

Cultural Explanation of Statecraft

The Politics and Policies of Asoka and Akbar

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Constructivism argues that the behaviour of actors in international politics is shaped by factors like identity, norms, rules, etc. Though it has been well argued that these factors shape and sometimes regulate the behaviours of political actors, not much has been written about the formation of such norms and how the identity of a political actor becomes operational through them. This article analyses the politics and policies of Asoka and Akbar, and argues that a lot can be explained by exploring the relationship between an actor and the masses that a political actor rules over or acts on behalf of them. If the actor enjoys legitimacy among the followers, it is easier to set a norm in motion which would be reflective of aspirations as well as expectations of both the actor and the masses. This maintains a balance in the polity, as seen in the cases of Asoka and Akbar.

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Among scholars of International Relations (IR), there is a growing trend to analyse ideas and norms that may both inform and influence a political actor's behaviour.¹ It is argued that beliefs, ideas and norms not only shape but also constitute the 'identity' of a political actor, which in turn has a significant influence on the policies of the state/political elite.² The argument has grown in significance because a state does not always behave in accordance with the precepts of the theory of Structural

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Realism—the most widely accepted theory in IR. Structural Realism claims that the international order is essentially anarchic in character and therefore in this ‘self-help’ system, states give foremost priority to security. However, since structural realism glosses over the process of ‘interaction’³ and the role of identity of actors involved in such interactions, it fails to explain the behaviour of states and political entities that sometimes explicitly run askew or contrary to the pattern of the anarchic ‘self-help’ dynamic.

For the purpose of finding an explanation for such actions, a debate has been raging in the theory of international politics about what other variable(s) can help in explaining the behaviour of such states, which appears to flout or does not conform to the arguments of Structural Realism. Further push for looking into the role of norms and identity in political behaviour of an actor came from the argument that mostly the discourse of international politics or IR has been dominated by Western scholarship, which is based on its own historical experiences, and therefore overlooks the culturally contextual understanding of the matters of the non-Western political entities/nation states. Their understanding of the issues may have taken different trajectories informed by their indigenously culturally shaped nature of such matters. Its examination becomes more important in the countries and societies where the culture is seen as an important source of self,⁴ like in South Asia. Such a culturally specific socio-geographical perspective can challenge ‘a particular geo-epistemological perspective’,⁵ as Ole Wæver and Arlene B. Tickner call the dominant Western narrative of IR, and create space for different ‘geo-cultural epistemologies’ to understand international politics as practiced and pursued by various states.

One approach that has been used and can help in identifying these missing links is to problematise the structure of international politics itself. In this, the fundamental claim of Structural Realism and its ubiquity are questioned, that the international system is anarchic and states have no option but to seek power and security. Questioning the very ontology of the anarchic structure of international system opens up space for the role of agency/political actor in the formation of such a structure which constructivists argue is ‘constitutive’.⁶ The assumption that political actors have a role in constituting structure, leaves space for analysing whether it is possible that there exist more than one international systems at the same time, depending on the agencies and their indigenous and exogenous interactions. It provides an opportunity

to explore and identify a causal link between the agency/political actor and its identity and the subsequent structures/systems that remained unexplored during the Cold War. However, since then it has drawn some attention.

Following the constructivist trend of problematising the Structural Realism's approach of taking the nature of interests and identities of actors for granted, this article argues that the belief or identity of a political actor has significant influence on the policies that it pursues. The decisions that such actors take are located in the socio-political surrounding through which they operate and believe in. Such decisions are located in the indigenous cultural understanding of the matters and thus probably indigenous ways to deal with them. These 'effective' decisions then develop into norms, which may not—and does not—be necessarily always so. Such practices of statecraft seem more likely in the culturally diverse countries like India where such diversity is taken as a trait as well as is asserted.

