

CHAPTER 5

BEFORE MIDNIGHT

Views on International Relations, 1857–1947

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IN his essay *Indian Strategic Thought*, George Tanham (1992: v) famously argued that political elites in India showed ‘little evidence of having thought coherently or systematically about national strategy’. The ‘situation may now be changing’, he cautiously noted in 1992, but he was certain that the ‘forces of culture and history’ had ‘worked against’ the cultivation of a strategic mindset.¹ Though Tanham’s claim has not gone unchallenged, relatively little has been done to substantiate the claim that, historically at least, India’s elite did in fact think about strategic matters.² This brief chapter cannot remedy this lacuna, but it makes a start. In contrast with contemporary discussions on Indian strategic culture, which focus almost exclusively on the post-independence era, this chapter shows that India’s political elites have been thinking about her place in the world for well over a century now.³ Limitations of space mean that it is not possible to discuss every important viewpoint to be found in the pre-independence era.⁴ Hence this chapter focuses on the worldviews that appear to have been the most influential.

EARLY STIRRINGS

The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of three distinct views on international relations. The first emphasized ‘universal brotherhood’ or the spiritual and moral unity of the human race. Among the more prominent spokesmen was the theologian Keshub Chandra Sen. In his 1886 lecture, ‘Jesus Christ: Europe and Asia’, Sen examined how Indians and Englishmen might regulate their relations, strained as they were in the wake of the 1857 Mutiny. ‘It grieves me to find’, he announced, that far from adhering ‘strictly and literally to the doctrine of forgiveness inculcated by Christ’, Englishmen dismissed the doctrine as an expression of ‘misguided sentimentalism’. They knew too well, he bemoaned, that by ‘systematically returning love for enmity,

they would too soon jeopardize all their temporal interests' (Sen 1870: 40–2). Initially Sen expressed the hope that diligent moral education would give rise to the day 'when race-antagonism shall perish, and strife, discord, and all manner of unbrotherly feeling shall for ever pass away, and harmony shall prevail among us all' (Sen 1870: 46).⁵ Subsequently, in 'Asia's Message to Europe,' a lecture delivered in Calcutta's Town Hall in 1883, he offered a more thoroughgoing response. Noting that 'Europe's aggressive civilization' had rent Europe itself with conflict, Sen made the case for peaceful coexistence (Sen 1904: 51). Human history showed, he contended, that there 'is a natural and an irresistible tendency in man's progressive nature towards social fellowship'. The evolution of humans from being solitary brutes in the state of nature into members of families and then villages and towns and eventually states revealed that civilization was on the side of 'what is broad and world-wide'. Groups with contrary interests appreciated communal life because associations enriched their lives culturally and materially. But communal life could only be maintained when communities were 'not destructive, but constructive', i.e. when they allowed groups to maintain as well as expand their existing sympathies and identities (Sen 1904: 77–9). Hence, if Europeans wanted to be on the side of civilization rather than barbarism, Sen concluded, they ought to mimic Asia's instinctive pluralism. 'Let us all march then into broader fields and larger intercourses', he proclaimed, 'till we form a blessed and world-wide community of God's children, for that is indeed the destiny of our race' (Sen 1904: 117, 80).

Perhaps the most influential of such pleas came from Swami Vivekananda, who saw Hinduism as being uniquely placed to further 'universal brotherhood'. Europe, he observed in 1897, was trying to understand 'how much a man can have, how much more power a man can possess by hook or by crook, by some means or other'. But this was to chase a mirage for history showed 'nations rising and falling almost every century—starting up from nothingness, making vicious play for a few days, and then melting' (Vivekananda 1955a: 205). Far preferable, then, were 'mildness, gentleness, forbearance, toleration, sympathy, and brotherhood', as these qualities alone would allow societies and nations to accommodate differences of interest and opinion that are a part and parcel of collective human existence. However, as these qualities could not triumph without the conquest of greed and desire, it was vital to learn to renounce. 'Giving up the senses', Vivekananda asserted, is what 'makes a nation survive' (Vivekananda 1955a: 205). And this was where India stood out. 'The foundation of her being, the *raison d'être* of her very existence', he wrote in 'India's Message to the World', was 'the spiritualisation of the human race' (Vivekananda 1955b: 261). This was because Hindu philosophy was best suited to impart the 'unworldliness' that nations needed to learn before there could be peace. The effects of this philosophy appeared clear to Vivekananda: India, he repeatedly observed, was 'the only nation that never went beyond its frontiers to cut the throats of its neighbours' (Vivekananda 1955c: 404).

