Pancharatra philosophy was

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87 The notion of the barbarian, for instance, was subject to different interpretations down history. It would be wrong to accord the cause of the inferior status of barbarians in ancient Greece to race. Black skin was not seen as a mark of inferiority. Their low social position was attributed to inferior linguistic capability, rather than poor social organisation, which went on to dominate accounts on barbarians in the nineteenth century. (Keene 2005: 20)

88 All the complexities in social life are seen in terms of three forces that pervade the entire world. The inert forces of good (sattva) and bad (tamas) rely on the intervention of the third force, that of ‘restless energy’ (rajas) to translate into active forces of luminosity (tejas) or evil (tamas). (Inden 2006: 216, 218)
not geared toward the attainment of an idyllic state of ‘pure’ existence, since there never was one. (Inden 2006: 220-221)

A more radical strand was the lokayata philosophy which believed that ‘Everything is confined/ limited...to the visible world’. (Inden 2006: 224) It signifies ‘that which is prevalent among people’ and ‘that which is essentially this-worldly’. (Chattopadhyaya 1959: xvii) Lokayata was the ancient Indian philosophy of materialism that predated the advent of such concepts of spiritualism as God and Soul. In the fragments of the Lokayatikas that remain, the evolved line of argument that mounted the strongest attack on the Vedanta philosophy of idealism is evident. (Chattopadhyaya 1959: xvi-xvii; Sen 2001: 9) The Sensationalists, as they are called argued that neither do humans suffer the consequences of acts committed in their previous births, nor are there any enlightened states of existence after death towards which life should be oriented. What mattered was only that which could be perceived by the senses and therein lay the explanation to all phenomena and human action. (Inden 2006: 224; Raja 1967: 258) Clearly, the assumption of a spiritual collectivity that shunned and abhorred violence does not hold water in the case of India. As Thapar observes,

‘...Indian culture did not have a monopoly on spiritual content. The same characteristics as are associated with Indian spirituality can be found in many other ancient cultures and are frequently recognisable in traditional societies. Not surprisingly, the ancient Indians never saw themselves as more spiritual than their neighbours in adjoining or in far-away lands. Nor did visitors from other equally significant cultures, such as the Greeks, the Chinese and the Arabs notice any markedly distinctive spiritual characteristics.’ (Thapar et al. 1969: 12)

The colonial claim that Indians were culturally attuned to spirituality is negated by the existence of rich literature that is materialist in orientation, Kalidasa’s works being a classic instance. In Indian philosophy, the ‘fullness of life must precede the surpassing of life’, evident in the taxonomy of four aims namely dharma, artha, kama and moksha that provided a balance between the material and the spiritual motivations, and of which the last alone qualified for the purely spiritual. (Aurobindo 1967: 118) Thapar maintains that a ‘...distinction has to be maintained between non-violence as a philosophical concept and the practice of nonviolence. There is very little evidence to suggest that in practice violence was avoided.’ (Thapar et al. 1969: 13) Hindu theourisations enumerate
four strategies that the king is to wield for effective control—sama (consensus), bheda (dissensus), dana (material gratification) and danda (punishment through coercion). As Inden notes,

‘The concept of danda is of central importance to the Hindu theory of political community, for danda, the ‘rod of force’, coercion, or, punishment was the central element, that is, the particular form of power that distinguished the kingly role from other roles.’ (Inden 1998: 51)

That the term danda was used to refer both to the power to punish and to the king’s army goes on to underline the coercive powers that were at the disposal of the ruler. Interestingly, non-violence or ahimsa, hailed as the hallmark of Hinduism was first upheld as a central tenet of religious discourse by Buddhism and Jainism. (Thapar 2004: 344)

That Indians were attuned to strategic matters that concerned their security is amply demonstrated by Tipu Sultan’s concerted efforts to militarily upgrade his army. Mysore under Tipu, and the Maratha Confederacy embarked on the process of military modernisation to counter the challenge of the East India Company. Tipu took keen interest in modernising his army along European lines and for that he elicited the support of European blacksmiths to manufacture muskets and guns for him. Eventually, Tipu’s efforts yielded a limited military revolution in Mysore that sought to attain self-sufficiency in terms of armaments for his army. However, despite the limitations which included his inability to regularise training in Western technology through the institution of training academies of the kind that Czarist Russia initiated in the eighteenth century, Tipu managed to blunt the military advantage that the British had wielded over the production and deployment of small arms. (Roy 2004: 30)

Historical evidence points to the existence of a pronounced and developed strand of materialist philosophy in India. Its neglect within colonial literature led to the conflation of Indian philosophy with spiritualism and idealism, an association that is yet to be seriously challenged within the genre of IR writings on India. Another issue in...
which the need for a critical approach is sorely felt concerns the Indian understanding of time, which during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was a vital cog in the colonial thesis on the absence of historical progress in India.