Norms, to which realism does not attribute any significance, are seen as superstructures with some regulating function, by the neoliberals. For constructivists however, norms have a crucial role. They do not only make behavioural claims on the actors; Martha Finnemore argues that norms also constitute actors' interests.⁷ Given the complexity involved in human interactions, the identity of the actors also gets influenced and shaped by norms.

Constructivists define norms as 'collective expectations about proper behaviour about a given identity'.⁸ Though it has been established that norms do regulate behaviour of humans and states and also constitute their identities, what the constructivists have been struggling with is the socio-political context in which these norms emerge.⁹ While explaining the evolution of norms, Ann Florine put forth three arguments: *first*, norms, like genes, regulate functioning 'directing the behaviour of their respective organism'; *second*, norms, like genes, are 'transmitted from one individual to another through similar processes of *inheritance*'; and third, 'norms, like genes, are "contested", that is, they are in competition with other norms that carry incompatible instructions'.¹⁰ While agreeing with the first two arguments, this article argues that in the contest between the various norms for defining and regulating behaviour of a political actor, the norms that are likely to emerge as successful are the ones set in motion by a powerful but 'legitimate' socio-political authority. These authorities themselves are quite sensitive to the socio-political structure

of their respective polities and aim to reflect that in the norms creation. The success and effectiveness of such norms will depend on their nature: Whether they reflect the socio-political structure of their concerned societies/polities or not? And what is the scale of their legitimacy among the subjects?

The other aspect that the constructivists are trying to explain for some time is that why some norms diffuse faster than others. Is it in the nature of the norms: Are they persuasive or convincing?¹¹ This article puts forth the argument that a norm has better chance to diffuse and better chances of receptivity if it is seen as convincing, in the first place. It means that it should not be seen in common perception to be forcefully imposed on its concerned audience. Here, the distinctiveness of Indian strategic culture that it preferred to create and practice norms which had wider appeal help in understanding the convoluted nature and wide appeal of these norms, reflecting the diversity of the Indian polity. The structure of the polities of Asoka and Akbar and their policies help in understanding this argument.

Contention may be put up (especially by Foucauldians and others) that if a higher authority is at the helm of affairs and creates a norm, how can it be called convincing, and not that the subjects are being persuaded by the hidden socio-political power-relations that exist in the structure in the first place. Why is it not like getting an order from the top which has to be followed, leaving no other option for the audience?¹² To this, I would argue that it will depend a lot on two factors: One, the nature of the norms itself. If a norm is seen generally to be good for a particular cause or populace, and in the Indian case appealing to a diverse population, it has chances of high receptivity. Otherwise, in case of an unappealing/unpopular norm the possibility of resistance remains high. Second, if there exists a cordial relationship between a ruler, that is the norm creator, and the subjects, the latter are more likely to concede to such norm formation and receive it rather positively, given their trust in the ruler.¹³ Both these factors remain informed by the indigenous socio-political environment, i.e., the construction and the nature of the polity.

The periods of Indian history ruled by King Asoka and King Akbar provide apt cases to test the above theoretical formulation. Both these rulers had or at least had tried to be benign authorities, to gain legitimacy in their respective ethnically and culturally diverse polities and were sensitive towards their subjects, smaller provinces and principalities.¹⁴ If Asoka was 'a political genius, a king with a rare understanding of human

being',¹⁵ given his 'thoughtfulness and imagination' to accommodate different power centres and heterogeneity of India, 'Akbar was the greatest king that India ever produced'.¹⁶ Notwithstanding the controversies associated with these two rulers at large, with the latter in particular,¹⁷ they have had formative socio-political impact on the political history and in the evolution of Indian statecraft. Analysing their belief systems, processes through which they pursued their ideas by establishing certain norms and the receptivity of those norms will be reflective of their way of statecraft.

INDIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE

It is argued that the Indian state lacks a well-established strategic culture. By this critiques mean that India lacks a proactive 'realistic' strategic thinking for pushing forth one's agenda. Scholars of Indian strategic culture and policy makers were taken by surprise when George Tanham produced his monograph on India's strategic culture in 1992. Tanham argued that 'Indian elites show little evidence of having thought coherently and systematically about national strategy'.¹⁸ He attributed this lack of coherence and systematic thinking to the complexities involved in the Indian domestic political system:

Ethnic, linguistic, religious, caste, and internal regional rivalries on a scale unimaginable to most Americans seem at times to prevail over national concerns and to threaten India's fragile coherence and national integration. At the same time, Indians appear consumed by personal and regional competition for political power-competition that diminishes India's claims to greatness and ambitions to play a larger international role.¹⁹

Since Tanham was writing in the background when many IR scholars were concerned about the changing dynamics of the international system,²⁰ his monograph overlooked the historical patterns and ideational beliefs in Indian strategic thinking and statecraft. The criticism against the lack of Indian thinking was directed at India not having a strategic culture to enter and pursue policies in an international system that was anarchical and without any higher authority out there to assure the security of 'weak states'.

Looking back, it appears that Tanham's monograph rightly did not introduce any change in the Indian thinking on strategic culture. As Alastair Johnston argues, 'there are consistent and persistent historical patterns in the way particular states (or state elites) think about the use

of force for political ends.²¹ Historically Indian political elite have had a priority of seeking domestic order and the policies pursued for that purpose had significant influence on the policies with other empires or states and in the international system. Indian strategic thinking is historically located in indigenous practices and ideas that is reflected in its foreign policy.

Tanham's understanding overlooked the internal socio-political structure of the Indian polity, the very nature and belief system of the Indian political elite. As the scholarship on ideational belief systems and role of norms have brought forth, the policies of states or their behaviour in the international system is informed by 'state identity'.²² Indian strategic culture bears strong historical imprints of a state identity constituted by the belief systems of political elites and prevailing norms in the country. These beliefs, norms and understanding of Indian history make the political elites to pursue policies that reflect its historical experience of statecraft, which has been endogenous rather than being entirely exogenous as Structural Realism would want us to believe.

The decision to choose an option among many is generally informed by the historical experience or historicity, belief system and set norms. Therefore, not choosing an option remains equally significant like choosing the one. As Johnston argues, to understand the complexities involved in the behaviour of a state that does not conform to the structural realism explanations, ideas and their relationship to behaviour, is to be linked and explained.²³ Thus, what shapes or decides policy of a state *vis-à-vis* its adversary depends on three basic but related questions: (1) the nature of conflict in human affairs; (2) nature of the enemy and; (3) the efficacy of violence.²⁴

Out of these three, the most important point appears to be 'the nature of the enemy', around which the other two revolve. Who is the enemy with whom a state is fighting? Is the use of force necessary to overcome the enemy? Or any other approach can be explored as well? Alexander Wendt argues that it is not necessary that every political actor may turn out to be an enemy in world politics.²⁵ That they will come to know only after having interaction. By sharing information or knowledge, the enemy can become a rival or, in the best possible scenario, a friend. Wendt calls them the three cultures of anarchy: Hobbesian, Lockian and Kantian.²⁶

There are two ways to look at this problem. One is to try to explain the consistency or variation in the behaviour of a state by looking into

its strategic culture. The role of formative ideational legacies becomes important. In this, we look into the relationship of ideas to behaviour. The influence of ideas should be verifiable by testing it against non-ideational influence.²⁷ The other way is to look into the ideas and norms that shape the strategic cultural approach itself. What does strategic culture comprise? A state or the political elite need to have some beliefs or ideas that they believe in and which they can translate into their strategic culture or policy. Whether it is the beliefs of the rulers or the general socio-political structure of their polities or the areas over which they rule that shapes their strategy, requires an investigation.