A second line of thought in this period drew on classical texts that had recently come into wider circulation. These texts, including *Hitopadesa*, *Manu Smriti*, *Nitisara*, *Agni Purana*, *Vishnu Smriti*, and the *Arthashastra*, offered advice that diverged sharply from the advice offered by Sen and Vivekananda. Instead of faith in moral progress,

these texts expressed a principled conservatism founded on the insight that men and their motives are more often base than noble. Compare, for instance, Sen's and Vivekananda's praise of the 'mild Hindu' with Book VII of the *Manu Smriti* where rulers are instructed to 'strive to gain' what they have not yet gained, and to 'carefully preserve' what they have already gained, which can be accomplished by the ruler who is 'ever ready to strike', whose secrets are 'constantly concealed', who ceaselessly explores 'the weaknesses of his foe', and who considers any 'immediate neighbour' as hostile (Doniger 1991, VII: 68). That said, it would be a grave error to read such passages as condoning the use of violence and fraud simply for the sake of acquiring or maintaining political power. These texts hold that such methods are permissible only insofar as they are used to preserve a well-governed state—a point of no small interest to early twentieth-century readers.⁶

An important conduit for these classical ideas was Swami Dayanand Saraswati's 1875 *Satyarth Prakash*, which outlined the *Manu Smriti*'s key lessons on statecraft (Saraswati 1908). But the transmission of these ideas was limited in a number of respects. Saraswati, the founder of the barely tolerated Arya Samaj, appears to have refrained from commenting on the most incendiary passages. His successors followed this lead, focusing on his many, popular writings challenging the social and religious orthodoxies of the day. The blunt advice offered by these classical texts was also highlighted by scholars such as Rajendra Lal Mitra and Manmatha Nath Dutt. But they discounted the advice on offer, viewing it as a byproduct of the bloody times during which these texts were framed (Kamandaki 1861: 3–4). This dismissive view would only start to change around the turn of the twentieth century when these classical texts would attract the attention of militant nationalists like Aurobindo Ghosh.

A third line of thought was liberal in flavor. Its proponents included Dadabhai Naroji, G. V. Joshi, Pherozshah Mehta, Dinshaw Wacha, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, all of whom sought to temper the Raj's foreign policies. A key demand here was that the British refrain from stoking the Great Game. The 'only safe policy', the Indian National Congress firmly declared in 1898, was for the Raj to keep within the 'natural limits' of the country (Zaidi 1987: 66–7). Congress elites also urged the British to show greater decency in its overseas dealings. Starting with Naroji's famous 1880 essay, 'The Moral Poverty of India', they regularly called on the British to withdraw from the opium trade with China, which was a 'sin on England's head, and a curse on India for her share in being the instrument' (Naroji 1887: 476). Concern also began to be expressed routinely for Indian settlers abroad who were subject to 'invidious and humiliating distinctions', and pressure was placed on the British to 'relieve' the settlers of the 'disabilities imposed on them' (Zaidi 1987: 111, 119, 157, 194). Above all, Congress elites emphasized that India's pressing social needs ought to trump the Raj's 'militarism' (Gokhale 1906: 831). Repeatedly in the first decades of its existence, Congress urged that 'military and other unproductive expenditure be reduced, and larger amounts be spent in promoting the welfare and progress of the people' (Zaidi 1987: 18, 47, 66–7, 81–2, 107, 142).

A MORAL NATIONALISM

At the close of the nineteenth century, an increasingly militant form of nationalism came to the fore. The defining feature of this movement was its willingness to countenance violence, a stance justified by reference to the idea that political life is governed by its own morality. This was, of course, a central claim of the classical texts on statecraft, and some prominent figures in the movement made this connection explicit, none more so than Bal Gangadhar Tilak whose *Gita Rahasya* argued that the moral lesson of the *Gita* was that one's salvation depended not merely on devotion and knowledge, but also on action, i.e. a willingness to engage in righteous violence (Tilak 1935).