7. **Linear notion of time**: Orientalism threw up certain other images of India from which extrapolations about Indian strategic approach are made. For instance, the Indian notion of time was believed to be wholly cyclic rather than linear. Whereas linear time of the Judaeo-Christian tradition was believed to have a beginning and an end and allowed for the progress of history through the passing of non-recurring events, cyclic time saw no such progression as events repeated themselves with regularity. Judaism's notion of the omnipotent God as the creator of the entire human race facilitated the formulation of universal history. Christianity inherited this understanding that the entire humanity was collectively progressing towards a particular telos, the Day of Judgment. The notion that the course of history was rendered meaningful by its progression towards this ultimate objective determined the concept of linear time in the Judeo-Christian tradition, unlike the Greek and Hindu conception of cyclical time. (Thapar 1996: 4-9; Yurdusev 2003: 40-42)

Jones' work on ancient Indian texts led him to remark in resignation, 'We are lost in an inextricable labyrinth of imaginary astronomical cycles, Yugas, Mahayugas, Calpas, and Menwantaras'. (Jones 2003: 262, emphasis original) This understanding of the Indian sense of time yielded the argument that since time has no beginning or end, Indians have no past, present or future, i.e. they have no sense of history. Mill believed that in order to civilise Indians, it was necessary to 'push them into history', an opinion

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90 The Western tradition drew on two key ideas from the Judaeo-Christian philosophy- the idea of 'creation out of nothing and the conception of a linear temporal order.' The philosophy provided the 'unique point of origin', a particular temporal juncture from which linear time could be said to have begun. In contrast to the above philosophy, Indian tradition did not uphold the idea of 'no pre-existing cause' behind creation. (Mohanty 1992: 18-19)

91 Thapar rejects the view that linear and cyclic times are polar opposites, arguing instead that both can coexist, as they did in ancient India. The progress of linear time is suggested in the sequential ordering of two major events alluded to in the texts, namely the great flood which Manu survived to become the progenitor of the Suryavamsa and Candravamsa clans, and the epic war in the *Mahabharata* in which these families eventually perish. The *Visnu Purana* offers genealogical details of the Suryavamsa and Candravamsa families, which later aspirants of power claimed to have descended from. (Thapar 2000a: 163-167)
that was aptly echoed by A. MacDonnel in *A History of Sanskrit Literature* in which he asserted that 'early India wrote no history because it never made any'. (Woodrow 1862; Thapar 2000a: 156) Jones further lamented, 'so clouded are the old history and chronology of India with fables and allegories' that an authentic account of the country's history was impossible. (Jones 2003: 262) Moreover, it was believed that human intervention could do little to alter the course of the immense cycles of time that were destined to recur.92 Once again, Indians were denied the power of agency to control, plan and strategise as they willed.

There are two key arguments discernible here. One was the assertion that in a static society like India, there were no developments that could be regarded as historical changes. That is, there were no points in history against which the progression of time could be measured. Since history was meant to record changes, the assertion that Indian history was an endless tract of stasis and stagnation dispensed with the need to justify the present rule in terms of a historical past that never existed in the first place. (Thapar 2000a: 158) The prevalent imagery of India in the colonial schema, Uday Mehta observes, was one of

'... a vacant field, already weeded, where history has been brought to a nullity and where extant social and political practices are narrowly contained, or altogether absent, primed for reform and constructive efforts.' (Mehta 1999: 11-12)

Ancient history was anything but static and this is borne out in the writings of historians such as D.D. Kosambi. That societies were differently organised in different periods of time is itself an indication that major changes were occurring in Indian history. (Thapar 2000a: 162) Urbanisation in the Indus was later followed by the formation of chiefdoms (mahajanapadas) which were eventually taken over by extensive empires such as the Mauryan empire. Another indicator that Indians were cognisant of the passage of time is its well developed calendar system. As early as the sixth century BC, Indians acquired the knowledge of calendars from Mesopotamia. The Vedas, believed to have

92 Indian calendars distinguished between current and elapsed years, whereas the West did not recognise the latter as a viable temporal category. A reason for the apparent irrationality of Indian time-keeping was the complexities in the Indian calendar system. Solar calendars contain variations that factor in the location of the observer and the position of the sun. However, valid calculations of time could be made on the basis of existing tables, taking into account such contingencies. (Richards 1998: 176-177)
been composed around 1500 BC contained a 12-month calendar of 30 days each. Thus, "very early in history, Indians learnt to live by linear time. As many as 20 calendars were followed in the country at the beginning of the twentieth century. (Richards 1998: 172-173)

Secondly, knowledge in India has historically been preserved and sustained through oral traditions. The introduction of literacy meant the structuring and systematisation of that knowledge into texts, though oral means of communicating the same continued for long periods of time. Reliance on one means of preserving the past did not signal the redundancy of the other although a gradual shift was perceptible. The Orientalist search for manuscripts suggested the underlying emphasis on texts as the sole source of history. Oral traditions as a mode of preserving the past were not seen as a mark of a historically conscious society. Vinay Lal gives an alternative interpretation to the relative lack of historical works, attributing it to ‘purposeful forgetfulness’ on the part of Indians.

‘Modern man thinks of history as an aid to living in the present, but to the Indian history has the contrary effect of not enabling one to live in the present. Each civilization must find its way to eliminating the suffering that is born of existential dilemmas, of decay from within, and of oppression from within and without; and the latter was, one can perhaps speculate, best achieved by a wilful amnesia.’ (Lal 2003: 59, emphasis original; see also Das 1967: 123).

