

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Imtiaz Ahmed, *State and Foreign Policy : India's Role in South Asia*, Academic Publishers, Dhaka 1993, pp. 349 + xviii.**

The nexus between state and foreign policy is inseparable. The foreign policy making and behaviour of every country are deeply influenced by the nature of the state, its composition, organization and role-perception. The relationship is indeed as close as in case of domestic policy-making and nature of governance. Despite this rather obvious conceptual linkage between state and foreign policy, it is seldom that one comes across studies on the subject, particularly in relation to Third World countries. The book titled, *State and Foreign Policy: India's Role in South Asia*, by Imtiaz Ahmed is a commendable effort towards filling the long-felt vacuum on the subject not only in the context of India, but also in South Asia as a whole.

The book, an outcome of the author's Ph.D. dissertation, aims at analyzing the relations between the state and foreign policy in the case of India, particularly with respect to New Delhi's role-perception and role playing vis-a-vis its neighbors in South Asia. The author takes two well-coined "Moments in Dynamics": India's role in Bangladesh's War of Liberation and Sri Lankan Tamils' War of Liberation as cases in understanding the Indian state and India's role in South Asia. This operative part of the study contained in the last two chapters of the book is preceded by elaborate theoretical exposition of the subject. The central thesis of the study - as highlighted by the author - is that relationship between state and foreign policy is to be understood from the standpoint of dialectics. In his

attempt at developing this theme Ahmed examines the subject "not only on the level of theoretical abstraction but also at the more important level of social reality".

The introductory chapter featuring a brief outline of the study is followed by a detailed discourse on methodology wherein the author sets out the scientific argumentation of his analytical approach. The author challenges the neutrality of any concept in theory, particularly ones related to social reality, in terms of conceptualization as well as in practical application. He applies this two-tier relationship between concept and theory and between theory and practice in understanding of external behavior of a state and shows that existing social reality is the historical product of politics. He also argues in favour of its constant 'demystification' in terms of dialectics. Ahmed takes this as his main mission in the subsequent chapters that follow.

The third chapter titled, "Understanding Foreign Policy: Hegemonic and Counter-hegemonic Traditions" is essentially an expose of some of the inadequacies of contemporary understandings of foreign policy from the perspective of the linkage between theory and practice. The notion of realism and the notion of power which are central to the "hegemonic" as well as "counter-hegemonic" theorization of foreign policy are critically examined. The author analyses the various philosophical assumptions relating to both notion of realism and notion of power. Then the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic traditions are examined from the point of view of realism and power. As an outcome of the exercise the author successfully exposes the relevance of theoretical exercises in understanding social reality. This leads the author to his enquiry into a counter-hegemonic understanding of the state, with particular relevance to India.

In chapter four, the reader finds a critique of the four main approaches to the counter-hegemonic understanding of Indian state. These are: the "over-developed" thesis; the state capitalism perspective; the bourgeois state perspective and the "post-modernist" perspective. These approaches are considered major contributions in the understanding of the state not only of

India but also of developing countries in general. Ahmed addresses himself to the task of examining the extent to which these approaches have succeeded in presenting the critical features of the counter-hegemonic tradition as outlined in the previous chapter. In analyzing Hamza Alavi's over-developed thesis - understanding of the Indian state as an over-developed state structure resulting from the colonial experience - the author challenges the notion that the post-colonial state remains merely an extension of the colonial regime. Such notion, Ahmed notes, lays emphasis on the "circumstances derived from history" and not on "men making history". History, therefore, is viewed as a process of both continuity and change which also helps understand the linkage between internal and external dimensions of behavior pattern of a state. The state capitalism perspective is challenged on the grounds that the state is understood in its narrow sense, with state being identified with government. It is argued also that state capitalism is understood under such perspective to be independent of the development of private capitalism. The dialectical relationship between capital and labour and between the ruling class and social masses which is crucial in the content and shape of the hegemony, is also understressed. In the same manner the author argues that the bourgeois state perspective also fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of the state. The post-modernist perspective is also viewed to be inadequate since this can hardly transcend the statist model of foreign policy emerging from the "colonial culture". The main contention of the chapter, therefore, is that these prevailing approaches provide only a partial understanding of the Indian state and its international role perception, particularly as these do not appropriately take into consideration the prevailing social reality and continued transformation thereof.

