

now we have ‘rising powers’—it has always been with us as the site for the constitution of western identity. Greater attention to the global histories through which this intellectual bifurcation emerged now point the way to a truly post-western discipline.

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**Kautilya and non-western IR theory.** By Deepshikha Shahi. London: Palgrave Pivot. 2019. 180pp. £38.30. ISBN 978 3 03001 727 9. Available as e-book.

International Relations (IR) and political theory scholarship today is mainly constructed by the narratives of western civilization. From the Greeks to the biopolitics of Foucault, the theories we reverently study are confined to the discourse coming from one civilizational root, which curtails the ability of scholars to appreciate the founding principles of statecraft and diplomacy practised in non-western civilizations. It is in this context that Deepshikha Shahi's *Kautilya and non-western IR theory* is a welcome addition to the literature. This selective academic amnesia becomes rather poignant when considering that, while the Peloponnesian war and its chronicler, Thucydides, are placed at the birth of realist IR literature, Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is bracketed somewhere along with the medieval genius Machiavelli, though they are set apart from each other by a millennium and a half. Shahi's book unfolds, with great elan, the deep legacy of political–legal philosophy which existed in Mauryan India more than two thousand years ago.

There has been a growing interest among western scholars in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and he is sometimes portrayed as India's own Machiavelli. But, ironically, those who make this comparison are often ignorant of the fact that Kautilya wrote his *Arthashastra* when he was the chief minister to the Mauryan emperor, thousands of years before the beginning of the Italian renaissance. Shahi discusses in detail the academic ambiguity of western scholars at the start of her compelling work, emphasizing the importance of seeing Kautilya as a theorist whose philosophy pre-empted all European political traditions. ‘Against this backdrop, the initiatives to include the non-Western knowledge-forms of Political Realism/realpolitik in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* tended to instigate a sort of “chronological battle”—since Kautilya's *Arthashastra* predates Hobbes' “state of nature”, Machiavelli's “Prince”, Morgenthau's “unchanging human nature” (*animus dominandi*), and Kenneth Waltz's “anarchy”, the IR scholars engaged with this chronological battle voiced their discontent with the labelling of Kautilya as “Indian Machiavelli”, and not labelling of Machiavelli as “Italian or Mediterranean Kautilya” (p. 3).

In the first chapter, Shahi addresses the accusation that the *Arthashastra* is a mere guidebook on political realism that justifies the immoral methods of statecraft. She provides an insightful account of how Kautilya's realism is rooted in strict religious and philosophical beliefs. In particular, she highlights how Indian philosophical approaches like yoga, *Samkhya* and *Lokayata* are essential to understanding the Kautilyan narrative. The civilizational turn taken by the Mauryan empire after Emperor Asoka embraced Buddhism was one of the most decisive moments

in Indian history. In chapter three, Shahi discusses how Kautilyan *realpolitik* met Buddhist *moralpolitik* during the Asokan period, resulting in a fusion between the two discourses. The author aptly notes that *realpolitik* and *moralpolitik* are incompatible parallel forces in Eurocentric IR, as by definition *realpolitik*—the subject of IR theories such as realism and neo-realism—legitimizes the exercise of power even if it leads to violence and injustice, whereas *moralpolitik*—which is the concern of modern IR theories like post-modernism and feminism—harshly condemns the unjust use of force. (More interestingly, Shahi also argues that Augustine’s notion of self vs other and good vs evil is rooted in a European conception of *realpolitik* which legitimizes contemporary just wars.)

But Shahi goes on to argue that the incompatibility of *realpolitik* and *moralpolitik* is an anomaly rooted in European IR scholarship. She provides a clear picture of how the *realpolitik* of Kautilya and Buddhist *moralpolitik* grew in harmony in the ancient Indian political space. In comparing Kautilyan realism in *Arthashastra* with the political philosophy of Buddha, the author acknowledges the salient differences between Kautilyan *realpolitik* and *moralpolitik* in Buddhist political thought. Yet she sees Asoka’s Mauryan empire as an ideal example to illustrate how both Kautilyan *realpolitik* and Buddhist pacifism can successfully coexist. The transformation of Asoka after the victory of Kalinga is seen in traditional Buddhist literature as a moment driven by deep remorse, in search of a higher goal called *dhamma*. However, Shahi argues that Asoka’s adoption of morally based pacifism and his renunciation of war is not entirely a denial of conquest itself, but a change in its methods, from war to conquest by *dhamma*.

As Shahi observes: ‘It is this newfound principle of *dhamma* or “morality as a means of conquest” that most efficiently captures the eclectic style of Asoka’s exercise of power in international politics—indeed, it hints the possibility of a “fusion of *realpolitik* and *moralpolitik*”’ (p. 145). In the last chapter of her compelling work, the author sets out her contention that Kautilyan *Arthashastra* can serve as an alternative to Eurocentric International Relations. In doing so, she draws out the parallels between Alexander Wendt’s social constructivism and the Kautilyan model, which somewhat contrasts with her previous insistence on portraying Kautilya as a unique IR theorist.

In her concluding remarks, Shahi strikes an optimistic note about the potential of Kautilyan *Arthashastra* to enhance Indian IR and global IR. In her attempt to analyse Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*, Shahi has demonstrated great academic objectivity and distinction and has made a valuable contribution to reordering the mental bookshelf of international scholarship on IR.

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