There is a reason more fundamental than ‘wilful amnesia’ brought on the trauma of suffering that explains the apparent absence of historical works. The domains of literary and historical writings often overlapped, a classic example of which would be the epic Ramayana, regarded not only as the first literary work in Sanskrit (adikavya) but

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93 However, there was a bifurcation of the oral tradition in India where on the one hand, the priestly class ensured the scrupulous conservation of the Vedic hymns and on the other, wandering bards narrated informal compositions that were later collated in a written format as the epics, i.e. the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The eventual codification of the hymns into the Vedas did not mark the end of its oral transference, as the continued emphasis was on the precise pronunciation of the hymn, failing which the entire recitation was deemed futile. For instance, the guru-shishya parampara, erected on the relationship between the teacher and the pupil, was originally an oral tradition that came to be increasingly mediated by written texts. (Thapar 2000a: 196-199)

94 Roy Perrett argues that the paucity of historical works was on account of the nature of Indian epistemology, which did not regard history or memory as independent knowledge sources. ‘Real’ knowledge was that which led the individual to moksha, and in that sense, was liberating. Historical knowledge was hence not valued for its inability to promote moksha. (Perrett 1999: 320)
The literary method of recording history was a well developed genre in India, and offers us valuable insights into the social context and perceptions of political power. The *itihasa-purana* tradition, referring to 'that which was believed to have happened in the past', contained elements of historical thinking which the British found Indians to be lacking in. The tradition, employing both the cyclic and linear notions of time, was in evidence in a variety of sources. Spans of linear time existed as 'fragmentary arcs within the cycle'. Within large time cycles or *yugas*, the lineages of ruling families were arranged in linear progression. Subsequent texts moved over from using generations as marking the progress of time, to regnal years that recorded the durations of royal dynasties. Edicts of Ashoka in third century BC record regnal years and important events as occurring at specific points in time. As Thapar notes,

'Time as a cycle does not eliminate the past and the future, since the cycle terminates in destruction and a new cycle follows. The inordinate length of the cosmological time cycle is to underline the idea of timelessness.... Only later does a different, generationally measured time, under human control come into historical reckoning. Implicit in this is also a distinction between the history of the universe viewed in an infinity of time and the history of man which was subject to exact measurement.' (Thapar 2000a: 737)

From the seventh century AD, biographical accounts of rulers became the means of recording events, *Harsacarita* by Banabhatta being a case in point. These biographical accounts traced dynasties of rulers, suggesting a sense of linear time. (Thapar 1996: 31-37) From the tenth century onwards, *vamsavalis* that trace the ancestry of ruling families, detailing the region concerned through records and inscriptions, became the popular mode of preserving the line of succession. The strong literary mode in India led Busch to observe that

'South Asia in particular has been a fertile site for investigating alternative modes of processing and producing history... India did not fail to become a historical society: it is a differently-historical one.' (Busch 2005: 33)

The *itihasa-purana* tradition which survived the invasion of the Afghans and the Mughals came to an end with the advent of the British who brought with them new approaches to historiography. (Thapar 2000a: 163-167)
Interestingly, medieval German and Indian writings display a striking similarity in terms of historical consciousness. Both societies regarded the medieval period to be the ultimate stage in the progression of cosmological time. While Europe readied itself for the impending arrival of the anti-Christ, India anticipated the commencement of the last of the four cycles, the *Kaliyuga* in the age they lived.95 (Kulke 1993: 31) As Buddha Prakash argues, according to the Hindu philosophy of history

‘...the duration of the ages is not chronologically immutable but rather depends upon the actions and character of the people....History is a collective and impersonal process according to the Hindu view of life...Hence it follows that when the people as a whole are active, it is the ‘age of activity’, when they are not active and lapse into inertia, it is an ‘age of sleep’; and when they again become active and shake off their inertia, it is an ‘age of awakening’. ’ (Prakash 1967: 28-29)

The notion of cyclic Indian time and was central to the colonial discourse for its potency. The lack of historical progression implied stagnation that was typical of traditional societies. The inevitable recurrence of massive time cycles made human intervention in changing the course of events appear a futile exercise. As van der Veer notes, ‘History is a sign of the nation-sate, of modernity as much as the denial of history is a sign of the colony, of tradition.’ (Veer 2001: 4) Thus, the denial of agency to Indians also implied the denial of the power to strategise and to act. India’s strategic history in every sense was believed to have effectively commenced with the purposeful thrust of colonialism.

**Warfare and Diplomacy in Ancient India**

An essential aspect towards understanding the nature of India’s strategic practice is the approach classical India adopted towards warfare and diplomacy. A disclaimer at this juncture is necessary in order to clarify that the attempt here is not to trace the ‘native’ or ‘indigenous’ theorisations on statecraft before the ‘disruptions’ caused by external invasions followed. As with any other country, these invasions brought with them diverse ways of thinking about war and peace, thereby contributing to the evolution of strategic thinking in the subcontinent. However, this is not to discount the importance of

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95 The texts in question were written by Bishop Otto von Freising near Munich in 1146, and by Kalhana in Kashmir in the same year.
theorisations that existed in ancient India. As Adam Watson asserts, 'No system of diverse states and peoples developed a greater sophistication in ancient times than that of India.' (Watson 1992: 77) Although many of the ideas prevalent then may be lost in contemporary times, they would serve as a useful beginning towards theorising about strategic practice in India. This may necessarily involve referring to ancient Sanskrit texts that are popularly regarded as Hindu scriptures, and the genre is often termed the Hindu tradition of warfare.

