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Brahmins and Balance of Power: Re-Reading A.P. Rana's *Imperatives of Non-Alignment*

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In this article, I revisit a modern classic, a book that is often cited but rarely analyzed: A.P. Rana's *Imperatives of Non-Alignment*. Appearing in 1976, the book was a culmination of decade-long work and claimed to be the first attempt at IR theory from India. Rana was indeed from the first generation of scholars who engaged deeply with International Relation (IR) theory, and the book drew on a range of, sometimes contradictory, theoretical perspectives from Systems Theory to Realism to English School to Hindu Social Theory. In this intervention, I analyze this book and the corpus of Rana's writings with an attempt to contribute to two themes within IR. First, I show how caste plays a prominent role in Rana's thinking about Indian strategies of foreign policy behavior. His analysis makes a case for seeing nonalignment as a historical continuation of a Brahminical mode of balancing. Consequently, this article is also an effort to place caste as a central category of IR theorization from India. Secondly, I discuss the specific ways in which Rana's realism adapted to its Cold War context and advanced a redemptive vision of realism.

En este artículo, volvemos a inspeccionar un clásico moderno, un libro que se cita a menudo pero que rara vez se analiza: *Imperatives of Non-Alignment* (Los imperativos de la no alineación) de A.P. Rana. Publicado en 1976, el libro fue la culminación de una década de trabajo y afirmó ser el primer intento en materia de teoría de las RRII en la India. De hecho, Rana pertenecía a la primera generación de académicos que se comprometieron profundamente con la teoría de las RRII, y el libro se basó en una serie de perspectivas teóricas, y a veces contradictorias, que incluían desde la teoría de sistemas hasta el realismo, pasando por la escuela inglesa y la teoría social hindú. En esta intervención, analizamos este libro y el corpus de escritos de Rana en un intento de realizar una contribución con respecto a dos temas dentro de las RRII. En primer lugar, demostramos cómo la casta desempeña un papel destacado en el pensamiento de Rana sobre las estrategias indias de comportamiento en política exterior. Su análisis argumenta a favor de ver la no alineación como una continuación histórica de un modo brahmánico de equilibrio. En consecuencia, este artículo es también un esfuerzo por situar la casta como una categoría central de la teorización de las RRII de la India. En segundo lugar, comentamos las formas específicas en que el realismo de Rana se adaptó a su contexto de guerra fría y promovió una visión redentora del realismo.

Dans cet article, je réexamine un classique des temps modernes, un livre souvent cité, mais rarement analysé : *Imperatives of Non-Alignment* (Les impératifs du non-alignement) d'A.P. Rana. Publié en 1976, le livre conclut une décennie de travail. Il s'agirait de la première tentative de théorie des RI venue d'Inde. A.P. Rana appartenait bel et bien à la première génération de chercheurs fortement impliqués dans les RI, et le livre s'appuie sur un éventail de points de vue théoriques, et parfois contradictoires, de la théorie des systèmes au réalisme, en passant par l'école anglaise et la théorie sociale hindoue. Dans cette publication, j'analyse ce livre et le corpus d'œuvres d'A.P. Rana en vue de contribuer à deux thèmes des RI. D'abord, je montre le rôle prédominant des castes dans la pensée d'A.P. Rana quant aux stratégies indiennes de comportement en politique étrangère. Son analyse conçoit le non-alignement comme le prolongement historique du modèle brahminique d'équilibre. Par conséquent, cet article s'efforce également de présenter la caste comme une catégorie centrale de la théorisation indienne des RI. Ensuite, je traite des différentes façons dont le réalisme de Rana s'est adapté à son contexte de guerre froide et a promu une vision rédemptrice du réalisme.

Introduction

In 1976, Aspy Pheroze Rana, a Baroda-based Indian scholar, published *The Imperatives of Non-Alignment: A Conceptual Study of Nehru's Foreign Policy Strategy in the Nehru Period*. Unwieldily subtitled, this work was a culmination of long years of thinking and research on nonalignment as a balance of power strategy. And consequently, the author confidently claimed, the first "proto theory" on International Relations (IR) from India.

Nearly five decades later, the book is now widely hailed as a classic. It is compulsively cited in nonalignment literature,¹ and as Ian Hall (2022, f.n. 20) observes, it remains the best theoretical work on nonalignment.² However, mounting citations do not necessarily translate into deep engagement.

Curiously, despite acclaim, the book is rarely analyzed for its conceptual and analytical depth.³ Often slotted as a "realist" work, it is presented as nothing more than realist rational maximization.⁴ As I will show below, this may be somewhat of a stilted reading of a text that defies a mold not only in its method but also in the complexity of its arguments. In particular, and that will be the key focus of my argument, the contemporary and subsequent readings of this work overlook one key aspect of Rana's theorization: caste.

In revisiting Rana's book and his corpus of writings during the Cold War, I develop two sets of arguments in this paper. First, this intervention is an effort to place caste as a central category of IR theorization from India (Krishna 2015). To

¹The Indian nonalignment literature is impossibly vast but perhaps the most comprehensive assessment came in a 500-page special issue. See *International Studies* (1981).

²In general, "nonalignment" remains poorly theorized. See, Varun Sahni's introductory remarks to the "International Relations Confer-

ence, 2023: Session 6," November 26, 2023. Accessed January 14, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cnAd8MKYxs&t=240> s.

³Rana's scholarship, however, was celebrated in a *festschrift*, see Bajpai and Shukul (1995).

⁴Even an observer as perceptive as Itty Abraham thinks of Rana's work as realist rational maximization. See, Abraham (2008, 196).

argue that caste is key to Indian tradition may be stating the obvious, but for far too long there has been a “norm against noticing” (R. Vitalis 2000) caste in scholarship from/on India in IR.⁵ Ideas such as civilization (Acharya 2020), *advaita* (Shahi 2019), nonviolence (Mantena 2012), and spiritualism (Thakur 2018), among others, and indeed, declarations of “Indian IR” (Shahi and Dua 2023) are often purveyed in caste-evacuated manner.⁶ A full-scale exegesis of Indian IR is not the purpose of this article—and that task must be left for another day, but what is important to note here is that not only is the first explicitly IR theory book from an Indian scholar strongly informed by a caste-centered analysis but that it also embeds nonalignment in the historical experience of Brahminical Hinduism. Rana positions caste as the central organizing principle of the Indian political order with ramifications for India’s international behavior. In fact, he spends nearly half of his book on developing a theory of a transhistorical Brahminic political order.⁷

Second, this article is also concerned with thinking about what “realism” entails. Does realism have a set of trans-historic and trans-spatial core assumptions to codify claims of being a coherent theory? Here, I draw on Stefano Guzzini’s (2004, 2022) argument that it may perhaps be better to think of *realisms*; realism as he argues is often a set of historically evolved diplomatic practices or foreign policy strategy masquerading as a theory.

