

BOOK REVIEW

S. Jaishankar (2024). *Why India matters*

Harish K. Thakur

The journey of Bharat from India to Bharat is not a long one as the two-century long British rule's impact and the British founded epistemological discourse in the subcontinent, has begun to wane. S. Jaishankar, the Indian Foreign Minister would be remembered for his formal declaration in 2016 of Indian stake in the emerging world order as a competitor and an ambitious world power in the coming decades. Not much time has passed and India has almost reached to the status of the third largest economy and fourth largest military power of the world. S Jaishankar's *Why Bharat Matters* presents a timely commentary on the India's quest to ascend the global hierarchy and its evolving place in the global order. Jaishankar builds his argument upon the ideas he first introduced in *The India Way* (2020), the way for India to deal with the new world, which is 'uncertain' and mark India's presence as a dynamic world leader drawing strength from its heritage, culture and traditional knowledge with the optimism of democracy and technology.

The book shows that an intellectual and strategic confidence is mounting within India and its external affairs establishment. It also goes well with the *Viksit Bharat vision* of the current government that aims to make India a self-reliant, strategically autonomous, globally integrated and a developed state by 2047. Jaishankar argues that while rising powers seek stability most of all, India must plan to rise amidst serious unpredictability. This process is also exceptional as it represents the rejuvenation of a civilizational state, a construct that appears to counter its counterpart "the national rejuvenation plan 2049" of China. As a *Vishwa Mitra* India also seeks to the wellbeing of the Global South, to contribute to the global good and embrace the global responsibilities and opportunities.

The book begins with "presenting a world view" through "foreign policy", "making friends, influencing people", "dealing with China", "the roads not taken" and "why Bharat matters"? Thematically rich, the volume has eleven chapters with historical counsels and anecdotes from Ramayana and Mahabharata. They encompass a wide range of subjects, from multialignment to regional alliances, global south to global good, strategic autonomy to digital

transformation, and from historical lessons to geopolitical alignments like the Quad, RCEP and SAGAR. Jaishankar's invocation of figures like Sardar Patel and Syama Prasad Mookerjee reflects a conscious effort to link contemporary statecraft with nationalist thought. This approach adds political depth but also risks narrowing the historical narrative to a particular ideological lineage, potentially underrepresenting alternative foreign policy traditions, such as those rooted in Nehruvian internationalism.

In chapter one Jaishankar embarks on the message given earlier through his volume the India Way which had urged to greater engagement of the world, especially the US, Japan, Russia, Europe and manage China but now the world has turned more complex, tough and the problems and issues have magnified more. Technology too, holds Jaishankar has become a game changer as it impacts the daily routine much deeper (p. 2). As a rising power India has to harmonise its particular interests with the commitment of doing global good (p.9). Since a good foreign policy must work for you according to Jaishankar, the second chapter anticipates what portends good for the Indian nation and the people. The chapter discusses how various Indian operations during Covid 19 pandemic and afghan crisis like "Vande Bharat Mission" were successful. However, the challenges from across the borders in the shape of terrorism, separatism and border incursions have kept the things tense for India for which the Indian state has to act sagaciously keeping accelerating the national development and developing the talent capabilities.

"The State of the World", the third chapter, notes how the world has been traumatised more by the incidents like Covid 19 pandemic, Ukraine crisis, violence in West Asia, climate challenge and the widened North-South and the East-West gulf. In a devastating state of things India has to "revisit its past and draw the right lessons from abroad as much as from home" (37). In "Back to the Future", the fourth chapter, Jaishankar observes that "we have the revival of all the negatives of global politics that were thought only recently as anachronistic" (41). Although, China has been the direct beneficiary of last century geopolitics but "the shortfalls on the American account today cannot be readily filled by the growth of China's capabilities. Some of that reflects from the sheer spread of the US and extensive grip on the international order. But there is also the crucial difference in the very nature of the two polities" (47). Their opposing worldviews keep them at a considerable distance and the new situation has to deal with both of them. Saudi Arabia's interest towards IMEC, the I2U2 unilateral, and Europe's approach towards the Urals and across the Atlantic are the issues going to matter.

"A Transformational Decade", the fifth chapter begins with the Modi's articulation as India's quest to be a leading power one day and discusses how in a decade's time the Indian foreign policy has transformed from its previous state into the one of progress and commitment. The chapter underlines a series of commitments like attaining the objective of "Viksit Bharat 2047", making India the "Third largest economy of the world", and inaugurating "Amrit Kaal", a

quarter period of India's progress to a developed nation. The "Neighbourhood First policy" in South Asia has its own implications for India as China's increased presence has eroded India's influence in the region (Thakur, 2023). It was followed by the extended neighbourhood to South-East Asia, Link West, Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), the India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States group (I2U2), India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) initiatives, the Quad alliance, the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), the International Solar Alliance (ISI), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), the Voice of the Global South Summit are some of the major feats cited in the volume. For Jaishankar India's "foreign policy is now seen as a direct instrument to accelerate national development and modernisation" (71). The need for a reformed multithread order is also felt that seeks quick solution and addressing.