The most fascinating work in this genre is Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's 1888 *Dharmatattva*. This remarkable dialogue focuses on whether patriotism or the willingness to fight for one's country is essential to human happiness. The answer:

Just as dogs in the rural markets snatch morsels from one another, peoples whether they are civilized or not are despoiling one another's property. A strong people is always ready to fall upon the weaker ones. Hence there can be no self-protection without protecting one's own country. (Chattopadhyay 1977: 54)

Dharmatattva was not, however, a simple call to arms. Having observed that Europe owed its strength to patriotism, the dialogue argued that Europeans should *not* be copied because the truest form of patriotism lies in 'love for the entire world'. Should there be a clash between the good of one's own society and that of another, then the appropriate way to proceed, the dialogue implied, was to calculate which outcome would produce the greatest benefit for the greatest number (Chattopadhyay 1977: 147). This path alone allowed one to reconcile national devotion with a love of mankind. Hindus were especially capable of following this path, the dialogue concluded, because their theology sought the universal rather than the particular.

Dharmatattva is striking because it shows one of the more vigorous Indian reactions to British imperialism voicing support for an eminently moral interaction with other peoples and for a defensive use of force. It is not unusual in this respect. Broadly, the same thought process can be discerned in Aurobindo Ghosh's influential corpus. Inspired by Japan's rise, Aurobindo warned his countrymen in a 1907 essay 'National Development and Foreign Rule', that a nation 'must develop military and political greatness and activity, intellectual and aesthetic greatness and activity, commercial greatness and activity, moral sanity and vigour', for it 'cannot sacrifice any of these functions of the organism without making itself unfit for the struggle for life and finally succumbing and perishing under the pressure of more highly organised nations' (Ghosh 1997a: 363). Aurobindo also explicitly defended militant methods in 'The Doctrine of Passive Resistance' and 'The Morality of Boycott', which appeared in 1907 and 1909 respectively. 'A certain class of minds shrink from aggressiveness as if it were a sin', he wrote in the latter. Their cry is to 'heal hate by love' and to 'slay sin by righteousness'. But political action

ought to be governed not by 'the Brahmanical duty of saintly sufferance' but rather by the 'morality of the Kshatriya' (Ghosh 1997a: 1118). This morality, he explained, counsels that 'love has a place in politics, but it is the love for one's country, for one's countrymen, for the glory, greatness and happiness of the race' (Ghosh 1997a: 1118-20).

These were dangerous words, no doubt. But a close reading shows that, like Bankimchandra, Aurobindo ultimately thought that violence was 'unrighteous when used wantonly' (Ghosh 1997a: 1120-1). This point is developed in 'Asiatic Democracy' and 'The Asiatic Role', where Aurobindo asserted that India's ultimate mission was to point humanity toward 'the true source of human liberty, human equality, human brotherhood', namely, a recognition of the 'divine equality of the world', which taught man to be 'brother to the whole world' and to serve 'all men as his brothers by the law of love, by the law of justice' (Ghosh 1997a: 931-2, 1019-1). This thought was elaborated still further in 'The Message of India':

It is an inferior and semi-savage morality which gives up only to gain and makes selfishness the basis of ethics. To give up one's small individual self and find the larger self in others, in the nation, in humanity, in God, that is the law of Vedanta. That is India's message. Only she must not be content with sending it, she must rise up and live it before all the world so that it may be proved a possible law of conduct both for men and nations. (Ghosh 1997b: 55)

CRITIQUES

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, growing domestic unease over the political violence unleashed by militant nationalists, and mounting concern about international conflict over colonial possessions, opened the door to new modes and ideas. Hereupon entered Mohandas Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore who, though united in their criticism of the international state system, offered markedly different advice on how India ought to conduct itself in the international sphere.

