

НАУЧНЫЕ ШКОЛЫ

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Studying IR in the Global South

*Interview with Professor Navnita Chadha Behera,
University of Delhi, India*



Abstract. Navnita Chadha Behera is Professor of International Relations at the Department of Political Science at the University of Delhi (India) and currently a Fulbright Visiting Fellow at the Sigur Centre for Asian Studies, George Washington University (USA). Dr. Behera is also presently Vice-President, International Studies Association (ISA) and Honorary Director, the Institute for Research on India and International Studies.

She is a former visiting scholar at the Brookings Institution. Dr. Behera is the author of *Demystifying Kashmir* [Behera 2006a], the editor of *Gender, Conflict and Migration* [Behera 2006b], *International Relations in South Asia: Search for an Alternative Paradigm* [Behera 2008] and *India Engages the World* [Behera, Vanaik 2013], and writes extensively on IR in South Asia.

In her interview, Prof. Behera talks about studying International Relations (IR) in the Global South countries, especially in India, and compares level and quality of education and academic approaches to IR Studies in both the Global North and the Global South. Prof. Behera also analyzes the possibility of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to become a unified structure for the Eurasian states.

Key words: the Global South, International Relations, IR Study, Non-Western IR theories, India, Indian schools of IR, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

— **Dear Dr. Behera, as we all know, in 2018 you were elected the Vice-President of International Studies Association. That obviously reflects the recognition of your status as a well-known IR scholar. Are the Global South scholars generally well represented in leading academic institutions and journals? Is their voice “heard” in global academic community?**

— Thanks for this opportunity to interact with you and through this dialogue to a wider community of IR scholars in Russia.

I think the field of IR has a long way to go to provide a more equitable platform for scholars from the Global South be it in terms of their representation in the global academic institutions as well as journals or books being published especially from the university presses around the world. This gap can be attributed to a host of factors including historical reasons — both the intellectual and institutional infrastructure of IR has remained centered predominantly in the Global North; disciplinary loci of IR as part

of the Political Science or Area Studies Departments in large parts of the Global South; lack of theoretical innovations both because the Global South scholars have focused more on empirical / policy issues facing their states / regions and, that their theoretical work has never got its due or commensurate recognition of qualifying as “theory” in the mainstream IR.

Having said that, the situation is certainly changing. There is a growing body of literature that underlines the need to listen to voices of the Global South through the debates on non- / beyond / post-western IR and this is also being reflected in both the published literature as well as global institutions of IR scholars. For instance, the World International Studies Committee has in the past few years focused its initiatives on developing networks among scholars from the Global South and the International Studies Association had instituted the Global South Task Force in 2016 to find ways to increase their participation in multiple ways. I had co-chaired this Task Force and many of the recommendations made by the Task

Force were adopted by the Governing Council of ISA in 2018. So, efforts are underway by diverse players at multiple levels but this remains a work-in-progress!

— **Your academic and professional background is quite fascinating. You got your PhD at the University of Kent (UK), you were invited as visiting scholar at the Brookings Institution and the University of Illinois (USA), you lectured at leading universities of Sweden, Italy, Poland, Hungary, etc. At the same time, in 2015—2018 you were the head of Department of political science at the University of New Delhi. Could you compare the level and quality of education and academic approaches to International Studies both in the North and the South?**

— I think the story of how we teach and “do” IR varies a great deal depending on your loci and yet the underlying foundational assumptions have not changed much which is what the scholarly community of IR needs to focus upon, in the years to come and this is necessary because the existing frames, narratives, methods and tools of IR are increasingly proving to be inadequate in the challenges international politics is throwing up both within different countries and in the international domain. So, both the pedagogy and practices of IR need to adapt/change given the rapidly changing nature of our global politics. Let me explain briefly through my personal experiences.

Teaching IR in the University of Delhi has been a challenge because, on the one hand, one is required to teach the basic cannon of IR theories to our students which means relying mostly on western textbooks and yet, their life worlds being radically different, one always has to modify / improvise and even challenge many of these theories to be able to equip them with the critical faculties to make better sense of their own world around them. The class debates in Poland and Hungary were not only different from the kind of class debates I have had in my campus but also distinct from those, say in the classrooms of Sweden and Italy. My current research of IR pedagogy in the USA has helped me learn the distinctions between International Relations being offered in some of its leading universities and, International Studies, being taught in many liberal arts schools which are mostly much smaller in scale and hence much more open to experimentation and open to multi-disciplinary debates in pursuing / teaching IR.

— **You took part in TRIP (Teaching, Research, and International Project) Survey, conducted by William and Mary College some years ago, and you are one of the key actors within the Global South Caucus of ISA. Could you please name the most interesting research initiatives (projects, edited volumes, conferences), aimed at studying IR beyond North America and Europe?**

— There are quite a few and I may not be able to list all of them, so let me give you some examples in which I have been personally involved.

I already listed two earlier in my conversation, the Global South Task Force that was instituted by then ISA President, T.V. Paul, and in this, the leadership of the Global South Caucus was an equal and important partner. As a result of this, ISA has already instituted an annual workshop for Emerging Global South Scholars Workshop. And, then there are the continuing such initiatives by the WISC led by Gunther Hellmann.

TRIP has been involved in undertaking such surveys for a very long time; what’s new is that they are beginning to include new states many of which are located in the Global South, for instance, in India, which was for the first time conducted in 2015, is a case in point. In terms of academic endeavors, an early important initiative was led by Arlene Tickner and Ole Weaver later joined by David Blaney, which started with a volume on *IR Scholarship Around the World* [Tickner, Waever 2009], in which I had contributed a chapter on South Asia and has now become a part of “Worlding Beyond the West” series by Routledge.