In India's strategic thinking, there is thrust for one strategic culture or the priority of use or non-use of force. There exists no duality: It is strategic and at the same time symbolic. They go together. Pacify the adversary by lulling or winning it over by diplomacy through, as Kautilya, otherwise a master of rational decision thinking and proponent of overcoming the adversary by any means, argues by offering gifts,²⁸ by accommodating different power centres and recognising them. It has shown considerable consistency. This is opposite to other realpolitik strategic culture, like the Chinese strategic thinking which, according to Alastair Johnston, has two strategic aspects: (1) symbolic or idealised set of assumptions and ranked preferences; (2) operational set (that is use of force) that had non-trivial effect on strategic choices. Johnston argues it is in the Chinese strategic culture to use force effectively when they think that it will be productive; the option of use of force resurfaces as soon as the adversary grows weaker and is unlikely to stand an assault, a strategy Johnston calls 'hard realpolitik strategic culture'.²⁹

Following the Johnston's formulation, apparently, no third approach has evolved for conflict and peace in the Chinese strategic culture or it is least preferred. While in the history of Indian statecraft, we have two great rulers who adopted policies that preferred peace over the use of force both in domestic affairs and which they then intended to universalise. This element is embedded in the Indian strategic thinking. Strategic culture of India, notwithstanding the rational choice understating of 'utility' of force or the realpolitik model, draws from the historical experiences and its preferences are ranked according to a set of norms, like the use of force as the last option or even 'for human betterment'.³⁰ They were practiced in various places at various times. This thinking, thus, inevitably appears to have been significantly influenced by the socio-political structure of the Indian polity which was vastly and ubiquitously diverse.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

To validate this theoretical formulation empirically, this article analyses the policies of two important and influential rulers in Indian history: King Asoka and King Akbar. Why these two? First, in social sciences, how firmly we may claim that we are unbiased in our selection of case studies but finally we have to settle with some. I am choosing these two because of their formative influence on Indian history, society, politics and statecraft. Second, there is some persistence in the policies of these two kings. Both had a vision of preferring to rule their subjects through peaceful means; non-use of force emerged as a norm in the reign of these two rulers, making the norm reference point for others later. By that I do not mean they entirely abandoned the use of force. It was there as 'symbolic virtue' but only used as a last resort, not instrumentally to overcome the adversary. Thus, I tend to inquire whether it is possible that these two rulers viewed domestic priority directed towards the elaboration of legitimating narrative for the regime.

Third, and importantly, it fills a methodological requirement of checking the consistency and persistency of the policy of the norm of non-use of force in the first place by tracing its use/non-use in the policies of Asoka and Akbar. The fact that the option of using force to achieve desired goals existed but they preferred to not use it is the argument that the article is trying to put forth. It strengthens our empirical validation.

Cross-national study is often considered better to validate an argument. Since this study deals with the concept of use/non-use of force in India, I take two periods of the Indian history that are formative in the evolution of the Indian strategic thinking and statecraft. One additional plus point with this selection of longitudinal cases is that they are separated by a long period of 1797 years. Identifying a consistent variable, if there is one, that guides a particular policy formulation and its pursuance for two different rulers separated by such a long period underlines the significance of that intervening variable in the strategic culture of the state. I would try to explore the policies of these rulers informed by the socio-economic structure of their subjects/territory over which they were ruling.

THE IDEA OF MORAL VICTORY OF KING ASHOKA

King Asoka, who ruled India from 269 BC till 232 BC, has been 'the greatest and noblest ruler India has known, and indeed one of the great kings of the world'.³¹ Asoka, the Mauryan King, ruled over an empire

stretching from the Himalayas to Mysore and from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea. Some argue that Asoka was the 'first ruler to forge India into a single nation state'.³² The policies of statecraft of Asoka are still considered to be unimaginable for a ruler who ruled over 2000 years ago over diverse polities.³³ Basing on the arguments of Structural Realism, Asoka should have gathered as much power as he could to overcome his adversaries. However, Asoka preferred an alternative way to govern his subjects and territories, basing it on norms which were informed by his belief and realistically assessing the structure of his polity.