The ancient tradition has displayed a parallel Indian engagement with both heroism and prudence. It is the dynamics between the two traditions that shaped the ethics of war in ancient India. The almost simultaneous interest in contrasting types is evident in the growth of both the dharmashastra and the arthashastra literatures. Whereas the former stresses on the ethical behaviour expected of a king, the latter serves as injunctions to the ruler regarding the conduct of statecraft. The dichotomy between the two traditions is reflected in the contrasting genres of literature that contained these ideas. Whereas the tradition stressing on dharma was chiefly located in epic literature, the genre of writing emphasising prudence found expression in the literature on statecraft. (Brekke 2006: 138)

Unlike the Christian tradition which was specifically engaged with the just war theory, the dharmashastra tradition believed that the ethics on warfare were informed by the duties of the ruler, and as such were part of the larger scheme of rajadharma. The enlightened ruler who was aware of the ethical dimensions of violence was endowed with divine attributes that enabled him to wield his power to wage war with discretion. The king in India was an extension of God and as such was bestowed with the attributes of the divine cosmos. His authority was not derived from an extraneous source as the case was in Europe, where the ruler possessed divine right only when he was so blessed by God. The rationale behind vesting warfare with the significance of the duties of kingship rests on the concept of karmayoga. Karmayoga elevates the status of warfare to a sacrifice that

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96 Manu articulated the divine authority of the king, 'For when this world was without a king and people ran about in all directions out of fear, The Lord emitted a king in order to guard his entire (realm), taking lasting elements from Indra, the Wind, Yama, the Sun, Fire, Varuna, the Moon, and (Kubera) the Lord of Wealth. Because a king is made from particles of these lords of the gods, therefore he surpasses all living beings in brilliant energy, and, like the Sun, he burns eyes and hearts, and no one on earth is able even to look at him'. (Cited in Brekke 2006: 116)
is expected of a virtuous ruler. The *Mahabharata* saw the war as a sacrificial act “(yuddhayagna), aspects of which were comparable to those of a conventional sacrifice. (Brekke 2006: 115) The constraints on the power of the king were in some senses, unique to the Indian notion of kingship itself.

Notwithstanding the duality of power in terms of the temporal and the religious domains in the Christian and Muslim world, both realms were located within the same social sphere. In contrast, the Indian theory restricts the authority of the king by postulating another separate sphere over which he has little control but which legitimised his divine status in the temporal realm- the sphere of renunciation. The *brahmin*, by renouncing the social sphere stands independent of it, because of which his sphere lies beyond the grasp of the king. The contradiction between the circumscribed powers of the king and the stricture that he has the final word on matters of dharma can be explained in terms of the amorphous nature of dharma itself. Howsoever great its appeal, the application and observance of dharma required the institutionalised support of an organisational apparatus, which the king alone could provide. (Heesterman 1998: 18-22)

As opposed to the *dharma*shastra literature which supported divine kingship, the *artha*shastra tradition upheld the theory of contractual kingship. Since kingship in this case was not concerned with divinity, the power to wage war was released from the logic of *dharma* and the attendant duties expected of the virtuous king. As Watson points out, for Kautilya

‘...the end of power was not the service of the gods or an ideology, but the happiness of the state. He believed... that a multitude of independencies was not the most desirable state of affairs, and that on the contrary greater happiness could be attained by establishing a benevolent imperial rule. It is curious that from the *Arthashastra* to the American Declaration of Independence (which opposes imperial rule) no other text puts the pursuit of happiness quite so high.’ (Watson 1992: 83)

Consequently, war was not a sacrificial act validated by just means and honourable intentions, but was one of the many means available to the king to achieve other ends.

97 Before the *asvamedha* ritual sacrifice commences, the king and the *brahmin* ritually exchange their qualities. The king temporarily forsakes his royalty to the *brahmin* who in turn bequeaths him with his power of *brahmin*hood. The symbolic alternation enables the king to withdraw to a life in the wilderness befitting an ascetic, while the *brahmin* assumes charge of the temporal sphere. (Heesterman 1998: 33-34)
The tradition stresses on resorting to war in order to attain objectives such as security. According to Kautilya, ‘Artha is the source of the livelihood of human beings, in other words, the earth inhabited by men. The science which is the means of the attainment and protection of that earth is the Arthashastra.’ (Kautilya 1923: 1-2) The arthashastra tradition is a rich body of literature comprising of not only Kautilya’s Arthashastra, but also Kamandaki’s Nitisara and the Barhaspatya Sutra which stressed more on the outcome that justified the use of unethical means. The Ramayana too can be classified as a postulation of the arthashastra tradition, evident in the 6000 references to military action that one can locate in the epic. The taxonomy of military strategies of conciliation, bribery, sowing dissension and coercion in the Ramayana coincide with the broader classification arrived at by Kautilya. (Brekke 2006: 118)

A notable work in IR theory that studies the specificities of the ancient Indian system is Watson’s The Evolution of International Society. For Watson, ancient India presented a classic example of the moves states made to escape the anarchy of multiple political independencies that existed during that time. To a great extent, the Mauryan empire that was ‘a patchwork quilt of independent and dependent communities’ held together because of the collective awareness ‘that the welfare and expansion, and indeed the survival, of a state depended on its relations with its neighbours. In this inescapable net, rules and institutions developed, shaped by the Hindu cultural tradition.’ Watson identifies the essence of the Hindu tradition as lying in its abiding injunction ‘that a ruler should not disturb the customs and laws of a subject community.’ However, Watson’s equation of ancient India with Hinduism is questionable (‘Hinduism in its many variants is one of the major civilizations of mankind’), as is his assumption that ‘the Hindu tradition’ was characterised by ‘a strong sense of a common civilization [that] distinguished Hindu Indians from other peoples.’ (Watson 1992: 77-78)

He selects Kautilya’s Arthashastra as the representative text of the period to emphasise the level of sophistication ancient Indians achieved in devising strategies to manage inter-state relations. Kautilya’s prescription for coping with the system lay in the establishment of an imperial order and not in securing peace through a cooperative arrangement arrived at by independent states. Watson hails the Arthashastra for being a ‘major theoretical analysis of international relations as an integral part of the problems of
statecraft', a fusion unparalleled in contemporary history. (Watson 1992: 79) Watson locates the ancient work within a comparative framework noting,