Gandhi's earliest salvo on the subject came in *Hind Swaraj*, where he argued that India's subjugation was the product not of her powerlessness but of her pusillanimity. True strength, he urged, lay not in the capacity to employ 'brute force', which usually proved counterproductive, but in the 'absence of fear', a state of mind that allowed victims to passively resist and even to pity the aggressor. A society capable of acting in this manner would discover that 'in the majority of cases, if not, indeed, in all, the force of love and pity is infinitely greater than the force of arms' (Gandhi 1908: 72-3). Hence, Gandhi concluded, it would be a mistake to imitate Europe, whose 'irreligious' focus on 'bodily welfare' had left her lacking genuine 'courage' (Gandhi 1908: 63).

Gandhi expanded on these ideas in 'Ahimsa', an essay published in 1916, where he distinguished between negative and positive conceptions of non-violence. Whereas the former involved abstaining from physical violence, the latter involved having the

courage to resist evil (Gandhi 1922: 285). The latter conception, it turned out, was the more sacred one; indeed it might even enjoin violence. As Gandhi wrote in his 1920 essay 'Doctrine of the Sword', 'where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence' (Gandhi 1922: 789). Such a tragic outcome could be avoided though by escaping the helplessness that justified the use of violence. This logic explains Gandhi's efforts to recruit on behalf of the British during the First World War. If Indians demonstrated a willingness to fight, he thought, it would show the British that Indians were their subjects by choice rather than out of cowardice. Put another way, for Gandhi the point of learning to use arms was not to bolster national power but to humble the British (Gandhi 1922: 431). As he later put it, 'abstinence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature' (Gandhi 1922: 789).

The horrors of the Second World War did not change Gandhi's views. True, he called on the Allies to defend India, but only because India was, he thought, genuinely helpless. The gravity of the Japanese threat—a people who listened 'to no appeal but to the sword'—justified the use of force (Gandhi 1956: 374). Since India lacked the capacity to use force, it was entitled to appeal to the Allies. Even so, Gandhi continued to advocate non-violent resistance, informing Chiang Kai-shek that his own faith in the practice was 'as firm as ever' (Gandhi 1956: 353–4). That is, he continued to believe that those who had the ability to resist with force ought to resist without using force, as only such a sacrifice signaled the presence of genuine moral courage. As he instructed the British in 1940:

I would like you to lay down the arms you have as being useless for saving you or humanity. You will invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of the countries you call your possessions ... You will give all these but neither your souls, nor your minds ... If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourself man, woman and child, to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them. (Gandhi 1956: 345)

The other important critic in this period was Tagore, who was driven by concern for humanity, which to him implied concern for society, because society allowed individuals to naturally 'develop ideals of life in cooperation with one another' (Tagore 1917: 19–20). Given this worldview Tagore was, not surprisingly, troubled by aspects of modernity that also troubled Gandhi—above all the exuberant materialism of contemporary Europe. Tagore confronted this issue most directly in *Nationalism*, a collection of influential lectures delivered toward the end of the First World War, that focused on the abnormalities produced by the modern nation state. The purpose of these artificial institutions, he argued, was to combine individuals in the pursuit of power and riches; the consequence being the destruction of the bonds that form naturally within and between peoples. 'In the West', he declared, 'the national machinery of commerce and politics turns out neatly compressed bales of humanity which have their use and high market value; but they are bound in iron hoops, labelled and separated off with scientific care and precision' (Tagore 1917: 16–17). The withering away of natural bonds, Tagore feared,

opened the door to excess. There was, he acknowledged, a response to this fear, namely, the balance of power. It was widely believed, he noted, that 'these machines will come into an agreement, for their mutual protection, based upon a conspiracy of fear' (Tagore 1917: 44–5). But Tagore was not convinced that greed was rational or could be neatly contained. 'Do you believe,' he asked audiences at the height of the Great War, 'that evil can be permanently kept in check by competition with evil, and that conference of prudence can keep the devil chained in its makeshift cage of mutual agreement?' (Tagore 1917: 57).

As he searched for remedies to this problem Tagore never dismissed the West. Europe, he noted, had 'seen noble minds who have ever stood up for the rights of man irrespective of color and creed.' These were examples well worth following. 'When we truly know the Europe which is great and good,' he wrote, 'we can effectively save ourselves from the Europe which is mean and grasping' (Tagore 1917: 107). He was not optimistic though that the West, drunk on power and riches, would heed its own best example. This is why he was drawn—famously so—to Asian civilizations, which remained, he thought, 'spiritual and based upon all the varied and deeper relations of humanity' (Tagore 1917: 85).