As a part of the author's attempt to provide an alternative approach to conceptualization of the problematique, the next chapter presents a theoretical abstraction of the relationship between state and foreign policy from the standpoint of dialectics. Here, the relationship between state and foreign policy is conceptualized with the help of two main approaches: a)

by understanding the composition of the state structure or in other words, by unravelling the relation between the structure (social production) and superstructure (social ideas, organizations, institutions and ideological linkages); and b) by projecting foreign policy as an element of the superstructure which is inextricably linked with the state structure. As the author moves to the exposition of the concrete situation, he focuses on the development of the state, organization and constitution of hegemony, the role of the organic intellectuals, and other related features, relevant to the understanding of the relationship between state and foreign policy. This task is undertaken in Chapters 6 and 7, both titled: "The Indian State: The Organization and Constitution of Hegemony". Chapter 6 examines the pre-independence phase while the post-independence period is analyzed in chapter 7. These two chapters in essence constitute an illuminating historical expose of the Indian National Congress as the nucleus of the organization and constitution of hegemony in India. One finds here how the Congress through its participation in the nationalist movement against British colonialism reversed the subalternity of India's indigenous dominant social forces - landlords, merchants and manufacturers. At the same time the author also articulates how Congress succeeded without a qualitative break in forming successive governments and running the affairs of the state after independence, which helped the reproduction of the hegemony. More importantly, attempt is made to present a critical understanding of the 'dominated social forces' in the context of their subalternity with respect to both colonial power and indigenous dominant forces. The result is an interesting exposition of the development of hegemony and correspondingly, of the dialectical relationships between the dominant and dominated social forces which appear critical to the understanding of the reality of the Indian state.

Chapter 6 focuses on the making of the hegemony in the pre-independence period - from 1885 to 1947. The review here is undertaken in two main parts. Firstly, the author concentrates on the varied experiences and modes of social responses of the subaltern social forces to colonial

domination with particular emphasis on the role of the intellectuals. This part actually highlights the "shaky beginning of the Congress", a phase which came to an end with the arrival of Gandhi in 1915. Section B highlights the qualitative transformation of the Congress in the light of Gandhi's politics which defined the nature of the dominant national leadership and eventually the way to the creation of the independent Indian state. In effect, the chapter exposes the process of transformation of the dominant and dominated social forces of the colonial period into the ruling and ruled class. More pertinent is the author's exposure of the way Gandhi, despite his sincerity in siding with the dominated masses, found himself constrained by the aspirations of the Congress to which Gandhi's politics was antithetical, particularly to the hegemonic interests of the dominant class. The reader gets convinced here that the Congress and the Indian leadership, despite finding Gandhi useful in mobilizing the hegemony, did not opt for Gandhi's non-monolithic and profoundly pluralistic nature of nationalist consciousness. They rather followed the "Roy-Bankim-Tilak-Aurobindo mode of nationalist consciousness" aimed at the creation of "great nation" in the image of the modern western state which had significant bearing on the role perception of the Indian leadership in subsequent periods. As the author proceeds to the next chapter, he attempts an exposition of the reproduction of hegemony of India's ruling class in the post-independence period within the framework of this consciousness. The organization and constitution of hegemony here is featured basically not only by the demise of the colonial domination but also by the transformation of the indigenous dominant and dominated classes into ruling and ruled classes respectively. In the first part of this chapter the author examines the manner in which the politics of the Congress Party integrally developed into those of the Indian state. In doing so, Jawaharlal Nehru with his attainment of the leadership of Congress, and eventually the position of Prime Minister, is highlighted to have typified the kind of hegemonic politics which played the key role in the process of transformation. Nehru's politics is reviewed to expose how it was qualitatively different from that

of Gandhi, and more importantly, how it was conducive to the reproduction of the hegemony. 'Development' and 'centralization', viewed to be the key aspects of Nehru's politics are also revisited to highlight the way development was conducive to growth of capitalism and centralization to the concentration of power in the hands of the ruling class. The reading gets illuminating particularly as it is related to the context of constantly transforming specific social relations. The second part of this chapter concentrates on the qualitative transformation in the reproduction of hegemony in the light of fragmentation of the Congress from 1969 upto the present period.