‘But when we remember that the Greeks, who produced such outstanding analyses of the domestic government of a state, wrote nothing comparable about a state’s foreign relations or about the working of their international system, we realize the importance of this pioneering Indian achievement.’ (Watson 1992: 79)

Kauityya's unit of analysis was the circle of states consisting of twelve primary kings around which he builds an elaborate network of potential alliances that would optimise the chances of expansion for the conqueror. The classical Indian texts mention the king as merely one of the 72 elements that comprise the ‘circle of kings’. As Heesterman observes, ‘The circle doctrine is a schematic representation of a universe made up of various interlocking forces, where the king has to stake himself in an ever-continuing gamble with his likes as well as with other forces.’ (Heesterman 1998: 20)

The notable point was that all states in Kauityya’s schema operated within the dynamics of the contemporary international system and as such an independent state was inconceivable. He also distinguishes between the mediatory king (madhyama) and the neutral king (udasina) on the basis of which he extensively discusses measures to tackle the manoeuvres of the more immediate mediatory ruler. Watson singles out this distinction as a sign of political sophistication achieved by Kauityya, which

‘...may be the first instance in a text of the concept of neutrality, and of the steps which a conqueror or someone resisting conquest should adopt towards a neutral state. No such distinctions between a mediatory and a neutral power are to be found in the writings of the near east or Greece; and the European system rarely got beyond allies, enemies and neutrals.’ (Watson 1992: 81)

The realist tenor in Kauityya also surfaces in his emphasis on expediency which often entailed winning the support and confidence of conquered people. Kauityya upholds peace over war and even neutrality as it entailed the most judicious and efficient use of state resources possible. However, every state even in peacetime should be prepared for war and for which no means were to be spared. Kauityya’s schema allowed for

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98 Mediator lay was one whose territory lay close to both the conqueror and his immediate enemy and who was noncommittal but powerful enough to determine the balance of power within the circle of states. The territory of the neutral king lay beyond this primary set of kings, but who was also sufficiently powerful to either resist or assist the conqueror, his enemy and the mediatory king. (Watson 1992: 80)
considerable degrees of local autonomy as his advice to the conqueror was to leave local power structures undisturbed in order to facilitate a peaceful transition.

The decline in the use of military strategies, restraint and prudence in war, and the dominance of the notion of chivalry that extolled death in war, are regarded by some researchers as the causes behind the inability of Hindus to effectively oppose the invading Muslim armies. However, the tradition of prudence was not altogether overshadowed by the dharmashatra literature in the Middle Ages. Somadeva Suri, a Jain teacher upheld prudence over heroism in his work, Yashastilaka. The notion of treacherous warfare (kutayuddha), which is denounced in the dharmashastra literature as unethical is upheld by Somadeva, and is indeed one of the underlying principles of the arthashastra theory. (Brekke 2006: 135)

In the continuum of kingship that at one end attributes independent divine qualities to the king as in ancient Egypt, and on the other regards him as a worldly instrument of the divine force as in ancient China and medieval Europe, the position of the Hindu king falls in the middle. He is to submit to the writ of dharma and at the same time, preside over his kingdom as its supreme power. In order to comprehend the position of the king in the political system, it is essential to understand that his kingdom was seen as a microcosm of the grand cosmic order. The Cosmic Man who generates the universe and into whom all its elements return to be regenerated again in cyclic alternation, also creates the king with portions taken from the eight deities of the cosmos. Constituted with the radiance and power of the cosmos, the divinity of the Hindu king is inherent in his person and not bestowed by divine right as in medieval European philosophy. The centrality of the Cosmic Man within the cosmos is replicated in the king who is the font of power, order and creation within his kingdom. Within this interpretive framework, the claims of Hindu kings over a universal dominion can be understood because the kingdom was seen as containing within it all the elements of the entire earth. (Inden 1998: 46-50)

The necessity for the regulation of human affairs is recognised by both the Hindu and Islamic traditions. However, the two traditions differed on the status and authority of the king with regard to his kingdom. The Hindu tradition vested the king with the divinity drawn from the gods that energised him to in turn revitalise the various elements of his kingdom. This replication of the cosmic power in the person is absent in Islamic thought.
which instead chooses to remind the king of his instrumental status in the scheme of things. Peter Hardy observes of the Islamic tradition, 'It is not by reason of his being, but by reason of his behaviour, that the sultan becomes the means whereby subjects enjoy welfare. The real agent is god.' (Hardy 1998: 228) Hence, the authority of the king is vested in him by god whose divine attributes cannot be replicated in any of his creations and hence no mortal being can aspire to reflect his powers in this temporal world. The eleventh and twelfth century invasions into India affected the formulations in both Hindu and Islamic theories of state. For instance, the learned of both traditions accepted the new claimants to power without questioning their social background or the basis of their claim. Instead, they chose to stress on the appropriate exercise of power notwithstanding the means through which it had been acquired. (Hardy 1998: 222-225)

