

Interview – Dilip Menon

Written by E-International Relations

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Professor Dilip Menon is Professor of History and International Relations and the Director of the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. He was educated at the Universities of Delhi, Oxford and Cambridge and did his PhD at Cambridge. His research for the past decade has engaged with issues ranging from caste, socialism and equality in modern India to oceanic histories and epistemologies of the Global South. He has worked collaboratively with scholars from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to develop a conceptual vocabulary for the social sciences from traditions of intellection in these spaces. He works with the idea of paracolony; of what always exceeded the temporality of the colonial encounter in the making of the modern world. He has published widely on these themes, including *Ocean as Method: Thinking with the Maritime* (co-authored with Nishat Zaidi, Simi Malhotra, and Saarah Jappie), *Walking on Water: Globalization and History*, *The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in modern India*, and edited volumes including *The cultural history of Modern India*, *Changing Theory: Concepts from the Global South* and *Capitalisms: Towards a Global History* (with Kaveh Yazdani).

Where do you see the most exciting debates/research happening in your field?

That is a difficult question to answer since the idea of what one's field is changes from time to time and is governed by the world as it is. For instance, as an undergraduate studying history in the 1980s, the Subaltern Studies collective framed the thinking of a generation trying to wrestle with the iniquities of the nation state and the uncertain legacies of nationalism. Even for those studying modern India, it became *de rigueur* to read French poststructuralism, the Annales school, the British Marxist social historians and so on. Being a mere historian was not enough. The agitations against the recommendations of the Mandal Commission extending the remit affirmative action in the 1990s meant that, belatedly, Indian social sciences had to engage with the social animosities engendered by the persistence of caste. Historians turned to literary scholars and their studies of dalit autobiographies in search of a paradigm that engaged with the iniquities of an academic space dominated by upper castes. The point that I am trying to make is that the very idea of a field is protean, contingent, conjunctural and so on. That is, if one is an interesting scholar not invested in a rigid idea of a discipline: the belief, for example, that history can be done only by working with the archives of the state and other archaic notions!

My move to South Africa and a society in transition demanded an engagement with the idea of decoloniality and the conceptual challenge of thinking a paradigm that was not Europhone, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o put it. The idea of "southern fact, northern theory" is a given in the social sciences, reflecting the intellectual biography of academics as much as the political economy of academe centred in EuroAmerica. Therefore, for me the most exciting debates were happening less in history, a theoretically conservative discipline, and more in the fields of anthropology (Eduardo de Viveiros Castros, Eduardo Kohn), political economy (Enrique Dussel, Bonaventura de Sousa Santos), literature (Walter Dignolo) and philosophy (Sylvia Wynter and Achille Mbembe). All of them were thinking less with the idea of the postcolonial and more with the idea of a persistent coloniality ("imperial durabilities" as Ann Stoler put it); their questions related to epistemological dependence rather than territorial independence. Alongside this were attempts to think against the Eurocentric definition of philosophy drawing upon the longer temporalities of Islamic and Confucian traditions of intellection (Peter Adamson, Bryan van Norden, Wang Hui). Ranajit Guha, in his time, had been insistent that history needed to be conceptual, if it were not to become a dull accumulation of facts, and it was this impulse that stayed with me. This led to my edited volumes titled *Capitalisms: Towards a Global History* (2020)

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which tried to decentre the history of capitalism from Europe and *Changing Theory: Concepts from the Global South* (2022) that attempted to begin the enterprise of generating a conceptual vocabulary from the languages of the Global South from Arabic to Zulu.

Moving away from the inheritance of a colonial pedagogy and the persistent structures of the political economy of academic publishing meant adopting the strategic essentialism (to borrow Spivak's phrase) of the term Global South. However, given the fact of global warming and the emergence of thinking about the Anthropocene, the exigent problem became one of thinking with the planet as opposed to the human centred notion of the globe, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has so lucidly argued. Living on the edge of a precipice, and, in many cases, literally with water up to our necks, categories like the First World and Third World, Global North and Global South seem to have exhausted their polemical purchase on our imagination. There have to be authentic trans-hemispheric conversations and a genuine global history that engages with the ocean and transnational connections as well as a longer temporality than the colonial and post colonial (the latter equally a polemical category). So given the trajectory of my thinking, I have been drawn to histories that engage with the time and space of the ocean like Engseng Ho's magisterial *Graves of Tarim* that looks at the space between the Hadramawt and SE Asia over a period of five hundred years; a space-time that sits alongside the colonial yet not wholly determined by it. Or Sanjay Subrahmanyam's commanding work, including the productive idea of connected histories that thinks athwart conventional continental divisions and connects Europe, Asia and south America thematically.