In this vein, contextualizing the “birth” of American realist theory in the 1950s, intellectual historians have argued how “realism” was a response to the hijacking of politics by liberal progressives who turned behavioralism into a secular theodicy. In this version, realism was a theological intervention against ideas of rationality in politics (Guilhot 2010; Williams 2013). It coded a specific set of responses to both the trends in American social science as well as the democratic optimism characterizing American foreign policy. The question, I ask in this essay, is how does this historicized “realism” travel? Discussions on nonwestern “theory” in IR are often focused on finding *roots* of alternative theorizations. However, I focus my attention on the *routes* (Thakur and Smith 2021). How do IR’s conceptual language and theories that define its landscape, emerge in different settings. If indeed there are “many realisms” and each is placed in a different context, our task must involve interrogating how their foundational assumptions are formed, the context of their formation and their implications. What I will argue is that scholars like Rana may use the conceptual language that the IR scholarship of the time supplies (balance of power, anarchy, international society and so on), but the modalities and mechanisms of that language are immersed in local politico-cultural settings. The fundamental assumptions in Rana’s realism are drawn from specifically peculiar circumstances of India. These are, as I will show, advanced to retrospectively provide an ideological coherence to a set of diplomatic practices or foreign policy practices, known as nonalignment.⁸

⁵This is a reckoning long overdue for Indian IR. Gladly, a new generation of scholars such as Kalathmika Natarajan, Pavan Kumar, Ankit Kawade, Medha, Ladhu Chowdhary, Ida Roland Birkvad, and Kira Huju, among others, explore intersections of caste and IR. For some of this work, see Birkvad (2020), Huju (2023), and Natarajan (2023).

⁶For critiques, see Mani (2005), Omvedt (2009), and Nanda (2002).

⁷To clarify, Rana’s own engagement with caste is hardly from the perspective of critiquing it and it appears that after discussing it at length in the book, he himself never returns to these arguments in his subsequent work on nonalignment.

⁸This also gets us away from the unhelpful, and eventually futile, question of thinking about whether Nehru was an idealist or realist—a long preoccupation of IR scholarship. The scholarship on this is vast, but for a helpful discussion, see Roy (2016).

The article proceeds in four sections. In the first section, I look at the context of Rana’s emergence as a scholar writing on Nehru. Here, I argue that Rana’s theorization was a strategy to save Nehruvianism (i.e., nonalignment) from Nehru and Nehruvians. Thereafter, I discuss two modes of balancing by the weak, drawing on Rana’s historical understanding of Brahminical social order. His political culture thesis attempts to show how nonalignment emerges from a historical dialectic. Based on this discussion, the third section elaborates on nonalignment as a brahminical balance of power. In the process, Rana also conceptually advances our understanding of balance of power and international society. The final section features Rana’s realism as a redemptive rather than a tragic vision of world politics.

Nehru’s Mystique and the Indian Intellectual

Rana’s first attempt at theoretically thinking through nonalignment came in 1966. In the bold promise of his youth, still in his early thirties, he was taking on an “ideological constellation” (Guilhot 2010, 227) that cohered around the figure and thought of Nehru. Perhaps, the most representative of this was the doyen of IR studies in India and the founder of the Indian School of International Studies, Angamani Appadorai. Trained as an economic historian (his doctorate from the University of Madras was a two-volume economic history of South India), Appadorai taught political science at Loyola College in Madras and published in 1942 a well-regarded textbook on politics. Soon afterward, in 1944, he was appointed as Secretary of the newly established Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA) in Delhi. He excelled in this role, firmly establishing this institute which was then in a struggle for survival with another Indian IR Institute (Thakur and Davis 2017). Appadorai also became the Organizing Secretary of the memorable Asian Relations Conference, held at the cusp of India’s independence in 1947, and 8 years later, of the Bandung Conference. In both these roles, he worked closely with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (Poplai 1971).

Appadorai and the generation of thinkers around him, such as R. Bhaskaran and Krishnalal Shridharani, emphasized that nonalignment came from a long Indian tradition of thinking about plurality, tolerance, and a temper of peace (for a representative sample, see Shridharani 1958; Bhaskaran 1977; Appadorai 1981; Jha 1989). Seldom critical of Nehru, they took Nehru’s own pronouncements at face value and argued that Nehru’s policies were a repudiation of a politics of balance of power. Balance of power was considered an extension of Western and colonial way of thinking, and nonalignment provided a way out of this thinking.⁹ Nonalignment was, in response, presented as an operational concept, a *mantra*, that stood in defiance, a refusal as it were, to engage in power politics (Sarbadhikari 1978). It signified a policy of extending an area of peace, a place shorn of superpower rivalry. Nonalignment was thus curiously a universalist policy with a national mind: a policy that pushed for peace in the world, but one that exemplified India’s own exceptionalism.

Like most youngsters of his generation who came of age in Nehru’s era (Rana, born in 1932, had just entered his

⁹Disagreeing with such readings of domestic cultural sources of Nehru’s foreign policy, but in a typically American conservative reading, Ada Bozeman argued that Nehru’s ideological motivations toward foreign policy were, in fact, Marxist–Leninist (See Bozeman 1958). In a book 2 years later, Bozeman (1960) discussed how political culture shaped foreign policies, and one of her cases was ancient India. This work is however quite different from Rana’s because Bozeman does not draw any contemporary inferences from ancient cultures.

teens when Nehru came to power) the Indian Prime Minister carried an air of greatness. His nonalignment punched above India's weight. India, as [Nehru \(2004, 48\)](#) often said, could either be a great power or perish, but it would never be a middling country.¹⁰ Nehru had, as [Rana \(1976, viii\)](#) recalled, 'a valuable mystique' and carried an unmatched halo especially for a student of foreign policy where the stamp of Nehruvian thinking seemed total. But if in the 1950s Nehru could do no wrong, at the turn of the next decade, he could do nothing right. The Indian annexation of Goa in 1961 and then a crushing loss to China the next year shattered both Nehru's aura and the cultural romanticism that fed it. Even [Appadorai \(1963, 1\)](#) now acknowledged with regard to nonalignment: "we have been living in an artificial world of our own creation."