But who in Asia held the answer? As China and Japan seemed to already be slipping away from their civilizational moorings, India above all offered hope. A concern for 'natural regulation of human relationships' lay at the heart of India's civilization, Tagore argued (Tagore 1917: 15). The establishment of political relationships, by contrast, had been neglected, especially externally. India had 'never sallied forth for domination, nor scrambled for spoils,' Tagore insisted in *Greater India*. India had sent out 'only her messages of peace and good will' (Tagore 1921: 30). Thus if India could stay true to herself, her example alone would offer the world 'a basis of unity which is not political' (Tagore 1917: 119–20). But unlike Vivekananda and Gandhi, Tagore did not assume that India had all the answers to the world's problems. 'It does not hurt my pride to acknowledge,' he declared in *Creative Unity*, that 'in the present age, Western humanity has received its mission to be the teacher of the world; that her science, through the mastery of laws of nature, is to liberate human souls from the dark dungeon of matter' (Tagore 1922: 98). In the event, the way forward was to embrace cosmopolitanism: 'I am not for thrusting off Western civilization and becoming segregated in our independence,' he wrote; instead, '[l]et us have a deep association' (Tagore 1917: 130–1).

SHARP DIVERGENCES

Just as Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 had fired an earlier generation with patriotism, the experience of the First World War—and the failure of the League of Nations in particular—prompted skepticism in the following generation. Out of this background emerged two intellectual movements. The first was Hindu nationalism, whose most articulate spokesman was Vinayak Savarkar. Savarkar consistently praised as an ideal outcome the kind of worldwide federation previously called for by Vivekananda and

Aurobindo. But unlike them, Savarkar thought—in part because of what the world had witnessed during the Great War—that the human tendency toward parochialism and selfishness made conflict between nations inevitable. Political life was scarred, he said, by an incessant ‘terrible struggle for existence’, which unfortunately made ‘survival of the fittest’ the rule in nature (Savarkar 1984a: 15).

This worldview led Savarkar to advocate on behalf of balance of power politics. ‘The sanest policy for us, which practical politics demand,’ he asserted, ‘is to befriend those who are likely to serve our country’s interests in spite of any “ism” they follow for themselves, and to befriend only so long as it serves our purpose’ (Savarkar 1984a: 81). It also led him to call for the cultivation of a martial ethic. This was, in part, to dispel the idea that Hindus were a mild race. Hence, we find Savarkar celebrating the decision of the British to send Indian soldiers to the battlefields of Europe (Savarkar 1984b: 12–13).

The more immediate factor motivating Savarkar’s militarism was the need he felt to combat Gandhi’s doctrine of non-violence. This ‘doctrinal plague,’ Savarkar argued, had ‘sought to kill the very martial instinct of the Hindu race and had succeeded to an alarming extent in doing so’ (Savarkar 1984a: 86). His response was to challenge Gandhi by drawing in no small measure on classical ideas about statecraft. ‘We denounce your doctrine of absolute non-violence not because we are less saintly but because we are more sensible than you are,’ he thundered. ‘Relative non-violence is our creed,’ he declared, ‘therefore, we worship the defensive sword as the first saviour of man’ (Savarkar 1984a: 85). This reference to self-defense should not be overlooked. Savarkar never promoted an expansionary brand of nationalism. Rather, like Bankimchandra and Aurobindo, he believed that martial spiritedness would serve to deter potential aggressors. The same logic explains his advocacy on behalf of an exclusionary nationalism; his objective here was to provide Indians with a corporate identity that could motivate them to rally in opposition to external aggression. As he defensively explained in *Essentials of Hindutva*:

As long as other communities in India or in the world are not respectively planning India first or mankind first, but all are busy in organizing offensive and defensive alliances and combinations on entirely narrow racial or religious or national basis, so long, at least, so long O Hindus, strengthen if you can those subtle bonds that like nerve threads bind you in one organic social being. (Savarkar 2003: 141)