CARICATURES IN THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT
Patterns in strategic practice of a country emerge when it is theorised, and as is mostly the case, theorisations are prone to varying interpretations. Although India is no exception to this norm, its case presents us with an interesting interface between theory and history. Precisely because the subjects under focus were so varied, the colonial scholarship was critical in moulding the Indian self-image. Many of the assumptions and images of India that were arrived at centuries ago persist and continue to be reinforced in contemporary writings, as we shall see subsequently. Within the field of IR, particularly in writings that attempted to give a cultural slant to India’s influence, the approach towards the constructed colonial images have remained largely uncritical. It is evident in the literature pertaining to the area that the historical and cultural context itself has been ‘objectified’ to simply ‘substitute specific cultural contexts for universals’. (Lawson 2006: 25) Given that the self-image of a country informs the role it would envision for itself in the world arena, the study of its historical evolution becomes imperative. The popular cultural images of India as the exotic land of bygone glories and of a fractious society caught in a time warp can be traced to the western colonial imagination and the nationalist writings it spurred in response.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw a continued intellectual preoccupation of Indian nationalists with India’s past that ultimately led to what Cohn calls ‘the
objectification of Indian culture'. Facets of it were singled out to authenticate and justify the national cause, as Gandhi did with the concept of *ahimsa* to great effect. Likewise, the Gita’s permissive use of violence for a just cause was interpreted by the nationalists to justify the national movement. (Cohn 2004: 229) For Aurobindo Ghosh, India had ‘developed the spiritual mind working upon the other powers of man and exceeding them, the intuitive reason, the philosophical harmony of the dharma informed by the religious spirit, the sense of the eternal and the infinite.’ (Cited in Chandra 1969: 43)

Indeed, the British turned out to be vociferous supporters of the nationalist claim over spirituality since it left them with the responsibility to undertake and control the mundane material responsibilities of administration. Nehru regarded the recourse to past glory and spiritual greatness as ‘a foolish and dangerous pastime’, since the willing withdrawal of the Indians from worldly concerns on the belief that they were better suited for spiritual pursuits absolved the colonialists of the responsibility to explain their intervention. (Nehru 1982: 81) Hence, although the exigencies of time prompted the intellectuals in Bengal and elsewhere to turn to Indian history, it entailed a selective reading of it so as to project the image of a composite national culture. An instance of westernisation in colonial India was the Bengal Renaissance during the nineteenth century, which was a response to the call for cleansing Hinduism of its superstitious practices and irrationalism. The purpose was to ‘purify’ Hinduism to the extent that it could be integrated with Western notions of rationality, monotheism and empiricism. Underlying the concerted effort on part of the intellectuals to glorify India’s past was the aim of making Indian civilisation comparable to that of the West. (Cohn 2004: 225-227) The challenge of making the two compatible continued to confound some of the best minds of the day. Nehru for instance noted,

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99 Partha Chatterjee located the early articulations of nationalist historiography that stressed on ‘ancient glory, present misery’ in nineteenth century Bengali texts. (Chatterjee 1995: 117)

100 These existed alongside derogatory images of the West that spawned two distinct strands of Asian consciousness, namely the ‘national-political’ and the ‘transcendental-cultural’. Whereas the former was driven by nationalist sentiments, the latter mounted a cultural attack on the West. Cultural Asianists like Tagore saw the East as spiritually superior to the West, which was marked by a mechanical and technical approach to progress. (Bonnett 2001: 81-86)
'I have become a queer mixture of the East and the West, out of place elsewhere, at home nowhere... They are both part of me, and, though they help me in both the East and the West, they also create in me a feeling of spiritual loneliness... I am a stranger and alien in the West. I cannot be of it. But in my own country also, sometimes, I have an exile's feeling'. (Nehru 1941: 353)

The search for timeless essences and continuing traditions did not end with decolonisation. The growing profile of the US led to a spurt in area studies programmes as its endeavour to know more about the world, especially the Third World was institutionalised. In its effort to expand its links, the dilemma before the US was how to ensure that the indigenous political elite could simultaneously straddle the spheres of tradition and modernity. The Comparative Civilisations Project from 1951 to 1961 grappled with this challenge of how civilisations holding on to age-old traditions could modernise. The University of Chicago was the first to emerge as the seat of Indian studies in the US. (Roosa 1995: 152-153) The Committee for Comparative Study of New Nations, set up under the chairmanship of Edward Shils in 1959, recommended that the imperative of modernisation would have to override concern for tradition. Yet, the indigenous elite would maintain the exalted status of 'sacred centres' with which the masses would identify during times of transition. Milton Singer, who was involved with the Chicago project, argued that India's 'sacred centre' was its ancient 'Sanskritic tradition'. The Chicago project was basically driven by the same concerns that occupied the minds of the Orientalists- to uncover an underlying tradition that would draw divergent cultural strands into one composite Indian culture. To this end, M.N. Srinivas's model of Sanskritisation suited the search for a unifying tradition in India. Srinivas argued that lower castes sought to gain greater acceptance within the caste system by 'Sanskritising' themselves through emulation. Thus, the caste system became the unifying strand that connected the lower with the higher castes, and came to symbolise the composite culture of India to the Chicago anthropologists. (Roosa 1995: 153-154) Roosa notes that in this manner,

'...the Chicago anthropologists encouraged the continuation of the Hindu tradition. They reinstated the Orientalist definition of Indian civilization as Hindu civilization and excluded all inconsistencies and historical changes. The 'Indian' conceived as the singular timeless essence was accorded great respect, while vast
reality incompatible with their model of 'Hindu mind' was dismissed from consideration'. (Roosa 1995: 154)

Societalism, which is the process of reducing political, economic and religious phenomena to the social phenomena, upon which orientalist writings were based, continues to dominate contemporary literature. (Gelber 2001: 11) Stephen Rosen, in his attempt to study the influence of domestic social structures on the military effectiveness of states, selected caste as the institution having an enduring influence on Indian military power from the ancient period to the modern era. The book's central argument is that caste divisions which were duly reflected in Indian armies down ages weakened their military prowess. Satisfied with caste as an 'objective' criterion, Rosen adopts an excessively deterministic view of Indian strategic practice. He asserts, 'Though other social divisions [religious, regional and linguistic] may be overlaid on the system of caste relations, they do not have the same profound impact on day-to-day life...' to the extent that religious divisions have become 'caste-ified.'