In his own words, [Rana \(1976, viii\)](#) was "hauntingly seized." When cold hard facts blazed a hole in the "artificial world," he turned to theory to rescue Nehru's nonalignment from Nehruvians as well as from his critics. Scholars like Appadorai, Rana averred, were too closely associated with Nehru and nonalignment, to the extent that they missed the proverbial wood for the trees. What was needed was an objective assessment of nonalignment as a foreign policy strategy. An occasional failure like the loss to China did not invalidate the rationale for its deployment. The question was whether nonalignment as a foreign policy strategy allowed India to work the balance of power system in the most effective manner, and the answer, Rana argued in his writings, was mostly yes.¹¹

Rana's analytical commitments lay with those who thought of nonalignment as a balancing strategy in the early years of the Cold War (such as [Rothstein 1966, 405](#); [Rose 1976](#)).¹² But he differed when they thought of nonalignment as a cold, cynical rational calculation, one whose viability depended entirely on a state of unstable unease between great powers. For Rana, this erased Nehru and India's ingenuity altogether. He would argue that nonalignment was not merely a by-product of great power relations, but a historically evolved strategy of engagement sharpened in the circumstances of India.

Indeed, even as his early articles, and later the book, analyzed nonalignment as a "scientific" foreign policy strategy, Rana's audacious claim was in fact normative.¹³ Nonalignment needed defending, he argued, because it was central to India's normative well-being and hence meant something more than just Nehru's foreign policy. His book was thus "an attempt, however indirect and tentative, to regenerate the normative well-being, and the morale, of our public life and polity" ([Rana 1976, x](#)). Rana's scholarship was, an early critic noted, "an apologia" for Nehru's foreign policy, albeit "more persuasive than most others" ([Jain 1966, 178](#)).

At a time when most Indian IR scholarship was either agnostic or hostile to International Relations theory, Rana

turned to it for redemption.¹⁴ *Imperatives* was a labored hybrid of the "Second Great Debate" ([Kaplan 1966](#); [Bull 1969](#)). And it was a frustrating text for many. Jayantanuja Bandopadhyay, a foreign services-retired-academic, lampooned Rana for revealing "a national inferiority complex" that Indian scholars displayed in kowtowing to Western scholarship while dismissing Indian thinking—this was in response to Rana's acknowledgment of English School on his thinking and the claim that his was the first IR theory book from India. Written in "rather stilted and involved language", Rana's use of system theory scientific jargon made the book "somewhat unreadable, unintelligible, laboured and repetitive," ([Bandopadhyay 1977, 254](#); also see [Levi 1977](#), [Kumar 1977](#)). More insightfully, however, [Sushil Kumar \(1977, 560\)](#) diagnosed that Rana was "torn between theoretical particularism and universalism."

Two Modes of Balancing by the Weak

Political culture whose roots are more subterranean than political ideology has, according to [Rana \(1976, 135\)](#), "the substratum affect" on foreign policy strategy. The "operationalization and style" of a foreign policy strategy is shaped by political culture or "the basic orientations" of the foreign policymaking elite. In sketching the basic orientations of India's foreign policymaking elite and understanding their reactions to the international system, Rana considers the role that a relatively stable caste order for over two millennia plays in political conditioning. His analysis of the evolution and workings of the Indian caste system over 2000 years is conveniently sweeping, reliant on textual rather contextual reading, and one that will raise many a historian's eyebrow (as we'll consider below). But he is a theoretician interested in a social contract approach. He postulates a theory of Hindu political order¹⁵ and centers a dialectic of, what he calls, a "detachment-attachment" paradox in theorizing about state formation and political thinking in India.

Anarchy, [Giorgio Agamben \(1998\)](#) postulates, is not the absence but the abandonment of law. In other words, social theorizations about anarchy are hardly explaining the world that came to be, but rather a world that is feared to be. It is a fear of a political system turning into anarchy (a moment of abandonment of law) that draws people to theorize about its origins (from the point of absence of law). What Agamben allows us to see is that social contractual fictions such as anarchy are about what the powers fear rather than what brings them into existence.

Keeping this in mind, Rana notes that a commonality across Hindu political texts is their abject horror of anarchy (1976, 142–3). In *Arthashastra*, a key Indian political text, its author Kautilya uses the term "*Matsya Nyaya*" (the law of the fishes) to denote the law of the state of nature. In the state of nature, the strong power over the weak just as the big fish consume the small in the ocean ([Sarkar 1919](#)). While various traditions of Hindu thinking may differ over specific terms (*matsya nyaya*, or *arajaka*, or *arayani*), it is understood that this state of anarchy was what led to the ori-

¹⁰Incidentally, Hitler is believed to have said the same about Germany.

¹¹For other assessments of this period that attempted to see the realism in Nehru, see [Murti \(1964\)](#) and [Misra \(1970\)](#).

¹²For Rothstein, nonalignment succeeded only "when great power relationships have neither sunk to war nor risen to peaceful cooperation" ([Rothstein 1966, 405](#)). Rana disputed this to argue that détente did not change the character of the international system and hence even peaceful cooperation between great powers did not make nonalignment less relevant.

¹³He wrote: "Possibly the most potent damage the Chinese have inflicted on this country has been to vitiate the hard efforts, not only of these two modern leaders [Gandhi and Nehru], but of their predecessors—stretching back in time to Rammohun Roy—to transfuse politics, and public life in general, with normative desiderata. This bodes ill for the country, and it is time we continued their effort to put our spiritual house in order" ([Rana 1976, viii–ix](#)).

¹⁴S.D. Muni has argued that IR theory did not interest Indian scholars because it was merely a tool of the West. This is obviously a generic assessment but has some grain of truth to it. When Morgenthau visited the School of International Studies in 1968, an Indian scholar argued that much of the Cold War theoretical writing was puerile since it considered great powers as the only relevant actors. Morgenthau's himself had reduced "Politics among Nations" to "Political among great nations," with only the historical experiences of European nations considered relevant. This was of little or no relevance to understand politics in Asia (see [Khan et al. 1968](#)).

