

Teaching International Relations in India: From Pedagogy to Andragogy

Written by Deepshikha Shahi

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DEEPSHIKHA SHAHI, OCT 29 2016

The academic discipline of International Relations in India (Indian IR henceforth) has remarkably evolved along a stretched historical trajectory. This evolution can be mapped through two inter-related dynamics: (i) Institutional; (ii) Thematic. Though the gradual expansion of the institutional base and the innovative extension of thematic layers have nationally enhanced the status of this academic discipline, it is hard to justifiably claim that a sufficient amount of attention has been paid on the 'strategy of teaching' in Indian IR. In other words, the strategic importance of conjoining the 'methodology' and 'goal' of teaching remains undervalued in Indian IR. One of the consequences of this undervaluation is the scanty scholarly contribution of Indian IR to the discourses on Global IR, notwithstanding the visible institutional and thematic advancement at the national level. The present article aims to highlight the downsides of neglecting the strategy of teaching in Indian IR, thereby suggesting the potential pedagogic and andragogic pathways for overcoming them. The article is divided into three sections. The first section briefly outlines the broadening institutional grounding of Indian IR. The second section demonstrates the proliferating thematic underpinnings of Indian IR. Finally, the third section sets out to critically interrogate the disjoint between the methodology and goal of teaching in Indian IR. The article draws the conclusion that a strategic shift from pedagogy to andragogy could possibly amplify the intellectual inputs of Indian IR to Global IR.

Evolution of Indian IR: Institutional Buildups

From an institutional perspective, the establishment of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) in 1943 marked the inaugural point in the evolution of Indian IR. However, the process of teaching in Indian IR methodically took off with the formation of the Indian School of International Studies (ISIS) in 1955. Later on, its formal scope widened when the ISIS (which was initially part of Delhi University) was merged with Jawaharlal Nehru University and was re-christened as the School of International Studies (SIS) in 1970. At present, an eclectic array of IR courses are taught not only at Jawaharlal Nehru University and Delhi University, but also other Indian universities including Jadavpur University, South Asian University, University of Hyderabad, Sikkim University, Pondicherry University, Central University of Gujarat, Central University of Punjab, Central University of Jharkhand, University of Calcutta, University of Kerala, University of Madras, Jiwaji University, Bundelkhand University, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar University, Mahatma Gandhi University, Symbiosis International University, Christ University of Bengaluru, Jamia Millia Islamia, Aligarh Muslim University, O.P. Jindal Global University, Manipal University, and Annamalai University. So far as the teaching of preliminary and advanced IR courses in India is concerned, the infrastructural platform offered by these universities play a central role.

Apart from numerous public, private, and international universities, the institutional foundation of Indian IR has been further strengthened by the rapid mushrooming of both government and non-government research institutes/think-tanks such as the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, Centre for Air Power Studies, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, Institute of Chinese Studies, Centre for Policy Research, Foreign Policy Research Centre, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, Observer Research Foundation, Delhi Policy Group, Energy and Resources Institute, and Gateway House: Indian Council on Global Relations. Though these institutes stimulate the scholastic standing of Indian IR, they play a tiny role in influencing the process of teaching. In the main, graduate and post-graduate scholars with substantial years of teaching/learning

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experience in universities qualify to join these research institutes/think-tanks along with a few retired diplomats (often holding prolonged work experience but little research experience).

As the institutional progression of Indian IR is gaining momentum, a wide range of critical literature has cropped up to investigate its deficiencies. The troubleshooting instigated by this critical literature has identified myriad glitches over time: Nehru's uncontested dominance over India's foreign policy as a hurdle for independent scholarship in the years following the country's independence from colonial rule (Rana, 1988; Bajpai, 2005); the subsequent flawed conflation of IR studies with Area Studies (Rana and Misra, 2004; Sahni, 2009); the derisory disciplinary location of IR in Political Science departments (Behera, 2007; Sahni, 2009); the discipline's narrow Delhi-centric character (Behera, 2007); the absence of a well-defined merit-based criteria for official hiring, salary increases, promotion, and retention of IR professors (Paul, 2009); the unsatisfactory library holdings (Paul, 2009; Gaffar, 2015); insufficient government and corporate funding in spite of the uncritical acceptance of the Indian state as a 'benevolent-protector' (Behera, 2007); the shortage of foreign funding in the initial years (Behera, 2003); the excess of foreign funding in recent years (Baru, 2010); and so on. Although this critical literature has constructively indicated sundry institutional-infrastructural deficiencies, it remains silent on the factors responsible for and problems emanating from the 'under-utilization' of the existing institutional infrastructure. While Indian IR still grapples with many of these pressing institutional-infrastructural issues, its thematic content continues to steadily acquire new heights.