An old fashioned concentration on British Empire, French Empire etc is no longer possible given the multiple intersections of geographies and lives. For me the most fascinating emergent work has been on Indian Ocean Islam and Islamic cosmopolitanism (Nile Green, Mahmood Kooria, Wilson Chacko Jacob, Ronit Ricci, Seema Alavi) that through engaging with the movements of trade, migration, and theology connect Indonesia to India, and beyond to East Africa and West Asia. The idea of connected oceans as in the work of Renisa Mawani and Isabel Hofmeyr allow us to move beyond the heuristic of the separateness of the Indian, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, as also narrow national histories. A whole slew of new works (Johan Mathew, Jatin Dua, Nidhi Mahajan, Thomas McDow, Pedro Machado, Jeremy Prestholdt) allow us to think about the global connections from India to the USA of slavery, textiles, and mercantile capital in the 19th century. The new generation of historians pose a significant challenge to the narrow national and area studies histories by seeing the world as their oyster.

How has the way you understand the world changed over time, and what (or who) prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking?

If I think about my life, being born in independent India in the 1960s and witnessing the growing authoritarianism of the ruling party culminating in the Emergency in the mid 1970s, the idea of nationalism soured early. At the same time, we lived alongside the vestiges of larger imaginations of political solidarity, from the invocation of the Bandung Conference to ideas of non-alignment, the Third World, and uncanny connected geographies from Egypt to Yugoslavia. This was an inheritance of internationalism that connected us back to the early 20th century when nationalism meant a perception of nations among other nations, not an exclusive inwardness. Alongside this understanding of geography which imagined a map of anticolonial affinity beside the pink map of empire, there was also the ideological map of socialism with its centre in the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, American coups and wars on countries ranging from Korea to Guatemala, Iran and Vietnam, sat alongside the wars of national liberation as African countries gained their independence from the 1960s onwards. Then the Soviet Union came to an end: everything that had seemed forever was no more. American triumphalism about the end of history, rather its culmination in the Liberal International Order presided over by the USA, soon came to be unsettled by the emerging hegemony of China. This arc from 1945 to the present shows the significant changes that have happened in a lifetime. This concatenation of imaginations has influenced the way that one conceives politics, states, and the idea of permanence – the only constant is change.

Our undergraduate education in India was within a Marxist habitus; and this included not only Marx, but a whole slew of British historians like Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Sheila Rowbotham et al and French philosophers like Louis Althusser and Jacques Ranciere. The Subaltern Studies moment introduced other paradigms ranging from *microhistoire* (à la Le Roy Ladurie and Carlo Ginzburg); the Annales school (Jacques Le Goff, Roger Chartier,

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Fernand Braudel); French poststructuralism (Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida); and the debates over structure and agency that were central to the debates of the time. All of this had a huge influence on our generation as we tried to develop narratives that were not just about nationalism, communalism, and colonialism alone. The search was for other lives and other times and cultural forms that inflected and worked against a mainstream politics. One of the most significant essays of the time was Shahid Amin's essay on perceptions of Gandhi in eastern UP and how the idea of Gandhi as Mahatma was constructed through rumour, popular religion, and local myths. Historical anthropology was a major influence in the attempt to understand the collective mentalities of "the people" and the works of Natalie Zemon Davis, Hans Medick, David Sabeen, and Robert Darnton were crucial to the reconstruction of imaginaries other than the nationalist.

When I went up for a PhD in Cambridge, in many senses, I had to leave much of this behind, since Oxbridge (I had a short stint at Oxford prior to this) had a historical paradigm that was resolutely Rankean and centred on the state and its archives. While one bucked at the reins, it was a period of learning the skills of reading the archives, constructing narratives, and investing in the verifiable. The major influence at the time was Sir Christopher Bayly who had made the 18th century his own first through a rereading of narratives of decline in India and arguing for the vibrancy of mercantile capital which created a slew of successor states alongside the slow decline of the Mughals. Second, the 18th century saw the emergence of the grammar and vocabulary of empire from Britain to Africa and Asia, and as he argued in *The Imperial Meridian* there was a circulation of personnel, ideas and institutions across the empire. The idea of a global history, and of states such as the Ottoman which were 'paracolonial' formations that were not entirely subordinated to Empire, allowed one to rethink an unreconstructed Hegelianism that worked with one spacetime. Chris also engaged with the big ideas of modernity and of liberalism looking at these within a global framework rather than the usual diffusionist view from Europe.