The second intellectual movement sparked by the First World War was anti-imperialism, which received a strong fillip from the failure of the League of Nations to extend genuine self-determination to colonial peoples. This movement was missionary in nature. It portrayed India’s subjugation as part of a broader story of European exploitation, and hence sought India’s commitment to pursuing decolonization everywhere in the interests of freedom and peace. The most influential proponent of this view was Jawaharlal Nehru, who became ever more vocal on the subject as he moved up the Congress hierarchy. In 1929, delivering his first Presidential address, he drove home the idea that India’s struggle

against British imperialism was 'part of a world movement', and that India ignored foreign events at her 'peril' (Nehru 1936: 14, 16). He observed:

Peace can only come when the causes of war are removed. So long as there is the domination of one country over another, or the exploitation of one class by another, there will always be attempts to subvert the existing order, and no stable equilibrium can endure. Out of imperialism and capitalism peace can never come. (Nehru 1936: 24)

Nehru developed these ideas further in his 1933 manifesto 'Whither India?' The problem that had 'the world by the throat', he wrote there, was the 'crisis of capitalism', brought about by the 'ill distribution of the world's wealth' (Nehru 1934: 11). This growing crisis—as evidenced by the Great Depression—boded ill for the world. 'To the hard-pressed imperialist Powers seeking frantically for areas of economic expansion', he warned, 'Asia still offers a field'. This made Asia the 'main field of conflict between nationalism and imperialism' (Nehru 1934: 16-17). India, Nehru asserted, had a crucial role to play here. India ought to pursue, both at home and abroad, the only sustainable response to capitalism, namely, to push toward 'the great human goal of social and economic equality, to the ending of all exploitation of nation by nation and class by class, to national freedom within the framework of an international co-operative Socialist world federation' (Nehru 1934: 24).

Over the following decade Nehru came to be especially troubled by the rise of fascism. In his 1936 Presidential address, he emphasized that the colonized needed to be wary of both imperialism and fascism, as the latter was merely an intensification of the exploitative impulses of the former. He pledged India's support to combating both these tendencies: 'To the progressive forces of the world, to those who stand for human freedom and the breaking of political and social bonds, we offer our full co-operation in their struggle against imperialism and Fascist reaction, for we realize that our struggle is a common one' (Nehru 1936: 106). And now, more concretely than before, Nehru aligned India with Soviet Russia, describing the 'unfolding' of this 'new civilization and a new order' as 'the most promising feature of our dismal age'; the 'spread to other lands' of this 'new order' would 'put an end to the wars and conflicts which capitalism feeds' (Nehru 1936: 83).

The outbreak of the Second World War only reinforced Nehru's convictions. The crisis 'that has overtaken Europe', he stated, 'is not of Europe only and will not pass like other crises or wars leaving the essential structure of the present day world intact' (AICC 1940: 16-17). Now more than ever Nehru emphasized the special role that India was bound to play in reorganizing the world. As the Nehru-drafted Congress's 1939 'Statement on the War Crisis' boldly declared:

India is the crux of the problem, for India has been the outstanding example of imperialism and no refashioning of the world can succeed which ignores this vital problem. With her vast resources she must play an important part in any scheme of world reorganisation. (AICC 1940: 17)

Going forward, India ought not to be content with a 'narrow nationalism,' Nehru warned, for 'freedom today is indivisible and every attempt to retain imperialist domination in any part of the world will lead inevitably to fresh disaster' (AICC 1940: 16). Hence the most appropriate foreign policy for India was an activist one:

A free democratic India will gladly associate herself with other free nations for mutual defence against aggression and for economic co-operation. She will work for the establishment of a real world order based on freedom and democracy, utilising the world's knowledge and resources for the progress and advancement of humanity. (AICC 1940: 16)

AT MIDNIGHT: DEBATES IN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

It has been claimed that there was, at independence, a 'Nehruvian consensus' on the ends and means of foreign policy (Cohen 2002: 37).⁷ The ends were 'idealistic,' focused on anti-imperialism and world peace, and the means were 'principled,' in the form of non-alignment and non-violence. Given the history traced so far, the implausibility of this claim should now be clear. There were too many conflicting ideas in circulation to permit such a consensus. An examination of the debates of the Constituent Assembly easily dispels any doubts that remain on this count.⁸

The Constituent Assembly addressed the subject of international relations on two occasions. The first involved deliberations on Article 51, which provides that

The State shall endeavour to—

- (a) promote international peace and security;
- (b) maintain just and honourable relations between nations;
- (c) foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in the dealings of organised peoples with one another; and
- (d) encourage settlement of international disputes by arbitration.