After inheriting a huge empire, Asoka ruled more or less uneventfully for the first eight years, following the footprints of his predecessors. It was the fateful year 261 BC that changed the whole structure of his rule. Now the King, who many would argue, sought to consolidate his empire by exercising power, resorts to what he called 'moral victory'. In the Rock Edict XIII, King Priyadarsi, beloved of the Gods, which deals with the Kalinga conquest and bloodshed that it had unleashed leaving a strong mark on the psychology of King Asoka about wars and was the reason for his 'change of heart', states that 'The beloved of the Gods, conqueror of the Kalinga, is moved to remorse now'. Asoka states that war affects all. Therefore 'even a person who wrongs him must be forgiven for wrongs that can be forgiven'. This is a rather strong statement and is more about dealing with winning over the enemy by providing an alternative that would let both live amicably. Since one actor displays a strong gesture of mercy and readiness to live in a mutually acceptable positive relationship, it creates a possibility to cultivate trust between the two. The interaction thus makes it possible to know each other's intentions and assess the situation accordingly. Thus, King Asoka introduced a radical change in the concept of victory by stating that 'King Priyadarsi considers moral conquest [that is conquest by Dharma, Dharma-vijaya] the most important conquest'.³⁴

For moral victory, it does not require use of force. That does not mean that Asoka abandoned the possession of force. Force in such policies acted or acts as 'symbolic virtue'. And Asoka, though now the proponent of *Dhamma*, the Prakrit form of the Sanskrit word *Dharma*, reserved the authority to use force, whenever it was felt to be ineluctable. In the Pillar Edict IV Asoka states that he appointed governors to the provinces 'for the welfare and happiness of my provincial people'. For the purpose these provincial governors 'may perform their duties fearlessly, confidently, and cheerfully, they have been given discretion in the distribution of honors

and infliction of punishments'.³⁵ Asoka maintains that punishment was waiting for someone, like the forest peoples, 'to induce them to desist from their crimes and escape execution'.³⁶ By invoking punishment for violators of the set norms, Asoka asserted that he continues to hold the authority and could wield force. For establishing a balance between the use and no-use of force, the norms were set in motion for when and for what they were to use.

The language that Asoka used for the diffusion of his understanding of *Dhamma* and 'to spiritualise the statecraft and politics'³⁷ was the vernacular language, Prakrit. This move reflects the ruler's intention to keep the social-political structure of his polity in consideration as Prakrit was probably understandable to common people throughout the Asokan Empire.³⁸ To inculcate morality in his subjects and 'to consolidate political and economic power', Asoka used religion, Buddhism, which was spreading fast because 'it was the result of a more widespread movement towards change which affected many aspects of life from personal beliefs to social ideas'.³⁹ The changing or an urge for change in society made the norms of Asoka appealing for his subjects. By setting in motion norms that were reflective of the socio-political reality made it possible for Asoka's subjects to receive them easily. Using the court language Sanskrit for the Edicts would have impeded the diffusion and receptivity of the norms that Asoka wanted to set in motion. In other words, it would have been unappealing/unpopular.

The authority of King Asoka, his selection of norms for moral victory, religious tolerance, and use of Prakrit as language to spread his message were all factors that made his norms appealing for the common people. Therefore, it can be argued that the belief of King Asoka in certain norms made him to explore other things for pursuing his ideas or normative policies to get desired results instead of using force for getting them.

AKBAR'S IDEATIONAL STATECRAFT

The Mughal King, Akbar ruled over an India that was imagined by his principal spokesperson Abul Fazl: He considered India a peninsula, for he says that the sea borders Hindustan 'on the east, west and south'. Abul Fazal claims that Hindustan also included 'Sarandip (Sri Lanka), Achin (in Sumatra), Maluk (Malaya), Malagha (Malacca) and many islands', so that 'sea cannot really demarcate its limits'.⁴⁰

Akbar was enthroned at the age of 14 after the death of Humayun. After taking the reins of power, he quickly learnt the skill of rule. By

1560s, after taking the control of the administration, 'By frequently changing his *wakils* or prime ministers he reduced the importance of the position and strengthened his personal power'.⁴¹ He started to bring his empire under his control by employing diverse strategies.⁴² At the same time, Akbar grew interested in Sufis, Hindu yogis, and *sannyasis* (hermits).