George Tanham similarly regards caste as the 'bedrock' of Indian society which 'tends to foster a conservative and non-innovative mind-set...' (Tanham 1996: 42) In the same vein, John Hall argues that the caste system provides the overarching template within which the entire Indian history can be explained. Introducing India as 'The Land of the Brahmans' in his book Powers and Liberties: The Causes and Consequences of the Rise of the West, Hall asserts that Brahmanism 'blocked the emergence of powerful polities' in India, because of which 'India did not have a political history' (Cited in Blaut 2000: 133, emphasis original). Hall's approach echoes what Hegel had asserted centuries ago about the 'prehistorical' nature of the spread of Indian culture, which 'is only a dumb, deedless expansion; that is, it presents no political action. The people of India have achieved no foreign conquests, but have been on every occasion vanquished

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101 The misrepresentation of India as a Hindu entity is evident from Rosen's argument, 'India is Hindu and Hindus think differently from non-Hindus' before proceeding to a psycho-analytic study of the 'Hindu personality'. (Rosen 1996: 39-41)

102 For Hall, the absence of political traditions accounted for long periods of statelessness and chaos in India. Blaut notes that while Hall regards the lack of a strong state in India as a sign of political weakness, the absence of absolute imperialism in Europe's history becomes a laudable trait. (Blaut 2000: 134)
themselves.' (Hegel 2003: 222, emphasis original) Yet another contemporary reflection of Orientalist caricatures is provided by Barbara Crosette who argues,

‘the [Indian] tendency toward moral relativism and a concurrent Hindu disinclination to take a rigorous individual stand on issues can lead to an unnecessary lack of self-confidence at national level for a country of this size....Wild allegations and abstractions are hurled around and sanctimonious speeches made, but concrete proposals or rational analyses rarely follow. (Crosette 1993: 11)

Perhaps no other work on Indian strategic thought incorporates orientalist images of India more completely and makes their strategic significance more evident than Tanham's essay on Indian strategic thought. (Tanham 1996) Tanham, in attempting a cultural interpretation takes Hinduism and its caste system to be appropriate representations of Indian culture. Indians, according to him, with their faith in *dharma*, *karma* and transmigration, nurture 'a passive, almost fatalistic acceptance of life'. The belief in pre-ordained repetition of cycles makes future 'less subject to human manipulation than it does to a Westener'. He further adds,

‘Rational analysis, so vital to Western societies, has less influence in Indian society as so many other factors play important or dominant roles. The acceptance of life as a mystery and the inability to manipulate events impedes preparation for the future in all areas of life, including the strategic.' (Tanham 1996: 43)

The import such an assumption carries for strategic affairs is worth noting, as Indians are depicted as being culturally and historically incapable of planning and strategising. Tanham states,

‘...the Hindu concept of time or rather the lack of a sense of time—Indians view life as an eternal present, with neither history nor future—discourages planning.... Hindus consider life a mystery, largely unknowable and not entirely under man’s control. In this view, fate, intuition, tradition and emotions play important roles, but how, how much, and when is never clearly known. Man’s control over his life is thus limited in Hindu eyes, and he cannot forecast or plan with any confidence.’ (Tanham 1996: 73)

108 Tanham’s opinion is echoed by Brahma Chellaney who similarly alludes to ‘the placidly pacifist Hindus and Jains’ along with ‘complacent Buddhists’ in order to reiterate his argument on the tolerant and peace loving nature of Asians. (Chellaney 2006: 68)
The caricature of a defensive India lacking in strategic thought is reinforced by the contrasting Western case, 'which assume(s) a faith in logic and human progress, the efficacy of individual efforts, a sense of history and continuity, and a future to be shaped and worked for.' (Tanham 1996: 43) Tanham argues that the defensive approach is the enduring feature of India's strategic culture and is reflected in its foreign policy in the modern era, as in the earlier periods. Reinforcing the set representations on India, he concludes that 'the forces of culture and history and the attitude and policies of the independent Indian government have worked against the concept of strategic thinking and planning.' (Tanham 1996: 75) What is interesting is that in the commentaries that follow Tanham's essays, many of these cultural caricatures of India go unchallenged. For instance, while scholars take issue with Tanham on the tenacity and orientation of India's strategic thinking, the familiar motifs of caste and a society caught in a time-warp remain unquestioned.\[104\]

Studies seeking to refute claims of a defensive India also succumb to the tendency of delineating identifiable attributes that have survived the ravages of history, in this case of an essentially realist approach. In making a case for a culturally militaristic Indian outlook, Bharat Karnad locates its essence in certain key ancient texts such as the Arthashastra, Manusmriti and the Vedas. He contests the view that Indians are a culturally defensive people who shirk the use of force, arguing that the texts offer the ruler a range of options that culminate in open war. For Karnad, Indian strategic thinking is characterised by pragmatism that can be traced back to the ancient period. History has reiterated the innate Indian proclivity to be calculative and strategise, and in its progress down millennia, the medieval era is reduced to being 'the Muslim interregnum' that bridged the ancient and the colonial periods. The contribution of medieval rulers was