¹⁵For an overview of this literature, see [Sahu \(1994\)](#).

gins of the state (Vajpeyi 1973, 65). This state of anarchy is resolved through the institution of Kingship. In both the divine origins as well as the social contractual traditions of ancient Hindu thinking, the historian A.L. Basham argues, the institution of Kingship was considered both divine and evil, moral and immoral.¹⁶ Unlike the Hobbesian social contract, in which it does not matter whether the leviathan is good or bad—the leviathan is a product of a collective agreement, Hindu texts are ambiguous regarding the nature of political sovereignty. Rana argues that they conceive of the King (male ruler comes from the *Kshatriya* caste) as mostly evil but generally a necessary one. This reflects the paranoia of the social caste which writes the King into existence, the *Brahmins* (the priestly caste). The sphere of knowledge in a Hindu society is one strictly restricted to the Brahmins, a minority caste, which sits atop the caste system. Indeed, the Brahmins are the authors of the texts that define the Kingship and its political role (Bronkhorst 2016).

Therefore, Rana suggests that the fear of anarchy or disorder in Hindu writings is an innate fear of the revolt of the masses, of the *Dalit-Bahujan* (the majority), turning against Brahmins. What makes the fear so intense is that Brahmins do not possess the material power to suppress them. For a caste relying on its metaphysical rather than physical superiority, on its power to create law rather than its ability to enforce power, anarchy consequently is a most dreadful situation. Brahmin as a caste group has the most to lose in an anarchical setup, and little or no coercive power to defend against it. Hence, for Rana (1976, 142–3), while the Hindu scriptures are not alone in imagining a state of anarchy with a dim view of human nature, the “intensity of emphasis” and the dismay that this chaos unveils is a standout aspect of Hindu social theory. In the words of the historian A.L. Basham (1963, 85) there is “an almost pathological dread of anarchy.” The “degree of intensity,” to draw on Morgenthau’s critique of Carl Schmitt’s concept of the political, is what makes this imagination distinctly political and antagonistic (Scheuerman 2007).

While caste order is a prerequisite to preserve the Brahmin privilege, just spiritual sanction was not enough to prevent social disorder. A strong coercive authority, unencumbered by bounds of normative control, which could unleash extreme punitive violence to deter social revolts was a necessity. Brahmins therefore co-opted the *Kshatriyas* (the warrior caste), who would be the political rulers. This means that in the new civic order, the King’s function is not merely the protection of the weak (Brahmins) through the state’s coercive apparatus but, in some ways, even more importantly, the establishment and then the preservation of the caste-based social order.¹⁷ The King preserves the social order through active policing of the caste functions and against any transgression, i.e., maintaining *varnashrama-dharma* (the right way of life for all castes and ages) (Basham 1963, 87; Rana 1976, 143–4).

In this framing, the relationship between politics and spirituality, statecraft and law, and *artha* and *dharma* is a relationship that emerges out of a contractual dialectic between the two dominant castes, *Kshatriyas* and Brahmins. Statecraft which related to the exercise of sovereignty was the realm of the *Kshatriya*. Law, the preserve of the Brahmin, provided

the normative precepts for rule (Bhattacharya 1983). But the relationship between them is one of estranged intimacy.

The dread of anarchy means that *artha* triumphs over *dharma*; i.e., the sovereign rules over law. Indeed, although the sovereign is expected to abide by the law—and there are various normative directions of rule, there is nothing that prevents the sovereign from flouting it. Here, Rana insists that the sovereign (the *Kshatriya* caste) was often immoral and ruled through *danda* (violence) rather than *dharma* (law). In a caste-unequal society, the threat of social revolt was always high, and hence *danda* was the norm (*dharma* was a precept either mostly ignored or utilized to justify *danda*). The interests of the Brahmins and *Kshatriyas* are both aligned to the maintenance of a caste order. Brahmins are ill-equipped to do this task themselves and hence need *Kshatriyas* to be coercive. But there is also a threat: what if the *Kshatriyas* turn against Brahmins?

That was always a possibility but managed by Brahmins through an ever-cautious but effective balancing strategy. Brahmins asserted the notional superiority of the spiritual over the temporal but actively abstained from its exercise. They asserted a sort of apolitical control over the *Kshatriya* by the carrots and sticks of spiritual legitimacy and divine punishment but restrained from challenging the custody of temporal power by the *Kshatriya*.

In this process, the compact between the priestly class and the political class was arrived in the following manner. The Brahmin withdrew more and more into the realm of the spiritual, leaving the *Kshatriya* to wield political power unchallenged. The Brahmin’s retreat into spirituality created maximum distance between the political and the spiritual—deeming the spiritual a realm of self-abnegation and total withdrawal. They become nonthreatening but useful for political legitimacy. In turn, this increased the spiritual hold of the Brahmin over the king—the former has a legitimizing function by which the Brahmin “exercised a kind of remote-control authority but carefully abstained from touching it.” Since that remote control is almost never used—the transcendence itself being a signal to the king about its nonuse—the king (*Kshatriya*) is assured about the political domain. It is this dialectic of estranged intimacy that brings the two ruling castes together. Consequently, for Rana, the conflict between spiritual and temporal power that was, in many ways, the engine of European history was conspicuously subverted in India (Rana 1976, ch. 6, 7, 8).

In this dynamic, a few things start to become clearer from Rana’s analysis. Contrary to what Rana’s contemporary the French structuralist Louis Dumont (1966) had argued in a famous thesis, Hindu social order is not dominated by a spiritual order or *dharma*/law/Brahmin. Instead, the hierarchy between the *Kshatriyas* and the masses (from oppressed castes) is one of amoral, even punitive control. But the normative structure preserves a specific subset of this relationship—one between the priestly and the powerful castes. Here, the social contract then is not among a community of individuals and/or with the sovereign. But between the two prominent caste groups—Brahmins and the *Kshatriyas*; the one which writes the contract and the other which wields it. The spiritual authority and the sovereign authority are bifurcated, according to the capacity of each caste. It is done in a way that the seemingly weaker (the Brahmin) are not only able to preserve themselves but also entrench their own power. Their combined power is then used to control/oppress the masses who suffer from the imposition of spiritual (caste) norms as well as political authority.