I would say the question of influence is a layered one. One's mind, life experiences, as much as immediate political contexts bring into relation what one has sometimes been reading in an unsystematic and dilettantish fashion over the years. While a graduate student and working on the idea of popular culture I had occasion to read a lot of the Annales school, but it was Bakhtin's precise formulations on the abundant joyfulness of what he called unofficial culture that stayed with me. His rejection of formalism and deep engagement with words and actions away from what he saw as the dead hand of philology unexpectedly came back to me when I started work on the idea of developing concepts from the Global South. Words, as he said, come to us from the mouths of people, not from dictionaries. This plangent formulation let me move away from an engagement with the idea of classical thought to the idea of the demotic: concepts generated by people in their everyday engagement with politics, ethics and the self. Again, as I commenced this project, a constant intellectual companion, Edward Said, who I had been reading for his polemical engagement with imperial paradigms of misunderstanding cultures, came back to me through another book. His very literary work titled *Beginnings*, led me to consider more philosophically the question of what it was to begin a new project. How was one to imagine departure, beginning, canonical thinking, and the question of filiations with existing intellection even as one thought beside it?

You have been credited with developing a 'paracolonial framework' through which to understand the modern world. What is 'paracoloniality'? How is this different from the postcolonial framework?

I mentioned earlier the use by Chris Bayly of the idea of the paracolonial in talking about Ottoman empire and Thailand which were not colonized and had a parallel temporality. In my ongoing work I am trying to think this idea through more systematically, to move away to a framework of multiple, intersecting temporalities rather than the one time of the colonial. This unreconstructed Hegelian notion then spawns the triad of precolonial, colonial and postcolonial which despite the sense of progression is mired in the overweening sense of the influence of the colonial. While not underplaying the violence and dispossession of colonialism as a historical force, it is important also to think about colonialism as 1) productive of parallel geographies of affinity driven by the impulse of anti-colonialism – the phenomenon of nationalisms in exile 2) sitting alongside earlier geographies of trade, pilgrimage, and migration that it never fully controlled 3) limited by its own inabilities and uncertainties to penetrate certain social and geographical spaces – the idea of the limited raj 4) unable to enter certain lifeworlds governed by linguistic and cultural intransigencies and so on. Colonial modernity was invested in a notion of a singular universal geography and time which arguably remained at the level of imperial ambition. Anti colonial thought drew upon these paracolonial

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imaginings – of space, time, and culture – to build its disparate and varied projects. The postcolonial framework stays within the world of the colonial and its epistemological ambitions; see for example Spivak, Guha, Chakrabarty et al and their reliance on Euroamerican categories and paradigms. Gandhi on the other hand or Birsa Munda draw upon categories of thought and trajectories of history that draw on local knowledges and the invention of genealogies and filiations with myth, religion, and traditions. Right now, we need to break away from the postcolonial trap that requires alignment with the reigning political economy of academe. We are required to make ourselves legible through western theory; we leap away nimbly from Dhanbad to Derrida and from Latur to Levinas, completely ignoring the intellectual landscape around us. If we are to understand the present crisis of India and its glorification of an Indian past, we have to understand the colonial origins of such thinking. Most of what right wing thinkers in India regurgitate are pale imitations of early Orientalist discourse by William Jones et al; the period of Indophilia as Thomas Trautmann characterized it. The paracolonial is attentive to both elite and subaltern forms of thinking that have sat alongside colonial modernity and have allowed for a recuperation of self from the damage wrought by colonialism. The right wing on the other hand, can be characterized as victims of a kind of Stockholm syndrome, where they have grown to love colonial sentimentalization of Indian tradition, despite its hierarchies and inner violence.

In *Changing Theory*, your edited book, you bring together conceptual vocabularies from Asia, Africa and Latin America to develop a political theory from the Global South. Why is such an initiative required and what were your major findings?