These provisions, widely viewed as homages to Gandhi, were strongly supported by delegates to the Constituent Assembly. B. M. Gupta and M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, for instance, praised the use of arbitration as a 'substitute for war' (CAD 1948: 603). Meanwhile, B. H. Khardekar and Biswanath Das commended Article 51 for neatly encapsulating India's 'spiritual heritage':

The mission of India is the mission of peace. Right from Ram Tirth and Vivekananda down to Tagore, and Gandhiji, if he has done anything, has very much strengthened it. Throughout history, it is not because we have been weak but because it has been in our blood that we have been carrying on this mission

of peace. Non-violence is in the soil and in the heart of every Indian. (CAD 1948: 601)

Others thought Article 51 did not go far enough. Damodar Swarup, one of the two Socialist Party members in the Assembly, objected that it ignored the continued weakness of ‘oppressed and backward people’, a state of affairs that encouraged the nefarious activities of ‘the exploiter and the blood-sucker’—the capitalist and the imperialist—thereby ‘paving the way for regional and international warfare’ (CAD 1948: 600). The mordant Gandhian, K. T. Shah, criticized Article 51, which had been placed in the non-justiciable part of the constitution, for making ‘vague promises’ instead of firm moral commitments. The need of the hour, he stated, was to ‘pledge ourselves, as a people against any form of warfare, and for ever stand to maintain and uphold peace and international security for all countries of the world including our own’ (CAD 1948: 599).

But other delegates saw Article 51—and their fellow members’ demands for more expansive moral commitments—as woolly-headed. The sharpest criticism came from a Congressman, the acerbic former military officer Mahavir Tyagi, who argued that Article 51 represented little more than a ‘pious wish’. How could ‘anybody arbitrate in such matters’, he asked, when powerful nations would not accept an unfavorable outcome? (CAD 1948: 604). This was why international arbitration was invariably followed by the use of ‘guns and aeroplanes’ (CAD 1948: 605). Tyagi was equally dismissive of calls for disarmament. Since powerful nations were not likely to submit to arbitration, he warned, India had to be prepared to use force when necessary:

[I]f we want to maintain peace and seek to maintain just and honourable relations between nations, then I say it is not possible if we remain ... merely a meadow of green grass for bulls to come and graze freely ... what we want is armament, both of will and weapons, moral armament as well as physical armament. We should see to it that our nation is militarily strong ... That should be the directive that we should give to our future government of India if only to achieve our laudable objective of ‘world peace’. (CAD 1948: 605)

A further window into the minds of the delegates is provided by the extended debate over India’s membership in the Commonwealth of Nations. Pressed to justify this policy, Nehru argued before the Assembly that Commonwealth membership was in keeping both with the principle of non-violence (since the Commonwealth provided a forum at which to peacefully resolve differences) and with the principle of autonomy (since Commonwealth membership did not oblige India to defend fellow members like England or South Africa). What is most striking about the ensuing debate is not so much the criticism emanating from the left, but the remarks made by those who rose to *defend* Nehru’s policy. These remarks disclose ideas about the nature of international relations that differed markedly from those expressed by the Prime Minister.