Importantly, for Brahmins, this strategy of transcendental withdrawal is not one of total detachment from power. In-

¹⁶There are two traditions of thinking about Kingship—mythological, which ordains a divinity on the King, and contractual, which sees the emergence of the Kingdom through a social contract. Arthashastra is a social contractualist. See, Basham (1963, 83).

¹⁷The first King, Manu, sent by the Brahmin-god Brahma, establishes Laws of the Manu which originate the caste-based order in society.

stead, this compact with Kshatriyas allows Brahmins to maintain their own status and privilege. From the Brahmin point of view, power is negotiated through its negation. They exercise power—retain spiritual authority over the sovereign but at the same time ensure their own preservation—through an active disavowal of politics. He is quick to point to the paradox that the “most phenomenal of realities,” anarchy, produced a most transcendent of reactions, spiritualism (Rana 1976, 162). This meant that unlike Western Europe where political institutions developed largely from an engagement dialectic between the Church and the State (Koskenniemi 2021), Hindu social order exhibited a “lack of political inventiveness” of the Brahmin mind. Indeed, “the imagination of disaster” that was at the core of the Brahmin psychology also led to “an incapacity to advance a theory of interstate relations” (Rana 1976, 162). This detachment–attachment paradox—where the Brahmins negotiate power through active disengagement and practice politics through declared distance from it (spiritualism)—provides the generic template for social ordering.¹⁸

The arrival of the British created a new dynamic in the detachment–attachment paradox. The primal fear of social disorder, or chaos, which had been at the center of Brahmin thinking, is now alleviated as the British centralize power in civilian hands. In fact, despite all the ills of colonialism, British rule was one that was essentially foregrounded on the supremacy of civil rule over military rule, of law over force, of the learned over the tough, and of the secularized spiritual over the militarized political. For the Brahmin, this removes two key systemic features: the pervasive fear of anarchy and the dominance of the Kshatriya.¹⁹ In a way, Rana suggests, the British are just like the Brahmins since they assert the dominance of laws over power. The British rule is thus a period of opportunity for the Brahmins, to emerge from their spiritual retreat and actively participate in state functions as allies of the British. This, then, eradicates the need for Brahmin balancing that was founded on a delicate balance of two realms—the spiritual and the political.

The Brahmins are faced however with two new challenges. First, the British establish a secularized polity, which the Brahmins can benefit from only by secularizing themselves and assisting in social reforms. Second, the British may be allies in the sense of alleviating anarchy and removing the dangling sword of the Kshatriya, but Brahmins were required to play a subservient role as secularized elite. Indeed, the British were also now the primary social group preventing Brahmin dominance. This ensues a relationship of, what Ashis Nandy (1983) famously termed as, “intimate enemy” and leads to a reversal of the former balancing through the detachment–attachment paradox.

Brahmin theorizations about state and order increasingly foreswear their former withdrawal and instead push for an increased mediation between norms and rule, spiritualism and politics, nonviolence and violence, religion and polity. While until then the Brahmins had practiced the latter categories by occupying and intensifying the former, in the new formation, the former were increasingly infused with the latter as a strategy of restraint and empowerment. In other words, spiritualism does not retreat from politics but intervenes in it. The detachment–attachment paradox now manifests not through the negation of a nonideal position (nonideal was confrontation between Brahmins and Kshatriyas)

but rather through the creation of a nonideal sphere (of constant sub-conventional confrontation). The result is an attempt towards spiritualization of politics, sublation of violence through nonviolence—or *satyagraha*, as peaceful coercion (also see, Rana 1969). The politicization of spirituality served the purpose of increasing the power of the Brahmin caste against the (colonial) rule. While in the past, Brahmins had retreated from politics to negotiate their material weakness, under the British rule, they now weaponize spirituality itself by infusing it into politics. This is clever because the Brahmin cannot totally endorse immersion into politics—the realm of absolute violence. The British would easily overpower them. A restrained but active form of spiritualized politics allows both normative and temporal maneuvers.

This strategy of balancing by the Brahmin elite against British rule manifests in, according to Rana, several forms of political engagements from Gandhi’s spiritualized politics to the constitutionalism of Indian liberals. These were fundamental strategies to mediate the relationship between the formerly disentangled spheres of spirituality and politics. While the Brahmin social order in an earlier age was characterized by mediation through the removal of the nonideal, conceptions of new social order were not about renunciation but a mediated adjustment of spiritualization of politics. While earlier the Brahmins secured power for themselves through renunciation, now ridden of the fear of social disorder, they generated their power through an infusion of spiritualism into politics. Spirituality and mediation were no more antagonisms, but rather productively engaged. The detachment–attachment paradox manifests in the infusion, not removal, of detachment into attachment.

The sum of Rana’s arguments can be placed under two historical modes of balancing for those who lacked material capacities (Brahmins). The first, when caught by an absolute fear of anarchy, the weak create a detachment–attachment paradox. They assert their detachment from politics, but this detachment is in turn a cunning attachment, as it ensures the security and privilege of the weak and indeed even empowers them through remote control.

The second, when the fear of anarchy is nonexistent, the former strategy of renunciation is channeled by infusing spiritualism into politics. Since there is no more a fear of absolute violence, a spiritual mediation of politics becomes an avenue for increasing one’s power or capability. The power or capability, for Rana, is imbued not in the capacity, but productive engagement of the spiritual–political binary.²⁰

Before we move to discuss Rana’s analysis on nonalignment, it is important to note that his own conception of Indian history is itself Brahminical. In relying on a scriptural rather than a historical account, he uses an abstraction—the recourse to a hypothetical Hindu social contract—to project a historically unchanging paradigm of Brahmin–Kshatriya domination. This ignores a long history of *Dalit–Bahujan* assertion and political rule. As Upinder Singh (2017) shows, the actual practice of caste hierarchy and the manifestations of violence within it were often context-specific; they did not always follow the scriptural register. Historically, *Kshatriya*hood has flowed from the throne and not always the other way around, meaning that several sovereigns from the Mauryas to Shivaji have been nonupper-caste (Mani 2005). Although attentive to the violence of Brahminism, his ab-

¹⁸This is until the medieval period when the lower social classes became more empowered, and the detachment–attachment paradox became more complex.