As academics in the Global South we work within the political economy of a paradigm determined by Europe and the United States of America. The major publishing houses, the journals of repute and so on are located there and the academic literature as much as the current theoretical orientations are also determined there. Given the hierarchy of publishing, papers published in “foreign” journals rank higher than those published in local ones. This reflects both a lack of self confidence in our parts of the world, as also the fact that predatory publishing has been the industry’s response to the pressure on academics to spend more time publishing than thinking. The result of all of this is the tendency to hitchhike on currently popular paradigms in EuroAmerica, and render experiences in India and elsewhere commensurable with arguments in those spaces. One striking example of this was within Partition studies in the 1990s and early 2000s that sought to locate itself within the literature on the Holocaust and questions of trauma and memory. This hitchhiking strategy worked well for visibility for local academics even though the parallel was stretched and arguably inapplicable. Perhaps the history of Partition could have been better located in the history of violence following the end of colonialism in Asia and Africa – Malaya, Burma, Kenya and so on. Complex arguments could have been made of the shortcircuiting of civil society under colonialism, the generation of antagonistic identities to counterbalance the colonial state’s exteriority, the entrenchment of gendered identities in the masculinist disposition of colonial authority and so on. However, these would have required more historical and comparative work; riding on an existing body of literature was easier. And of course, “local” experiences became legible through their insertion into a “universalist” discourse.

There is an equal mixture of bad faith, the influence of structures of academic power, and colonial cringe in this succumbing to narratives that come from elsewhere. It is almost as if there are no intellectual tradition to draw upon in Asia and Africa to understand historical and contemporary experience and narratives. The *Changing Theory* project brought together academics across the board in terms of seniority as much as disciplinary affiliation and posed a simple question. If we were to develop theoretical positions and concepts from our spaces to study history, literature etc where would we begin? This was an act of remembering (shaking off the amnesia that Ganesh Devy referred to) and experimentation as much as that of temerity. The question of amnesia is worth staying with. Very few of us have the training or intellectual wherewithal to read and parse Sanskrit, Urdu or Persian texts, and even texts in the regional languages. Our education as Krishna Kumar once observed has made us incompetent in several languages! It was part an acceptance of what we had to work with and part theoretical innovation to depart from questions of genealogy, tradition and going back to the classical. The exercise was literary and philosophical as much as anthropological – to take a word from Arabic, Sanskrit or Zulu and explore its conceptual entailments and field of meanings. So we had words like *raj*, and *kavya* which already had a set of meanings and commentary adhering to it, as much as words like *tarbiyya* and *musafir* which were explored within detailed anthropological contexts, yet yielding larger landscapes of meaning.

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One of our tendencies is to italicize local words like *izzat*, *kartavya* etc and parse them in terms of honour, duty and so on. Our enterprise demanded a staying within local contexts of meaning and not moving to an easy commensurability with established EuroAmerican conceptual vocabularies. It was to theorise what was in italics, to theorise in italics as it were, and resist the easy move to hitchhike on an existing set of narratives and concepts. Our major findings are in the book; the proof of the pudding as it were. I would suggest that you read it to look at how theory can be renewed and we can begin an ethical project of what anthropologists call an *emic* understanding.

How can epistemologies from the Global South help counter contemporary issues of climate change, refugee crises and majoritarianism? Do these substantively give us the tools to rethink the international order today?

A question like this has a hidden assumption. That EuroAmerican theory helps us understand the present, and questions of equality and freedom etc while epistemologies of the Global South are in some sense passé, they belong to another world that is past. Amartya Sen in his work has shown how we could think with questions of equality, ethics and freedom drawing upon Asoka as much as the Mahabharata and so on. These are texts that imagine emancipation and just behaviour precisely because they are located in the space of contentious hierarchy. We have to engage in the task of recuperation and critical analysis just as Aristotle and Plato have been recovered from their location in, and firm belief in, slavery, or Kant from his racism and misogyny, by European scholars.