104 Tanham employs another stereotype to drive home the point that Indians are not programmed to strategise. He argues that the unchanging agricultural cycles inhibited planning which ultimately influenced the mind-set of the Indian political elite. He asserted, 'Like most rural people, Indian farmers have no tradition or understanding of long-range planning... The peasant psyche remains important, however, as many of today's leaders come from the rural areas of India.' The cliché once again receives no critical mention from the other commentators. (Tanham 1996: 81)
restricted to changes at the tactical and strategic level, whereas the already established
grand strategic framework remained intact.\textsuperscript{105} (Karnad 2002: 23-24)

Andrew Latham contends that the realpolitik tradition of strategising was
introduced in India by the British, and coupled with the realist streak in the ‘Kauthilyan
tradition’, it led the Indians to conceptualise security in ‘essentially unilateral terms’, as
opposed to the Western notion of ‘mutual’ security during the Cold War. In India’s case,
both traditions emphasised the greatness of the dominant power to which smaller states
were expected to submit. One of the vestiges of the Raj tradition was the formulation of
security in terms of the defence of the ‘natural’ frontiers of the subcontinent.
Furthermore, this rationale becomes the basis of the Indian concern with all security
issues that fall within this naturally demarcated territory, namely South Asia. (Latham
1999: 137, 140) However, Latham cautions that

\begin{quote}
\textit{...it is important to recognize that India’s security culture is not transhistorical, either in the sense that it can be traced back to some ‘authentic’ pre-colonial tradition or that it is timeless, immutable and unchanging. In the Indian context, security culture is a contested discourse, embattled on the one hand by transnational cultural and political forces, and on the other by indigenous critiques of the security policies of the Indian state.} (Latham 1999: 132)
\end{quote}

Despite assertions that the Indian security culture cannot be ‘traced back to some
‘authentic’ pre-colonial tradition’, Latham sets out to explore the ‘\textit{\{e\}ffects of Hindu
Norms on Foreign Policy Style‘.\textsuperscript{106} (Latham 1999: 146) Not surprisingly, the familiar
Tanhamian interpretation of Indian culture is adopted, emphasising as it does on its
hierarchical understanding of international power relations stemming from the ubiquitous
caste system. Furthermore, the Hindu concepts of Karma and fate allow Indians to accept
‘inconsistencies and contradictions’ that trouble the Westerners. (Latham 1999: 147)

\textsuperscript{105} Orientalism fostered the notion of the effeminate Hindu subjugated by the aggressive Muslim invader, giving rise to the perception that the medieval period contributed little to the evolution of strategic thinking in India. A sophisticated presentation of this idea can be found in Jaswant Singh’s \textit{Defending India}. Singh argues that despite an accommodative and forgiving Hindu milieu...Islamic conquest of just parts of India needed many centuries of strife. Despite the earlier Delhi Sultanates, the Vijayanagar Empire flowered in the south’. Termed as ‘achievements’ during the medieval period, Singh’s pitting of Hindu rulers against their Islamic counterparts is apparent. (Singh 2001: 14)

\textsuperscript{106} Latham goes to the extent of asserting that the Kautilyan tradition prevents Indian decision-makers from exploring shared interests with Pakistan that could become the basis for initiating Confidence Building Measures. (Latham 1999: 150)
It is evident that on the issue of India’s strategic practice, the scholarship can be arranged along a spectrum. One extremity of the continuum is occupied by scholars who argue that internal disunity and cultural attributes prevented Indians from developing a tradition of strategic thinking of any kind. Academics claiming to approach the issue of culture in more dynamic terms, but who still dabble in the exercise of identifying cultural markers, fall somewhere at the centre of the spectrum. Finally, there are scholars who contend that Indian strategists showed a decided preference for the realist approach, a position that takes them to the other end of the continuum. However, if there is one thing that this panoramic view of positions reveals, it is their shared penchant to regard history and culture as a seamless whole from which validations of contemporary positions can be sought. The tendency to collapse the past into the present is, at a fundamental level, a flawed approach to any issue. It is for this reason that IR scholarship on India has progressed little despite the burgeoning literature on culture studies.

CONCLUSION

The Indian discourse on strategic thinking and practice presents us with a classic case of reflexivity, wherein the images that the colonialists drew up about the country were accepted as authentic representations of reality. Far from rectifying the skewed images, contemporary scholarship on India has gone on to further reinforce these in its studies. The spirit of critical enquiry has been altogether absent within IR for two important reasons. Firstly, IR scholarship in India is directed by a definite policy orientation that demands attention be paid to issues of immediate concern. The transient nature of issues, coupled with the changing profile of academics increasingly engaged in policy analysis, have made historical enquiry within IR redundant. Secondly, the near-total lack of dialogue between the fields of IR and history, which assert that they have very little to learn from each other, has further pushed the call for interdisciplinary studies to the margins. So long as IR remains constricted within its isolated field of enquiry, issues of identity and self-perception of post-colonial societies like India shall remain unaddressed. A constructive dialogue with other disciplines alone offers the hope for correcting the Eurocentric bias within IR theory and for expunging long-held orientalist caricatures from popular perception. The advantages of adopting an interdisciplinary approach are
many, and one of the areas where its beneficial effects would be felt the most is that of strategic history, which remains an understudied aspect of international politics. In the next chapter, we will examine the key material and ideational factors that shaped the grand strategy of one of most prosperous and populous empires of world history- the Mughal empire.