¹⁹The category of Kshatriya is more expansive in the medieval period because of the political rise of lower castes (and of the Mughals as military rulers).

²⁰Importantly, Rana is keen on demonstrating how actors with no or little material capacity harness the system to their advantage. He differentiates therefore between capacity and capability in balancing. Capacity refers to the resources—military, economic, and diplomatic—that an actor may have. But the capability is “the activation of potential or mobilized capacity so as demonstrably to affect the behaviour” of other actors in desired directions’ (Rana 1976, 15).

straction erases several other contesting political, religious and philosophical systems of thought, such as the *sramanic* faiths—Buddhism, Jainism, Ajivikas and the rationalist traditions of lokayata, among others. And finally, the Brahmin abnegation of power is itself a historical fiction, for not only have there been several Brahmin rulers in Indian history but Brahmins have also wielded political power in ministerial positions throughout.

Yet, to his credit, he does something that Indian IR scholars have been supremely reluctant to do: make caste order as the fundamental basis of Indian political thought and foreign policy practice. Indian IR scholars usually refer to Indian history texts by erasing their social context. (So *Arthashastra*, for instance, is celebrated for its realism, without elaborating that the text is a treatise to maintain state order through *varnashrama* (caste order)). Curiously, none of the reviews or retrievals of Rana's work, despite it now being celebrated as one of the key texts on nonalignment, ever discuss his focus on caste social order. This is despite the fact that, as I mentioned above, he spends nearly half the book in developing this argument.

Nonalignment as Brahminical Balance of Power

There are two broad views on the balance of power, or the balancing process (Schweller 2016). According to one, balance of power is closest to what we have for law of nature in world politics. In this regard, Arnold Wolfers's (1962, 15) is perhaps the classic definition on balancing: "nations, like nature, are said to abhor a vacuum" and therefore "the powerful nation will feel compelled to fill the vacuum with its own power." And since each powerful state does it, this creates a process of balancing, which strives for equilibrium. However, for some others, balancing was a product of active intervention by actors rather than a structure-driven process. Nicholas Spykman (1942, 25) argued that "political equilibrium was neither a gift of the gods nor an inherently stable condition. It results from an active intervention of man, from the operation of political forces." Likewise, according to Reinhold Neibuhr (1944, 174), the balance of power was a "managed anarchy" ["... But it is a system in which anarchy invariably overcomes the management in the end"]; for Nehru, it was 'a process of managed antagonisms' (quoted in Rana 1976, 16).

Regardless of whether balancing is natural or managed, the balancing literature assumes both its uniqueness as well as desirability. However, Rana distinguishes between two kinds of balancing: normative and, what we can call, performative (Rana 1966).²¹ All states follow balancing, but all states are not similarly committed to it. Normative balancing occurs when a state practices balancing to create or maintain a nonhegemonic systemic order. This means that not only do such states practice balancing, but they are also normatively committed to it. In contrast, performative balancing is when states practice balancing but only with the purpose of eventually creating a hegemony. The final aim is to destroy the balancing system itself through hegemony.²²

²¹Rana's defines balance of power as "a process for the division of power available to sovereign states in their external relations *inter se*." This process, he adds in *Imperatives of Non-Alignment*, is "activated by states, with conflicting claims on each other, by increasing, exploiting, manipulating, or, in any other way, utilizing their capacities in a manner that perceptibly tends to reduce the capabilities of those they are in conflict with, or conversely, relatively increases their own." See Rana (1976, 15).

²²A normative balancer commits to the balancing process because it allows them a maximalist chance to achieve their national objective. While a performative

This differentiation between normative and performative balancing is key to understanding the balancing strategy of newly independent, nonaligned states. With long histories of colonialism, the most important national objective of such states was preserving their national sovereignty and territorial integrity. This was only possible under an international system that facilitated national sovereignty, i.e., an international society. Newly independent states normatively commit to balancing with the purpose of maintaining this post-Second World War system of states. Great powers, neo-colonial and ideological powers, in contrast, aspire to become hegemonic and were thus performative balancers. They were interested in accumulating more power to become hegemonic.²³

Rana was inspired by the English School and their argument about international society. But unlike the English School which traces international society to Westphalia, Rana suggests that an international society only becomes a reality after the Second World War. Two sets of post-Second World War developments were specifically responsible for turning the international system into an international society—the advent of the nuclear age and the rise of postcolonial states.

For him, the pre-1945 international order is a classic balance of power system. Dominated by a few colonial, sovereign countries, it was maintained through a system of alliances. In this system, weaker polities must either ally with another stronger power or succumb to an antagonist superpower. In this period, an international society, underwritten by Westphalian sovereign statehood as a key norm of the international system, was mostly nonexistent. Indeed, territorial sovereignty was regularly flouted through wars, occupation, partition, colonialism and imperialism.

However, with nuclear weapons as several realists also argue, the international system moved from a classic, mobile balance of power to an immobile one; the balance of power had turned into a balance of terror (Rana 1966). In the classical bipolar system, each pole tried to extend its reach to make itself stronger—through territorial expansion, political tutelage, or alliances. In such a system, a political vacuum—an area that was unaligned or unoccupied—was an automatic field of action for the superpowers, with war being the ultimate option. A bipolar (or for that matter, even a multipolar) order detested political vacuum. A bipolar order is destined to become either hegemonic or biglobal—i.e., eventually turn into twin hegemonies without any vacuum (Rana 1979).

However, in an immobile balance of power system, the two superpowers could no more resort to war as politics by other means (Rana 1966, 1976). Unaligned countries, i.e., the zone of political vacuum, cannot be outrightly occupied without risking a general war. Hence, a bipolar order could only be turned into a biglobal one through politics without war.

The nuclear era of bipolar balancing was accompanied by a large expansion of the unaligned world or political vacuum, as large swathes of colonial territories gained independence. This is the point on which Rana goes deeper than his Western realist and English School contemporaries. He

balancer is committed to destroying it because that is what their national objective demands.