That said, there is work to be done. If we are looking for easy resolution as in a Gideon's Bible – when in despair read Chapter X verse Y – then we are going to get nowhere fast. We have to return to old texts with new questions as EuroAmerican theory has done, by going back to Plato, Augustine et al in order to address exigent theoretical issues. Colonialism introduced a caesura in our thinking, so those who deal with texts from the classical period are seen as Indologists, Islamicists are those who study medieval and early modern habits of thinking and so on. The Mahabharata for example deals with states and war, ethical behaviour in conflict, and in the end the question of the futility of violence. Are these not lessons for our times? Yet again, there are instances that we could draw upon to understand environmental thinking. The famous passages dealing with the burning of the Khandava forest and the Pandavas relentless killing of animals that flee the conflagration are framed by the story of a mother bird trying to protect its fledgelings while reflecting on human perfidy. These are a few examples. There is a whole treasure trove of texts in multiple languages that we can work with (if necessary through translations) in order to reflect on the crises of the present. We rush to Foucault in order to understand the workings of power; Foucault goes back to the Greeks to comprehend the lineaments of the present. We tend to be myopic and work with an abbreviated temporality in our theorizing. Muzaffar Alam for example, revealed to us the *akhlaq* tradition of medieval and early modern texts that has informed ethical governance in South Asia.

It is indeed from the epistemologies of the Global South that we can find the resources to understand our contemporary situation rather than working with an universal template for the problems of the world. As Dipesh Chakrabarty observed a generation earlier, we cannot think our histories merely in terms of lack and absence – we don't have capitalism, individualism, revolution etc. Our questions should be what are the intellectual resources that we have? What can we do with them? Are we willing to put in the hard graft to think with the plethora of traditions ranging across religions, temporalities and divisions of textual and non textual?

How do oceanic histories and languages contribute to the development of non-European traditions of thinking?

One of the things about thinking with the ocean is that one then has to deal with a different geography; one that transcends the terrestrial hubris of empires and nations. We are alerted to the historic movement of people across millenia; whether the travels of the first anatomically human groups 40000 years ago from Africa to Polynesia and elsewhere, as also the movements of Christians, Muslims, Armenians, Jews etc into the South Asian subcontinent. The earliest mosques, churches and synagogues are to be found on the southwest coast of India, Kerala in particular. Parallel to that we have the movement of Buddhism outwards to East and South East Asia, and Hinduism to SE Asia in the time of the Cholas. Before we get to the question of non European traditions, thinking with the ocean helps correct the narrow Hindu terracentric imagination of India as extending from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari

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and Gujarat to the north eastern states. We move away from a myopic Hindu historiography that refused to get its feet wet. To write a history of South Asia requires us to engage with the sheer diversity of religions, languages, ethnicities and so on.

To move to the larger question, once we take into account that the movement of people across the ocean created hugely miscegenated cultures, we start moving away from singular narratives to more complex and heterogeneous ones. Braudel remarked long ago that thinking about South Asia in the 17th century required us to engage with a geography not determined by the short history of the nation state. So the southwest of what is now called India was integrated via the ocean with a space that extended as far as south America via West Asia and Europe. The south east of India was continuous with SE Asia and China. Given this we can begin to think about questions like Indian Ocean Islam and the circulation of legal texts, personnel and traditions in a wide arc from Melaka to the Swahili coast with the considerable admixture of languages involved in which Arabic played a major role. Prior to the emergence of the “West” and colonialism there was an already existing circulation of ideas across the oceans the history of which is only being written now. It requires us to engage with vaster geographies, a multilingual universe, and think with the question of dialogue and circulation; thinking for example as Nile Green has done recently with Arabic as a South Asian language and a maritime lingua franca before the coming of the Europeans.

To what extent is today’s international order and the discipline of international relations shaped by Euro-American ways of thinking? Has your work pointed to any overarching, alternate imaginaries of the world?

International Relations as a discipline has its roots in imperial ideology and a civilizational hierarchy which was explicit in colonial thinking (as the work of Vineet Thakur and Peter Vale among others has shown). Anthony Anghie’s historically rich analysis of the discipline as the continuation of imperialism through other means is another example. And, as we know, the idea of the Liberal International Order reflects the present unequal world order in which Europe and the US of A see themselves as the policemen of the world. So we have putative spaces of “order” governed by the rhetoric of democracy and a vast landscape in Africa, Asia and elsewhere of failed states, tribal loyalties and internecine warfare. For anyone studying IR in the Global South, the discipline appears like a judgement on our benighted spaces that leaves out the actual working of power in the world; the depredations on newly emergent states by European powers and the US of A ranging from coups, assassinations, and economic skewering through structural adjustment programs etc. The initial attempts at worldmaking, as Adom Getachew has called it, by newly emergent decolonised nations through the institutions of the UN, for example, were scuppered by the western powers through a rendering of the UN as a infructuous institution for maintaining peace or questioning neoimperial politics.