Solidification of Indian IR: Thematic Upsurges

For a rational understanding of the transmuting themes of Indian IR, the following question raised by Siddharth Mallavarapu (2012) holds specific significance: 'Why has disciplinary international relations tended to be so integrally connected with the changing fortunes of powerful players in the international system?' Following a similar trend, the thematic journey of disciplinary international relations in India (read Indian IR) has tended to be integrally connected with the changing fortunes of the Indian state in the international system. This entire thematic journey can be bifurcated into two phases: (i) Primitive; (ii) Contemporary. The primitive phase was relatively self-skeptical wherein the sole concern of the newly-independent Indian state was to safeguard, uphold, and consolidate its sovereignty and prosperity. By contrast, the contemporary phase is moderately self-assured wherein the chief ambition of the Indian state is to live up to the freshly acquired image of a 'rising power'. The domestic and global factors resulting in the altering fortunes of the Indian state have manifested in the thematic contours of Indian IR.

The thematic footing of primitive Indian IR was somewhat parsimonious. It comprised a constrained set of motifs primarily pertaining to the 'hard power' dimension of India's foreign policy: (i) relations with major powers (Appadorai, 1969; Venkataramini, 1982); (ii) responses to the Cold War (Ganguly, 1992); (iii) the tactic of non-alignment (Rana, 1969; Misra, 1981); (iv) the plan of nuclear deterrence (Mirchandani, 1968; Vanaik, 1985); (v) the role of the Third World (Rana, 1996; Nayyar, 1975); (vi) the ethics of war and peace (Ganguly, 1997); (vii) the implications of international law (Chimni, 1993); (viii) the approach to multilateralism under the ambit of the UN and other regional forums such as SAARC and ASEAN (Rajan, 1961; Muni and Muni, 1984); (ix) the attitude towards the country's South Asian neighbour-states (Prasad, 1962); and (x) the asymmetries of East-West/ North-South (Lall, 1978; Misra, 1980).

While these traditional themes more or less retain an enduring presence, the thematic pillars of contemporary Indian IR have dramatically multiplied in recent times. One of the most outstanding features of these multiplying thematic pillars is an unprecedented emphasis on 'theorising'. Occasionally, the emphasis on theorising has been expressed as a prerequisite for enhancing the 'soft power' of the rising Indian state (Mehta, 2009; Paul, 2009). This emphasis on theorising IR, in turn, has led to the assimilation of various hitherto unheeded conceptual categories: (i) cultures and psychologies (Singh, 2011; Nandy, 2013); (ii) nationalisms and modernities (Mallavarapu, 2005); (iii) histories and mythologies (Vivekanandan, 2011; Rajagopalan, 2014; Narlikar and Narlikar, 2014); (iv) ontologies, methodologies, and epistemologies (Shahi and Ascione, 2015). Every so often, the alternative explorations of these conceptual categories are overtly or covertly motivated by a non-Western/post-Western thrust.

However, the non-Western/post-Western motivations in contemporary Indian IR have been cautioned against the following slippery grounds: (i) positivism; (ii) nativism; (iii) ethnocentrism; and (iv) essentialism (Bajpai, 1997; Behera,

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2007; Acharya, 2011; Mallavarapu, 2014). Though a judicious sensitivity towards these recognized slippery grounds is necessary for escaping the narrow institutionalization of an Indian school of IR, it should not discourage the process of theorising via employment of hitherto untapped indigenous resources. In fact, the actual goal of contemporary Indian IR is to fortify the process of theorising which exploits indigenous resources by way of pursuing 'universalisms' and escaping 'exceptionalisms', thereby meaningfully contributing to the discourses on Global IR. The next section examines how a critical rethinking of the strategy of teaching in Indian IR could in part be instrumental in effectively accomplishing this goal.