²³This is different from the status quo and revisionist power distinction. Neither status quoist nor revisionist powers have any normative investment in the process of balancing itself. Balancing is a process that allows them to either preserve or challenge a particular order. Both status quo and revisionist powers are eventually hegemonist in orientation—their aim is to achieve hegemony, and thereby undermine the balancing process.

indicates that it was only with the emergence of postcolonial states that an “international” society, which he called “Eastern Westphalia,” truly emerges (Rana 1979). Before the Second World War, territorial occupation was the norm, and consequently, normative balancing was less prevalent and limited to only a few Euro-American actors. National sovereignty becomes a systemic norm only in the aftermath of the Second World War, and it becomes so because of an intense insistence by postcolonial states, which are emerging from long histories of colonialism. They were naturally most concerned about protecting their autonomy and national sovereignty.

They aimed for political, economic, and territorial independence, whose maximization required the prevention of a bipolar system descending into a biglobal system. Alliance with one superpower may ensure protection from the other, but it also meant compromising on national sovereignty.

However, this peculiar and unprecedented structuring of international order awarded capabilities to newly independent states that they did not have in the classical balance of power system. They now have a larger scope of maneuver between the two superpowers. Their lack of material capacities could be compensated through the deployment of diplomatic capacities in a manner that divides the power of the superpowers. What follows is a nonalignment–alignment paradox.

Let us imagine three actors. Two of them are bullies, and a third one is a physically weak actor. What are the options for a weak actor? It could hide and thus declare neutrality. This may be a good strategy, but the success of the strategy depends on the willingness of the bullies to let the weak actor live in peace. The power in this case is with the bullies. The weak actor could ally with one of the bullies. This may create a sense of security, but the weak actor is now captive to the whims of the ally that it has allied with. The final option is for the weak actor to play the bullies against each other by constantly swinging from one side to the other. Creating a delicate balance through a process of maneuver in which none of the sides is assured support, but also none is not assured of support. It is a testing strategy and requires clever deployment of diplomatic capacities, but if employed properly this is the best way for the weak party to keep the bullies in check. So, while in each of these cases, the overall capacity of the weak actor may remain the same, its capabilities are measurably higher in the third scenario.

The third scenario employs the nonalignment–alignment paradox. Essentially, newly independent states, or the political vacuum, swerve between the two superpowers but never align enough with any side. Their acute sensitivity to national sovereignty because of colonialism makes them wary of any kind of neocolonial alliances. When one pole makes a move, they move toward the other pole, but never enough to be consumed by it (ally status) and hence lose autonomy. Likewise, for their own developmental needs, they may drift towards one of the poles, but retain the agency to retreat towards the other side. This nonalignment–alignment paradox is at the very center of nonalignment as a strategy. Nonalignment was neither a position of staying neutral or charting a different, autonomous path for the third world, but instead a process of constant realignment. Maximal nonalignment is indeed maximal realignment. It is a strategy that can only be deployed because of an assurance that the weaker power will not be territorially threatened through war, for it may turn into a systemic war. It was a status-quoist policy in so far as it was about maintaining and further investing in the existing systemic order of international society. But it is also a “tightrope performance” (Rana 1969: 309), one that

needs constant assessment of options and awareness of international circumstances. Rana’s realism is a sagacious performance of diplomatic capabilities.

As is perhaps becoming evident, for Rana, in deploying this nonalignment–alignment paradox, Nehru was drawing on a political culture of Brahminical balancing. This strategy relied on an acute awareness of the evolving circumstances and using normative positioning as a strategic choice. Just like Brahminical balancing during British rule, the strategy worked only so far as the weaker actor retained its normative/spiritual essence. In the normative-material duality, instead of withdrawing the normative from the material, they infuse normative into the material power. Hence, Rana argues that nonalignment as a balancing strategy was successful only so far as the nonaligned weaponized their weaker status through exhibiting their normative commitment to the balancing system. A strategy of performative balancing, one where the nonaligned also aspire for material hegemony, would eventually be counter-productive because the nonaligned would compromise on their developmental needs, lose the space of maneuver as the superpowers feel more threatened and consequently adopt more assertive containment strategies.

This nonalignment, however, was a strategy for a specific systemic order. The pre-Second World War world order, for instance, would be different. It was an anarchic period and if India become independent before or during the War, Rana argues India’s strategic options would be very different. Indeed, during this period, three different strategies were advanced. First was the idea of a brahminical retreat into complete nonviolent spiritualism, of asserting maximal distance from material power. This was mostly Gandhi’s position at the start of the war (his letters to Hitler, for instance). The second strategy was of qualified nonalliance. In the Quit India Movement, the Congress leadership made it clear that it would not ally with the Japanese. Indeed, it declared its sympathies with the allies but conditioned its support upon granting independence. This nonsupportive support was another play on a Brahminical detachment–attachment paradox, of evolving a balancing strategy between the allies and the axis powers. The third strategy was of an Asian Federation, i.e., a large polity big enough to be large and powerful enough on its own to emerge as a third bloc.²⁴ This would qualify as a more “realist” position, but as Rana reminds us, Nehru may have championed Federations in the 1940s, but he quietly dropped advocating for them because the structure of international politics changed in the late 1940s (Rana 1969). All three strategies were advanced in a situation where war was possible (and indeed evident or ongoing).

Conclusion: Lord Vishnu of Eastern Westphalia

It is the postcolonial states, strongly invested in national sovereignty, which turn balancing into a normative end goal, rather than just a performative strategy. Through the distinction between normative and performative balancing, Rana’s attempt is to make the “balance of power” a system-wide operation—one that reflects the national objectives of all states, rather than merely reflecting the struggle among great powers.

But with the end of the Cold War, Rana declared that nonalignment “had lapsed into history” (Rana 1994, 158). He

²⁴Even as far as back in 1931, Nehru had written an article titled “Defence of India,” where he had advanced a balance of power explanation—of bipolarity between Britain and Russia—to explain why Free India would be able to maintain its independence and sovereignty.

argued that the bipolar order was replaced by "a complex, shifting, uncertain, ambiguous configuration of power" in the post-Cold War period, which made nonalignment redundant (Rana 1997).

The preceding analysis may suggest that Rana thought of nonalignment as status-quoist; after all, it worked best in a bipolar order. Yet, in some of his writings, he seemed to take a transformative view of Nehruvian nonalignment (Rana 1979 in particular). While nonalignment was the most optimal balancing strategy for India, Nehru eventually expanded its purpose from the preservation of national sovereignty to world peace. At times, in what appears like an enduring contradiction in his work, the optimistic Nehruvian in Rana seems to trump the pessimistic IR theorist. But this is, as Guzzini (2004) suggests about realism, only a contradiction if one takes realism to be an ideological position, rather than a foreign policy strategy attendant to conceptions of national interest. Rana thinks of nonalignment as a realist practice, as a diplomatic game of maneuver and negotiation of power, rather than an ideological position. And precisely because it is protean, it retains the possibility to transform the structure. Nonalignment as a practice for Rana came with an embedded promise of systemic transformation. So, even though critical of Nehru, Rana is not entirely dismissive of Nehru's world peace aspirations.