There has of course been a whole range of literature that questions the very foundations of IR as a discipline (ranging from Robbie Shilliam and Siba Grovogui to Amitav Acharya and Ayşe Zarakol). Apart from those arguing from the belly of the beast, as it were, the most significant development for me has been alternative theorizations of the world, of international order and an alternate cosmopolitanism that looks beyond the self regarding rhetoric of EuroAmerica. The rise of China (only perceived as the “Chinese threat” in the febrile American imagination) has also resulted in a recuperation of alternate traditions of thinking the world, as for example, the recovery of the idea of *tianxia* (all under heaven) as a counter to Kantian cosmopolitanism with its unreflectiveness towards imperial difference. Zhao Tingyang’s exposition of this idea while it contains a kernel of Chinese nationalism, and a slight amnesia towards history in the region, still is important as a laying out of an alternative landscape of thought which moves us away from the Eurocentric realist position: things are what they are, and the devil take the hindmost. In India, unfortunately, there has been less intellectual input into thinking with notions of war and peace and world order, or political authority despite the rich resources of the Mahabarata and the Arthashastra. What we have are political appropriations that are crudely nationalist, and less than scholarly, working with cliches of non-violence and ancientness.

The Bharatiya Janata Party and its supporters in India have emphasised knowledge of the Sanskrit language, Vedic texts and ‘Indic’ traditions to ‘decolonise’ Indian society. This has been accompanied by increased violence against religious minorities like Muslims and Christians. How is it that the language of decolonisation has simultaneously been used for such political goals and intellectual inquiries as

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yours?

The language of decolonization used by the BJP, RSS and Hindu ideologues is intellectually impoverished because there is no real investment in scholarship in Sanskrit, or regional language traditions. What we have is a politics of gesture for which authenticity and ancientness are the rhetorical watchwords that substitute for rigorous intellectual work. Thus, we have the irony that the right wing imagination is truly colonized in its need for approval and a turn towards statements made by colonial Orientalists that praise Hindu civilization and its philosophies. We know that the recuperation of ancient Hindu texts by colonial officials was done with the political imperative of delegitimizing the preceding Muslim rule which the British were contending against at the level of the imagination as well. Moreover, this recovery of Hindu texts was done without an engagement with the hierarchy and violence that was implicit in our classical tradition (on the other hand, the missionaries went too far in the other direction by identifying Hinduism with Manu and little else). This inheritance – the uncritical Indophilia of early British Orientalists and the colonial rejection of the Islamic heritage – makes the Hindu right the real legatee of colonialism. So their version of decolonization is not a scholarly enterprise, it is a shallow, political enterprise, ironically that accepts the blessing of colonialism. And of course, for them decolonization involves a return to Sanskrit, not Arabic, Persian, Pali and so on accompanied by a desire for approbation from the west. It's a very strange position, indeed!

What decolonization means for the academics of the Global South engaged in an anticolonial stance is to engage with the epistemicide (de Sousa Santos), amnesia (Devy), and loss of self (Nandy) that colonialism entailed. It necessitates an engagement with the entirety of traditions – elite and subaltern – within a nation, as much as a recognition that there is no such thing as “national” knowledge that is hermetically sealed from influences from elsewhere. Decolonizing means thinking with Kant and Marx and Foucault, but also thinking with Kautilya, Confucius, and Ibn Khaldun. Yet again, it also means thinking with the quotidian, with the everyday practice of politics, ethics and knowledge of self; in short a philosophical anthropology as the Brazilian anthropologist de Viveiros Castros puts it. Its not only a return to tradition and great men, but an engagement with the demotic: from the mouths of people as it were.

A decolonized world would be one in which the current political economy of knowledge – institutional, pedagogical, and publishing – is not centred on the west. That multiple traditions of thinking are brought to bear on a problem, so that scholars working on India and elsewhere, cannot carry on the absurd practice of not knowing regional languages well. It will be truly a multilingual, multi-tradition, and equal space of thinking and exchange for which we need to have the intellectual courage and temerity. The true act of decolonization is as Bob Marley put it when we emancipate ourselves from mental slavery and don't rush to intellectual traditions that come from elsewhere, and tainted by the residue of colonial power, to understand ourselves and our situation.

What is the most important advice you could give to young scholars of International Relations?

Read widely. Learn languages. Think about power. Have the courage to speak from a location, rather than a universal set of postulates. Above all, read, read, read.