The examination of the international dimension of the Indian state is contained in chapter 8 which shows the external manifestation of the Indian elite's hegemonic task of making India a great and strong nation. As enunciated by the author, like the politics of development and centralization operating within the national frontiers, there are specific and distinctive policies nurtured and organized by the ruling class to reproduce hegemony with respect to the international dimension of the Indian state. In order to explain this external hegemony of the Indian state Ahmed takes recourse to the two inter-related Indian philosophical traditions, e.g., *Kautilyan* and *Asokan*, both of which essentially uphold the construction of a great and strong India in the image of modern western state, and both are related to the politics of development and centralization. In the process it also becomes evident that insofar as the 'Hindu majority' is central to the ruling class in the task of organizing hegemony, the ruling class in India would also obviously pursue traditions and philosophies that are cherished by the Hindu majority with respect to the international dimension of the hegemony. Thus, the author maintains that with the exception of Gandhi all notable Indian leaders, particularly Nehru, were fascinated with Kautilya, whose *kutilla* - crooked or amoral - strategies helped to transform a small Mauryan Kingdom in north-eastern India into one of the greatest empires of ancient India (fourth century B.C.). The historical significance of Kautilya and popular acceptance of his teachings, if not the semantic relationship

between Kautilya and *Kutniti* (diplomacy), are shown as the philosophical basis on which the hegemonic construction of a great and strong India, particularly with the attainment of regional hegemony in South Asia has been built over the years. The absence of "counter-hegemonic forces", according to the author is to account to a great extent for the monopolization by the ruling class of the organization of hegemony in the international dimension of the Indian state.

Two of the most notable examples of India's regional role in South Asia in recent times are taken as illustrations. In chapter 9, India's role in Bangladesh's War of Liberation in 1971 is analyzed. The construction of Indian hegemony in this historic case is examined at two critical levels: one, at the level of struggling Bangladeshis; and two, at the level of the Indian population. Needless to mention, the Indian ruling class proceeded to organize the hegemony on both the fronts simultaneously, which allowed India take control of the events and direct the same to its full advantage. The chapter elaborates how by contributing to the success of liberation struggle of Bangladesh it succeeded in fulfilling its primary objective of establishing and consolidating its own hegemonic position. India also successfully organized international consent and managed, particularly in the backdrop of signing the Indo-Soviet Treaty, to limit the role of United States and China, including their support to Pakistan and thereby consolidate its position as the regional power in South Asia. In this context, the nationalist struggle of Bangladesh and India's success in transforming it into an Indo-Pakistan affair greatly contributed to the task of fulfilling the hegemonic aspirations of the Indian ruling class.

As the second case of the international dimension of hegemonic construction of India, the next chapter analyzes India's role in the "Sri Lankan Tamils' War of Liberation". The period covered for the study here is from the time of the Tamils' launching of armed struggle in 1982 to the landing of Indian troops in northern Sri Lanka in August 1987. Here again, the author discusses the problem in two levels: firstly, the organization of hegemony with respect to the Tamils and secondly, organization of

hegemony among the Indian population. In a separate part of the chapter he also undertakes a brief study of the significance of the India Doctrine in the context of the conflict in Sri Lanka and thereafter focuses on the July 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement under which Indian troops landed in the island country in the name of peace keeping. The analysis here shows how the Indian government successfully transformed the Tamil nationalist struggle into an Indo-Sri Lanka affair leading to further consolidation of Indian pre-eminent position in South Asia. The final chapter of the book, of course presents a summary of the author's main theses which is done under three main sub-headings: understanding of the Indian state, understanding of India's role in South Asia and methodological.

The book by Imtiaz Ahmed, as indicated in the beginning, is a serious attempt at understanding the linkage between state and foreign policy in the context of India. It is essentially a theoretical exercise which despite its rather abstract approach to understanding some real-life situations provide an indispensable reading for anyone taking interest in the basis of Indian foreign policy, its role perception and role playing in recent times. It will also be a required reading for students of contemporary South Asian politics and international relations. Having said that, it needs to be confessed that a visionary approach laden with abstractions that often mystifies the study aimed at 'demystifying the appearance of things' (as the author wants to), makes the otherwise very scholarly and interesting book a rather difficult reading. The readers of Imtiaz Ahmed, one of the most active and promising Bangladeshi experts on international studies, should be aware of his penchant for theoretical and often fancied abstractions. Here in this book one is told in its very first lines that the purpose of writing the book is to "contribute to the task of changing the fate of millions of poverty-stricken masses, and that not only of India but of numerous countries across the globe". A dispassionate reader would know that this is a challenge the response to which would be hardly found in a book of the type. Other than indicating that the absence or weakness of "counter-hegemonic forces" (meaning communist or other political parties that could represent the



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interest of the 'ruled' class) was to an extent to account for the way India played its external role in South Asia, there is not too much of a realistic answer to the grand question the author poses himself. Nevertheless, the author does very successfully "rekindle our imagination" which would provoke further studies to examine ways to answer this as well as the whole set of related questions that are posed in the concluding page of the book.

The book has an excellent get-up, though not free from the printer's devil thanks to which the chapter on "Sri Lankan Tamils' War of Liberation" for example, becomes "Sri Lankan War of Liberation"!

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