Rana (1976, 96–7) wrote:

... when generally nonalignment had achieved for India a measure of security he [Nehru] retreated further from such expressions, only very obliquely revealing himself, or substituting the word peace for the word security, and smuggling away from his consciousness perceptions of his balancing policies, as though he felt guilty about them. The safer he felt the more boldly his intellect moved towards some sort of norm of power that he persuaded, rather than coerced, power that helped to reach mutual accommodation without rancour, rather than power which forced an accord and left bitterness behind.

Here, he credits Nehru with an incisive understanding of power that the latter learned from its most "sensitive but effective" practitioner, Gandhi (Rana 1976, 95). In foreign affairs, this translated into an understanding that "power would need to be used very sensitively—as carefully as a surgeon's scalpel—and wherever possible . . . to phase off, progressively if possible, its more obvious and threatening expression, which was no equivalent, in Nehru's view, of not wielding it effectively" (Rana 1976, 95).

Concealed in the idealism of Nehru's vision thus was a very practical aspect of power: nonalignment assiduously pushed forth norms of international conduct that made international politics less power driven. Such norms included respect for state sovereignty, anti-imperialism and nonimperialism, and racial equality. Coming off a period of colonialism, "non-aligned foreign policies have been uniquely successful in extending the sovereign state system to all reaches of the globe, and in subsequently sustaining this formal framework of freedom" (Rana 1979, 81).

Furthermore, nonalignment played another important role. Nonalignment "whilst protecting a state from the hegemonial tendencies of a hegemonial power, helps also in putting pressure on that state which in its fight against the hegemonial power, might feel obliged to become hegemonial itself" (Rana 1966, 113). In other words, by demonstrating the power of nonalignment as a legitimate strategy of survival, it assists in preventing similarly placed states to become performative balancers.

If Morgenthau's balancer drew on, as Nicolas Guilhot (2010) has argued, Schmitt's theological restrainer, the figure of the *katechon*, the antiChrist who prevents a degeneration into anarchy, Rana's balancer, nonalignment (and Nehru in particular), plays a more nurturing role. The nurturer uses the maneuvering space to extend and grow an international society that can mitigate the effect of power politics. For Rana, Nehru inherits nonalignment as a historically sharpened Brahminical practice—as a diplomatic practice evolved and practiced over centuries in India, most recently by Gandhi. Indeed, Nehru is able to become its most ardent exponent not merely because of his own intelligence but because of this being an inherited cultural form.

Consequently, nonalignment, and Nehru in particular, as a nurturer who prevents a regression of international society into anarchy, was thus "the lord Vishnu of the Eastern Westphalia" (Rana 1979, 75). If Morgenthau's balancer is a *katechon*—the restrainer who delays the arrival of the antiChrist—Rana's balancer is the Brahmin god "Lord Vishnu"—the eternally creative, nurturing, redeeming force. These two realist visions of the balancer are starkly different. Morgenthau's realism is driven by a tragic, pessimistic vision of politics, Rana's is in contrast a more redemptive, nurturing vision.

However, there is another unstated aspect to Vishnu as the balancer. Vishnu may be the nurturing god, but he is invariably a god of the Brahmins, one who uses all his might and treachery against *Dalit-Bahujans* (Phule 2012). His nurturing image is a conceit to his violent bearing. The Indian leader B.R. Ambedkar had strongly criticized nonalignment for its Brahminical virtue-signaling. Indian nonviolence was steeped in centuries of violence against *Dalits*, and hence he saw no morality in it. For him, trapped in a moral-material binary, nonalignment disallowed India to explore transactive and historical practicable ways of soliciting solutions for foreign policy problems (Ambedkar 1995, 1317–27).

Rana is ambitiously heretical—drawing on classical realism, English School, systems theory, and Hindu social theory, and he even brings in post-structural insights with the focus on Brahmin discursive power. His theory is not without holes²⁵ and his own suppositions, as we have pointed out above, draw on a scriptural rather than historical understanding of Brahminism, allowing him to make neat claims about an essentially messy history which in turn help advance only a Brahminical view. Furthermore, as Bandyopadhyay (1977, 255) reminds him, nearly seven dozen other countries had followed nonalignment. How could an Indian-specific theory explain a general phenomenon?²⁶ Presumably, the only way to reconcile the India-specific cultural motivations of nonalignment with its systemic application was to suggest that India (and Nehru) originated nonalignment which others followed as a prudent course of action. In other words, Indian nonalignment was politico-cultural—one that germinated from political and cultural circumstances of India, while for the rest of the nonaligned world, it was imitative, i.e., they followed India's example. This gestures toward a relationship of Brahmini-

²⁵Although a critique of his theory is beyond the purview of this article, his forceful normative stances try to compensate for the lack of analytical precision. His arguments are not always fully substantiated, when faced with difficult counter-arguments (especially on nonalignment and China) his argumentation becomes more jargonistic. His understanding of the Balance of Power is complex, but he suggests that hegemonic systems are not the balance of power systems. Here he mistakes balancing and balance.

²⁶In a later article, Rana suggested that even a broader Global South foreign policy approach could be explained through his systemic theory analysis (Rana 1980).

cal tutelage between India and the rest of the nonaligned world. Rana's cultural essentialisms are perhaps as complex as his normative ambitions—but none more than other realists, including Morgenthau, who also saw normative and tutelary hopes in American liberalism (Guilhot 2017).

Nevertheless, for a student of International Relations, it allows for rethinking the standard narratives about anarchy, social contract, international society, and balance of power. Rana contextualizes, or rather provincializes, claims about these “fundamental” suppositions to advance claims for a specific foreign policy strategy. Hence, rather than thinking of Rana as a derivative of one specific theory of IR, i.e., realism, it may perhaps be better to view his version as part of a Wittgensteinian “family resemblance” approach of many realisms (Guzzini 2022).

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