In the sixth chapter, "Making Friends, Influencing People", Jaishankar executes a critical assessment of India's strategic and soft power relations with the countries and regions like US, China, Russia, Japan, Europe, Africa, West Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and Latin America. The idea of "*sab ka sath, sabka vikas*" is more relevant in foreign policy application than at domestic level only. In France, a relatively newer diplomatic discovery, Jaishankar finds the third way that offers encouraging scope in selected domains. Germany also offers a space for further growth. It is also important to reassess India's approach towards the west in view of the negative role US has played against India in collusion with Pakistan and China.

The importance of the Indo-Pacific as a future theatre of conflict and the rise of QUAD in answer to this forms the central theme of the seventh chapter "Quad: A Grouping Foretold". Since Quad is an organisation of democratic states it provides the most natural and robust response to the changing geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region, and the growing influence of China. It primarily provides a platform for cooperation on an array of subjects, like maritime security, connectivity, infrastructure, trade, technology, health, climate, and disaster relief. It has been helpful in issues like United Nations Convention on Law of Seas (UNCLOS) 1982, Open Radio Access Network (O-RAN) 2021, global semiconductor value chain, climate, World Health Organisation (WHO), Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief 2022 (HADR) and Inter-governmental Negotiations (IGN).

Chapter eight "Dealing with China" is in fact at the core of the volume as the global power shift signifies the shift from the west to the east or more specifically from the US to China. Besides the conventional rhetoric about failed foreign policy of the post-independence Indian regimes the chapter notes multidimensional challenges from border, trade, security and geopolitical influence. At one time what was expected to be the "Asian Century" is now witness to a more divided continent, a multipolar Asia. Aware of the Indian rise China has been part to anti-India moves at the international fora especially on the issues of terrorism, Kashmir and the permanent seat of UNSC. In order to

protect its national interests India has to develop a comprehensive national power incorporating a realist and cogent foreign policy formulation and its strategic application. There are outcomes, holds Jaishankar, “that reflects the lack of purpose on the India side till 2014. Technology and tactics can offer some compensations on their own score. India is therefore, compelled to imaginatively address the problem of dealing a powerful adversary... seen from a narrow perspective, it is not unexpected that the rise of India has been underplayed by China” (152-53). India has to follow a more China focussed policy to keep its interests safe.

In “Re-Imagining Security”, (ninth chapter) Jaishankar situates India’s security landscape within the frames of emerging global patterns and the evolving nature of security. The chapter begins with the counsel line “corrosion is now the new competition” (p.158). In the changed world “knowledge economy” can generate new power metrics. Keeping in view the broadened expanse of security domains, such as space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum Jaishankar underscores the importance of multilateralism which needs to be strengthened with restructuring and making it more representative (Thakur, 2024). India has played significant role in the past too in global security forums and it can play a greater role by collaborating in stable and reliable partnerships with like-minded nations, which can help in securing a better and secure world order. The role of United Nations needs to be made more responsive and legitimate through its expansion and restructuring.

In “The Roads Not Taken: Recalling Leaders, Revisiting History” (tenth chapter), Jaishankar tries to reassess the issues of strategic significance from the lens of history and leadership. Thinking beyond the foreign policy of Nehru featured by his predilections he notes down the diverging perspectives of Sardar Patel, S.P. Mukerjee, B.R. Ambedkar, J.B. Kriplani, Ram Manohar Lohia, Deendyal Upadhyay and Minoos Masani, of course appearing to be more realist and relevant at their times. One reason to go back in history, holds Jaishankar “is precisely because differing political viewpoints gained ground to the point of one of them (the BJP) eventually coming to power” (180). Patel’s importance could be realised with his role in integration of Indian states, Hyderabad, Junagarh, Jammu & Kashmir and counsels to Nehru on West Asia and China. Mukerjee’s protests against two flags and two constitutions in India were important to overpower the tendencies of Indian balkanisation plans. Ambedkar’s “India first” is the core principle of Indian foreign policy today. M.R Masani’s contesting the significance and benefit of nonalignment policy of India in 1950s is relevant even today. Therefore, from the road taken, we must learn that national security can never take second place and the road not taken could be source of better results.

India’s recent feats rank it among the most powerful states of the world today, at least among the top five. The final chapter, “Why Bharat Matters”, begins with India’s Chandrayaan-3 success as a proud member of Global South, also lauded at BRICS summit held in South Africa. Being one sixth of humanity India’s

successes or failures have global connotations. India matters to the world because of its history, economy, power, capacity, values, culture, and contributions. At G20 summit held in New Delhi, “the diplomatic accomplishment was unparalleled by the admission of African Union (AU) as a permanent member, that too at India’s initiative” (197). India’s *vaccine maitri* also helped twenties of small states during the pandemic. The pan-Indian welfare schemes have expanded the domains of benefit to the people at periphery. The digital schemes like *Jan Dhan Yojna*, insurance, digital payment system have all revolutionised the domestic business and influenced and inspired the world that lags behind in this domain.

Therefore, S. Jaishankar’s volume *Why Bharat Matters* presents an overarching narrative of India’s transformation from a reactive regional actor to a confident global stakeholder. Through a blend of historical reassessments, leadership roles, strategic insights, and policy analysis, he offers a structured argument for why India must be understood not only as the most populous state, a rising power but also as a mature civilizational entity reasserting itself in a rapidly changing global order. Obsessed with the Sino-US factor in the global power matrix, the book offers a persuasive and well-documented case for India’s centrality in global affairs, though a more balanced treatment of past policy legacies and structural constraints would deepen its analytical rigor and strategic maturity.

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