Akbar's vision of India was of a diverse country based on language, religion, region and culture. In order to gain legitimacy across these divisions, Akbar tried to create a normative authority that would have been seen or perceived to be above than any particular affiliation that would have undermined his position in other groups. First attempt was made by inviting Islamic religious scholars for discussions in the *Ibadat Khana* (the place for worship). Akbar hoped that he would implement the suggestions of the theologians and in return secure recognition of his own supreme position.⁴³ In 1579, the theologians were 'persuaded to sign a statement of testimony (*mahzar*) recognizing that Akbar possessed a particular religious status'.⁴⁴ This did not meet the expectations of Akbar, though. Meanwhile he continued to look towards other religions in an attempt to reconcile core values of different religions.

Akbar possessed dual concept of sovereignty: The Divine Sovereign and the temporal sovereign. To see sovereigns and dispensing of justice and administering the world was seen by him as worship.⁴⁵ J.F. Richards argued that the 'formation of Mughal authority' was achieved by a two-pronged strategy. First, Akbar saw himself 'the elect of God', in an illuminationist theory (*farr-I izadi*), independent of any religion and open to being variously interpreted by Islamic theologians, adherents of pre-Islamic Persian court ritual, and Rajputs. Second was the creation of a kind of royal cult (*taubid-I Ilahi*). Both of these stressed on the personal qualities of the ruler,⁴⁶ informed and shaped by the socio-political structure of his polity.

Akbar wanted to be received as a legitimate, secular and benign ruler among his subjects, as gaining legitimacy was crucial for the success of the Mughal state. Given the complex socio-political structure of the Indian society, he adopted a strategy of demanding suzerainty from the various principalities existing in India. As Manjeet Pardesi argues, Akbar promoted 'universal' ideologies in the form of universal reconciliation (*sul-I kul*) with the goal to enhance state power after realising that the Muslims formed a minority in India.⁴⁷ Akbar's policy towards the autonomous or independent provinces and principalities was to use force only when they stood as a clear threat to his empire.

The concept of use of force for Akbar therefore stands almost in the same understanding like in case of Asoka. He did not aim to engineer the social fabric of the Indian society which remains one of the reasons why it could survive disintegration after the weakening of the Mughal state.⁴⁸ When it came to provinces or principalities that posed threat to the empire, military/force was used. The use of force was not, as in the Chinese strategic culture, exercised when the adversary was weak. In fact, when the adversary gave up and accepted Akbar's suzerainty, they were treated respectfully.⁴⁹

Few cases will be of interest. The five Shia Deccani Sultanates of Khandesh, Ahmednagar, Berar, Bijapur and Golconda, were left untouched after 1580. However, their intransigence and political links that they formed with the Safavids led to their incorporation later.⁵⁰ Akbar's political and military reforms in the late 1570s gave rise to dissatisfaction among the Mughal officials. It started in Bihar and crossed over to Bengal where a new appointed governor in 1580 was killed by the revolting *mansabdars*. They appointed their own government, and appointed Akbar's half-brother Mirza Muhammad Hakim, the governor of Kabul as their ruler. Akbar marched in 1581 to Kabul against Mirza Hakim. Despite the fact that he defeated Mirza Hakim, Akbar left Kabul in Hakim's hands.⁵¹