To begin with, no small number of speakers that rose to support India's continued membership in the Commonwealth argued that even though India ought to strive to maintain peace between the West and the Soviet Union, in the event of a confrontation she ought to side with Western democracies. As Begum Aizaz Rasul bluntly declared:

Indian ideology is opposed to communism. There is no doubt that we do not want communism in our country, and we know that Britain and the countries of the Commonwealth are also opposed to communism. Therefore, that is also a common factor between the two. (CAD 1949: 61)

A second difference with Nehru followed from the first. The Commonwealth's defenders argued that since neither neutrality nor non-alignment could fully ensure peace and stability, India ought to be prepared to obtain peace through external and internal balancing. 'It is very easy to talk about world peace,' K. M. Munshi noted, and to praise 'collective security'. But collective security 'is not a mantra to charm serpents with ... It really implies preparation, defensive preparations, standardisation of weapons, co-ordinated research and planning and industrial co-operation between nations on a very large scale' (CAD 1949: 47). What India's circumstances really demanded, then, speakers like Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar and Kameshwar Singh went on to stress, was a willingness to enter into profitable relationships such as those offered by membership in the Commonwealth:

Both history and geography entitle her [India] to ensure the peace of the world. But she can discharge that function only if she is strong both militarily and economically. She can be made so by the co-operation of the Commonwealth countries and America. (CAD 1949: 60)

And if allying with distasteful but nonetheless potentially useful partners like South Africa and Australia was much too bitter a pill for Indians to digest, Frank Anthony observed, then the alternative remedy was not isolation and withdrawal (as the Gandhian H. V. Kamath and the radical socialist Maulana Mohani had proposed) but instead to build up India's strength so that she could enforce her preferred policies:

our policy must be broad-based, and that India's strength should be built up most rapidly. It may take us five years; it may take us ten years. But any realist, any sober person must realise that in the world we are living in today, in the final analysis, one's strength is measured exactly by one's military might. (CAD 1949: 65)

These voices were on the losing side in 1949 because the Congress Party had absolute control over the Constituent Assembly. But they were not stray voices; they represented long-standing worldviews that had strong support, both inside and outside the Congress Party. It is not surprising, then, that these worldviews resurfaced—indeed came to fore—as the Congress Party's influence, and Nehru's authority in particular, began to wane over the following decade.

CONCLUSION

The chapter has challenged the notion that, historically at least, India's political elites failed to think coherently and systematically about national strategy. The reality, we have now seen, is that elites thought about—and disagreed over—the nature of international relations. Such disagreement is not unique to India of course. It can be found in other societies too, including the United States. What is perhaps distinctive about the Indian experience is the extent to which *moral politik* ideas have had the edge, at least in the period leading up to independence. By the same coin, the history canvassed here implies that the 'realism' that is said to be seeping into contemporary Indian deliberations on international relations is not a radical development—it is in fact an iteration of long-standing critiques directed at the more reckless tendencies of modern Indian political thought (Mohan 2004: xxi–xxii).

This essay has not examined *why* India's political elites adopted the moralizing stance that they did prior to 1947. This may have been, as K. Subrahmanyam (1999: xvii) once suggested, a product of their exclusion from officialdom, which denied them contact with the sobering cut and thrust of international diplomacy. It may have been because these elites thought that national unity was all that was needed to ensure security and prestige. At any rate, one visible consequence of this history—as witnessed in the homilies enshrined in Article 51—was a collective failure to publicly reckon with the responsibilities of statehood. That this collective failure was the *outcome* of thinking about international relations—and not evidence of the *absence* of thinking—is what I have tried to convey here.

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NOTES

1. Also see Harsh V. Pant, 'Indian Strategic Culture: The Debate and Its Consequences', in Scott (2011).
2. An interesting critique is W. P. S. Sidhu, 'Of Oral Traditions and Ethnocentric Judgements', in Bajpai and Mattoo (1996). The rare exceptions to have addressed the historical record are Dixit (2004) and Prasad (1962). These are thought provoking and valuable contributions, but they are more in the vein of general overviews rather than detailed scholarly examinations.

3. The most well-known contemporary analyses are Cohen (2002: ch. 2) and Kanti Bajpai, 'Indian Strategic Culture', in Bajpai and Pant (2013: ch. 3). Also see Singh (1999).
4. For instance I have had to pass over the views of important figures like Mohammad Ali Jauhar and Mukhtar Ahmed Ansari from the Muslim League, and M. N. Roy and Abani Mukherji from the Communist Party of India.
5. Also see Sen (1871: 145–6).
6. This point receives only passing mention in Gilboy and Heginbotham (2012: 31).
7. For a perceptive critique see Mohan (2009: 149–50).
8. This section draws on Sagar and Panda (forthcoming).

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