Rethinking the Strategy of Teaching in Indian IR: Pedagogy vs. Andragogy

The 'strategy of teaching' implies a complex educational behavior of a teacher in using apt methodologies – procedures, skills, styles, techniques, tools, and communications – for mobilizing the process of learning towards identified goals (Ware, 1989; Shinn, 1997). In the context of teaching in Indian IR, the currently identified goal is to not only introduce the learners to customary issue-areas and theoretical-frameworks, but also update them about up-and-coming improvisations and forewarn them of persisting lacunae, thereby gearing them up for alternative imaginations of rationalizing, moralizing, philosophizing, and theorising Global IR. The goal of exposing the learners of Indian IR to Global IR has begun to reverberate in the area of syllabi-designing. The measured incorporation of non-Western/post-Western (read Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Brazilian, and African) debates along with the customary theoretical strands of Realism, Liberalism, Marxism, English School, Constructivism, Feminism, and Post-Modernism in IR syllabi taught at select Indian universities substantiates this point. Though these redesigned IR syllabi assure a preliminary familiarization with the recent non-Western/post-Western theoretical components of Global IR, they do not necessarily induce an enthusiastic engrossment leading towards original contributions to Global IR. It is precisely in this context that the strategy of teaching in Indian IR acquires a greater relevance.

In general, a desirable strategy of teaching takes into account the following key variables of a teaching-learning environment: (i) objectives of the course; (ii) characteristics of the students; and (iii) methodologies of the teachers (Jones et al, 1987). In the context of the existing teaching-learning environment in Indian IR, it is obvious that these three key variables change with the variations in the IR courses/papers taught at different levels of the university system – BA, MA, MPhil, PhD. Typically, the basic objective of the IR papers taught in BA programs is to introduce 'undergraduate students' to the elementary issue-areas of IR (it more often than not involves a little or no exposure to IR theory). On the contrary, the key objective of MA, MPhil and PhD programs is to systematically lead 'postgraduate students' towards an advanced understanding of the issue-areas and theories of IR. While the teachers at undergraduate level deal with less advanced students (bearing miniscule knowledge of IR as an academic discipline), the teachers at post-graduate levels deal with comparatively more mature learners (possessing a cursory awareness of IR and/or a meticulous background knowledge of Political Science or any other discipline of the Social Sciences/Humanities).

On the basis of the presumed degree of maturity of learners, the strategy of teaching can be aligned along two methodologies: (i) pedagogic; (ii) andragogic. While pedagogy essentially endorses a 'hierarchical' teacher-learner relationship wherein the teacher is always fully dependable and the learner is always fully dependent, Malcolm S. Knowles (1980: 44-45) advocates andragogy as a preferable methodological alternative for relatively mature learners: 'Andragogy is premised on at least four crucial assumptions about the characteristics of the learners that are different from the assumptions on which traditional pedagogy is premised. These assumptions are that as learners mature: 1) their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward being self-directed human being; 2) they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning ; 3) their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles; and 4) their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly, their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of performance-centeredness'. Since these assumptions of andragogy match the characteristics and orientation of many of the post-graduate learners of IR in Indian universities, it is sensible that the strategy of teaching IR in India shifts from pedagogy to andragogy.

The derivation of a greater inspiration from andragogy than pedagogy could potentially go a long way in overcoming

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the following habitually encountered downsides – the *SSADD* aspects – of the teaching-learning experiences in Indian IR:

1. *Split inter-disciplinarity*: An apparent stress on interdisciplinarity is traceable in the contemporary discourses on Global IR (Aalto, 2015). Nonetheless, the interdisciplinarity in Indian IR remains an under-explored option at best and a lost opportunity at worst. Though the majority of learners of Indian IR (especially at the post-graduate level) possess basic background knowledge of the multiple academic streams of political philosophy, administrative theory, political economy, political thought, political theory, etc., they hardly undertake a trans-disciplinary approach while conducting advanced research in IR. It so happens because the prevalent learning process in Indian universities is reliant upon compartmentalized teaching. For instance, the compartmentalized teaching of political theory or administrative theory remains unconnected to the compartmentalized teaching of IR theory. This compartmentalized teaching of various academic streams manifests as the split inter-disciplinarity in Indian IR.
2. *Subsidiary research*: Though Global IR makes a call for redefining existing IR theories and methods (Acharya, 2014), the research carried out in Indian IR generally remains subsidiary to the conventional umbrella-research-projects pursued by established teachers/supervisors. In other words, the student's choice of a research topic often gets constricted by the 'areas of expertise' of the established teachers/supervisors. For instance, a learner's proposed research topic readily wins approval if it is compatible with the areas of expertise of his/ her teachers/supervisors. If a promisingly innovative topic (transcending the intellectual/ideological comfort zones of the established teachers/supervisors) is proposed by a learner, it either faces an outright rejection or goes through a diplomatic modification. As a result, the possibility of major groundbreaking research systematically gets nipped in the bud.
3. *Abortive gate-keeping*: Though the maxim of 'publish or perish' has been prescribed as a necessary pre-condition for linking Indian IR with Global IR (Paul, 2009), the editorial teams of a good number of India-based journals and publishing houses act as gatekeepers for filtering only those submitted manuscripts for publication which conform to their upheld ideological/political positions. At times, the manuscripts having a reasonably superior quality are not published by some reputed journals and publishing houses (despite being recommended for publication by the peer reviewers) if the specialized knowledge offered by those manuscripts is likely to be relevant for a small size of readers, and is therefore likely to deliver only marginal profit. The problem of 'profiteering' further magnifies when many newly-found second-rate journals and publishing houses offer a paid outlet for printing substandard manuscripts. In this scenario, the voluminous substandard publications along the lines of the maxim of 'publish or perish' – as reinforced by the inclusion of the Academic Performance Indicator (API) scores for the hiring and promotion of teachers in Indian universities – becomes a mark of degeneracy rather than an upgrading.
4. *Dependent networking*: For removing the archaic restrictions imposed by the Indian government on free and critical research in IR, the importance of networking between Indian IR scholars and scholars around the world has been rightly underscored (Paul, 2009). However, Indian IR witnesses an increased practice of 'dependent networking' wherein a learner's/teacher's membership of research networks is dependent upon personal affiliations/ anticipations/obligations (rather than shared professional research interests). As this dependent networking is frequently motivated by a desire to attain 'greater visibility' rather than 'greater research intensity', it is detrimental to the genuine academic advancement of Indian IR.
5. *Discreditable recruitment*: Despite the repeated stress on the meritorious recruitment of teachers for improving the qualitative output of Indian IR (Paul 2009), the process of recruitment in Indian universities is barely based on principles of merit. Against the backdrop of the ongoing demographic explosion, examiners are under pressure to not detain many underperforming students at universities so as to not add to the institutional workload. Even at the stage of recruitment, such former students are offered university jobs if they tend to have major political push. These politicized recruitments do a prolonged disservice to the teaching-learning process in India IR.

Concluding Remarks

It is not difficult to admit that the overall intellectual contribution of Indian IR to Global IR is not proportionate to the visible growth so far as its institutional and thematic grounds are concerned. In fact, the crucial institutional and

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thematic headway remains circumscribed by the lack of concern for an appropriate strategy of teaching in Indian IR. Notwithstanding the unparalleled creative involvement of some extraordinary scholars in the academic growth of Indian IR, the hierarchical teacher-learner relationship sanctioned by the traditional pedagogic strategies has by and large emerged as the direct or indirect source of many of the SSADD aspects of teaching-learning experiences in Indian IR. In these circumstances, a greater willingness to embrace the andragogic strategy of teaching – wherein the teaching methodologies aiding a non-hierarchical teacher-learner relationship creates a larger room for unprejudiced and unhindered choice, expression, exploration, exchange, expansion, and publication of unconventional ideas – can probably open up fresh pathways for attaining the goal of an enriched contribution of Indian IR to Global IR.

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