The case of Sindh is worth a brief analysis. Upper Sindh was ruled by Sultan Mohammad Khan and Lower Sindh by the Tarkhans. After being autonomous for long, Mughal interference in Sindh started from 1578–79. Sultan Mohammad could not stand the assault and pacified Akbar by offering him his daughter. Baqi was made permanent ruler of Bhakkar.⁵² The Mughal started second operation to incorporate Tarkhan principality of Thatta, by now ruled by Mirza Jani Beg. In the first two encounters, many soldiers of Mirza Jani Beg were killed. He wanted to establish cordial relations with Akbar and wrote a submissive letter after receiving a *farman*. However, Mohammad Sadiq Khan, the Mughal governor of Multan, did not forward the letter to Akbar. Sadiq Khan could not subdue Mirza Jani Beg and in the last phase of Sindh annexation, Abdur Rehman Khan-I Khanan was made the commander-in-chief.⁵³ After a long tussle, Khan-I Khanan was able to overcome Mirza Jani Beg and in 1592 Thatta became a part of the Mughal Empire. Khana-I Khanan received a *farman* for bringing Jani Beg to the court. After reaching the court in 1593, 'Mirza Jani Beg was kindly treated

by Akbar and was honoured with the rank of 3000'.⁵⁴ In fact, all the territories except Siwistan were restored to him.

These cases help in understanding Akbar's use of force and the nature of his relations with the rulers of the principalities and the provinces. It is arguable that the policies of Akbar were driven by securing his empire and letting the rulers of the principalities and the provinces continue to rule. As S.A.A. Rizvi argues, the Mughal boundaries were 'the strongest line of defence that had ever existed in India'. Rizvi continues that 'Akbar acquired these territories by diplomacy; his use of force was minimal'.⁵⁵ Thus, the practice of the non-use of force norm made the Mughal boundaries 'the strongest line of defence'.

CONCLUSION

Statecraft is a process. A state does not evolve or emerge in vacuum. It is a historical institution, a product of multiple contracts, negotiations and re-negotiations.⁵⁶ These factors of statecraft premise on belief system of the actors involved in it, making it more like geo-epistemological practice. The 'state identity' or identity of elite has a significant role in how the state sees the international system and policies that it pursues. The constructivism(s) that highlight the ontological bases of statecraft process and the international system, argue that the role of ideas and norms need to be analysed for better understanding of policies that a state identity pursues, both internal and external.

India, a hugely diverse country with an interesting history of peace and wars, has a lot to offer to the non-Western International Relations scholarship. A number of studies can be employed to explore the evolution of Indian statecraft by highlighting the role of the political actors' beliefs, identity and the norm creation. These are context- and culture-specific and can contribute in 'geocultural epistemologies'.⁵⁷

In fact the term 'geocultural epistemologies' has opened up new possibilities for introducing local, culture-specific approaches and understanding to the socio-political issues. Therefore, it is time to introduce 'indigenous ontological' studies to explain how the indigenous belief systems and norms have informed and shaped—and continue to do so—the policies of the rulers in these states and vice versa. Whether the nature of challenges was different and how they were dealt with, remain to be explored to enrich the existing scholarship of statecraft and international politics.

This article argued that in the cases of two great rulers of India, Asoka and Akbar, ideas and norms indeed regulate and constitute the state identity, as the norm of non-use of force in their reigns has had a crucial role in their policies of statecraft. It also argued that the creation of norms is likely if it is found to be helpful in bringing order and justice in a polity. The chances of its receptivity are high if it appeals to the wider audience which in turn will depend on the legitimacy of the norm-creator.

A.L. Basham argues that the Indian civilisation differs from the other civilisations of the world 'in that its traditions have been preserved without a break down to the present day'.⁵⁸ This is a strong statement. It needs to be verified by locating consistency in different variables, like in the ideas and belief system of non-use of force.

The policies of Asoka and Akbar, it appears, were not entirely driven by external threats as Structural Realism argues. Rather, here the priority was the domestic order and harmony rather than offensive and expansionist behaviour. The goal was to use a strategy that would make the people following different cultures to live respectfully with each other, and at the same time be loyal to the rulers. This strategy was driven by the need to bring the ruling authority in tune with realities of existing composite socio-political structure. The same model was preferred for other polities as well.

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