Another was led by Barry Buzan and Amitav Acharya on *Non-Western International Relations Theory* [Acharya, Buzan 2010], in which I had contributed a chapter on India. Acharya has since then led a drive on fashioning ‘Global IR’.

Many others including A. Tickner, D. Blaney, T. Trowsell, and myself along with many colleagues across Asia, Latin America and Africa besides of course parts of the Global North are currently involved in a new initiative titled “Doing IR Differently”, that is focusing attention on the relational thinking in IR by exploring other ways of knowing and being in the world or worlds and, other cosmological traditions around the world. Since many of us believe that urgent interventions are also needed in re-working the pedagogy of IR, an initiative is also underway to write a textbook on IR, which better captures the diverse, if not divergent realities of the Global South for IR students.

— In recent years China has been demonstrating the rise of new IR approaches and schools — moral realism (Yan Xuetong), Tianxia System (Zhao Tingyang), relational theory (Qin Yaqing), etc. These theories are in some way interlinked with the leading Western IR paradigms — realism, liberalism and constructivism. But at the same time, they introduce specific Chinese characteristics in IR field and, in this quality, contribute to the development of the IR discipline in general.

What about Indian schools of IR? What is the particularity of the Indian approach to understand and explain international politics? By the way, in this volume we publish a review of the book, issued by professor of your Department Deepshikha Shahi on Kautilya [Shahi 2018].

— You are right that in past one decade, we have witnessed robust debates within China on the IR theories and several important contributions on the Chinese schools of IR. However, I do not think there are any such parallel, systematic initiatives for promoting an Indian school of IR though in the past three years, I have led a small group of scholars who have been engaged in a research initiative on “Reworking the ‘Knowledge Structures’ in International Relations: Some Indian Contributions”, supported by the Indian Council for Social Science Research in India.

I would consider Deepshikha’s work on Kautilya and Adavita as part of this broad endeavor. That is because, I think that while all such endeavors are important to diversify the foundational and disciplinary knowledge base of IR, they also run the risk of being isolated or ghetto-ized in a corner of area studies; what is needed is a serious, multi-pronged critical mass of scholarship from around different parts of the world that is engaging with the fundamental assumptions, parameters, theories and methods of IR as such, I mean the mainstream IR. That is where we all need to focus our energies in the coming years and I certainly hope Russian scholars will become an integral part of such initiatives.

— In June 2017, India joined Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and now Russia and India are full members of common political

and security alliance. Of course, there are still many challenges within SCO. For example, our Bangladesh students here, at RUDN University, accuse Russia of becoming more pro-Pakistan after 2017. And it’s really difficult to convince them, that now we are all pro-SCO, not pro-Indian, or pro-Pakistan. There is still some misunderstanding between India and China, especially because of Chinese ‘String of Pearls’ strategy. Some experts assume that Russia is jealous about quite massive Chinese investment strategy in Central Asia, etc. Do you personally believe in SCO? Could this organization really unite most of the Eurasian states in close alliance, like it happened with Europe?

— SCO is important not just for exploring avenues for political and security alliances among the policy making communities of this region but also for helping forging new imaginations and solidarities among the member countries and peoples of these regions. I certainly believe SCO holds the potential of uniting the Eurasian states but for this they must actively consider buttressing their policy initiatives by building strong foundations for the same in the world of ideas. And, for this purpose, we need to create new forums and initiatives that bring the world of academia, think tanks and policy makers together. Along with China, I think other member states, especially Russia and India need to allocate much larger quantum of resources in order to materialize such ideas into reality.

— Could you tell us some Indian proverb that helps us to understand better the nature of international relations?

— No singular proverb comes to my mind which would single-handedly capture the nature of international relations. However, in view of the emerging global challenges especially relating to the rapid climate changes and radical policy shifts that are required by each country to save this planet, what I can think of, is “*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (whole world is indeed one family)”, because its only by believing in the unity of human existence, can we earnestly make sacrifices needed by each state individually and collectively to save the humankind.

Interviewed by D.A. Degterev

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Изучение международных отношений в странах «Глобального Юга»

Интервью с профессором Навнитой Чадха Бехерой, Университет Дели, Индия

Навнита Чадха Бехера — профессор международных отношений на факультете политических наук в Университете Дели (Индия) и в настоящее время приглашенный научный сотрудник Центра азиатских исследований Сигур, Университет Джорджа Вашингтона (США). Д-р Бехера является вице-президентом Ассоциации международных исследований (ISA) и почетным директором Института исследований Индии и международных отношений.

Навнита Бехера — бывший приглашенный ученый в Институте Брукинса. Автор книги «Демистифицируя Кашмир» [Behera 2006a], редактор монографий «Гендер, конфликт и миграция» [Behera 2006b], «Международные отношения в Южной Азии: поиск альтернативной парадигмы» [Behera 2008] и «Индия привлекает мир» [Behera, Vanaik 2013]. Много пишет о международных отношениях в Южной Азии.

В своем интервью профессор Н. Бехера рассказывает об изучении международных отношений в странах «Глобального Юга», особенно в Индии, и сравнивает уровень, качество образования и академические подходы к международным исследованиям в странах «Глобального Севера» и «Глобального Юга». Профессор Бехера также анализирует возможность Шанхайской организации сотрудничества (ШОС) стать объединяющей структурой для евразийских государств.

Ключевые слова: «Глобальный Юг», международные отношения, международные исследования, незападные теории международных отношений, Индия, индийские школы международных отношений, Шанхайская организация сотрудничества (ШОС)

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