



IJMRRS

**International Journal for Multidisciplinary
Research, Review and Studies**

ISSN: 3049-124X (Online)

Volume 1 - Issue 3

2024

© 2024 International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Review and Studies

BOOK REVIEW

THE INDIA WAY: STRATEGIES FOR AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

BY S. JAISHANKAR.

Padmanabh K. Sharma

**“If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings—nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run—
Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,
And—which is more—you’ll be a Man, my son!”**

– Rudyard Kipling

This verse from the sempiternal poem “If” by English Novelist and Journalist Rudyard Kipling articulates the heart of Indian foreign policy. It is with this spirit that Jaishankar’s book ministers to the intellectual exigency of Indian foreign policy enthusiasts to be conversant with churns in New Delhi’s grey matter occasioned by tectonic shifts in the global geopolitical matrix. Russia’s new Avatar, China’s ascent, the US retreat from its overt extraterritorial advances guided by its lately minted convex inward-looking policy in the 21st Century, and burgeoning Asian economies underpin this capricious contemporary globe. In metaphorical parlance, The India Way is an account of South Block’s fresh diplomatic reconnaissance of the evolving global landscape and its prognosis about the emerging world order, as C. Raja Mohan opines “There is no doubt that this book (The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World) opens an important window into Delhi’s changing world view”. As countries become infidel towards their customary diplomatic stance, Jaishankar is aptly positioned on the scholastic plane to demystify cryptic nuances of this fragile world. Jaishankar set out on his diplomatic voyage from Moscow as Third Secretary in 1979 and served as Foreign Secretary of India after

having been the Indian Ambassador to key countries such as the US and China. The apotheosis in his professional trajectory befell him with his enlistment into Modi's Kitchen Cabinet as External Affairs Minister in 2019. His treatise on the Indian approach towards the world factors into his ring-side experiences of seminal milestones in the international highway, marking its transcension from a purely theoretical framework.

Jaishankar's injunction to Indians against deep 'self-absorption' given the rise of China by drawing on a film of Satyajit Ray (p3) seeks to infuse a sense of strategic awareness in Indian citizenry to analyse and surmount challenges that may spring from the alterations in the global power hierarchy.

According to Jaishankar, Indian foreign policy has three burdens from the past: Partition, Delayed economic reforms, and the prolonged exercise of the nuclear option (p9). This allusion endows readers with the empirical constraints under which Indian diplomatic business is conducted. Jaishankar propounds a comprehensive diplomatic strategy for responding to contingencies of the day for he writes "This is a time for us to engage America, manage China, cultivate Europe, reassure Russia, bring Japan into play, draw neighbours in, extend the neighbourhood and expand traditional constituencies of support" (p.10). In an attempt to tide us over embedded psychological limitations, he argues that we have to get away with the mindset that the post-1945 world order (bipolar world) is the norm, and departures from it are aberrations and reinforces his argument by reflecting on the world's historical affiliation to multipolarity (p.12).

In the course of expounding his approach, Jaishankar casually intersperses his text with a fitting pedagogical delineation of IR and other connected concepts. To cite an example, he writes "...International Relations is an exercise of both forging convergences and managing divergences". Jaishankar talks about a universal phenomenon during economic predicament in which countries, even powerful ones like the US and Russia, subscribe to the policy of "prioritizing of national interests at the cost of international responsibilities" (p.23), which is again the quintessence of realism and a caveat against over-reliance on countries. Jaishankar argues that the present Sino-US polarization is gestating an interest-driven world, which will be governed by transactional terms, like a bazaar, in this context he remarks "Single-minded pursuit of

national interests will make our world look like a bazaar, with more players, less rules and greater volatility” (p.28).

Jaishankar attributes the credit for preventive measures undertaken by countries to the anachronistic global order (post-Cold War), as he mentions, “The discipline of the global order was given credit in the past for a range of preventive measures. Non-proliferation experts would confirm that many more nations would have gone nuclear but for alliance pressures”, (p.39). This argument, in an indirect way, signals that the robust individualism that has outsmarted collective lifestyles of traditional societies was in effect, the percolation of changes in attitudes of countries down to their social fabrics in a transformed form, since as state actors shed collective ideals, the social behavioural attitudes ape the orientations of countries, which in turn reinforces Jaishankar’s long-standing view that we cannot be immune to the events happening outside India, in an interdependent world as we have today. It also points to the fact that individualism, the aorta of liberalism, which served the Western interests well is now acting as a counterpoise to their setting. He counsels the need for issue-based relationships with constricted ambit to leverage the changing global scenario (p.41) and in localised purview, he moots “India must reach out to as many directions as possible and maximize its gains” (p.42).

Krishna’s choice happens to be the most appealing theme to Indians, given the analogies Jaishankar draws between the episodes of Mahabharata and the circumstances of the world in this thematic chapter to bolster his argument of realism. Jaishankar unwraps the philosophical prescriptions enshrouded in stories of Mahabharata, which are germane to the backdrop against which the postulates of Indian foreign policy are to be framed. As a matter of illustration, he juxtaposes the emotive impediments to war, which were in motion during the Mahabharata with the structural deterrents *du jour* to initiation of war (p.51), to signify the confluence of core issues at the cellular level. However, it is also emblematic of the normative degeneration that the global society has undergone, which again corroborates the need for a realist mindset for navigating the rocky challenges posed by this selfish world. He substantiates the flouting of rules by harkening to instances of the Mahabharata, such as Drona taking the thumb of Eklavya, to argue that realist traditions are intrinsic to our civilizational paraphernalia (p.53). However, it should have been mentioned that Mahabharata embodies both the noble proposition of idealism as well as the deft manoeuvres of realism and therefore, it transcends the temporal frontiers and wields the cognitive thrust to steer through any kind of world.

Jaishankar draws exception to the Nehruvian foreign policy doctrine by averring, “the pursuit of a global profile sometimes came at the cost of narrower national interests” (p.81). However, the propensity to mount opprobrium on Nehru may not be in concord with the gospels of that biaxial geopolitical macrocosm. An adjudicatory take from an analytical lens unravels that his idealism was the indispensable realism of the bygone era, given the stark fiscal skeleton of our nation. Nehru's intellectual grandeur firmly rooted in Gandhian austerity placed India at the helm of the global metaphysical realm, after all, it was with no trepidation that he, as leader of the gestating Indian economy, enunciated the concerns of all newly born nations at the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, just a year after Independence, “There are vast tracts of the world which may not in the past, for a few generations, have taken much part in the world affairs. But they are awake; their people are moving and have no intention whatever of being ignored or of being passed by.” Even Jaishankar’s dissertation of multi-alignment as an energetic and participative system (p.103) conceptually banks on the Nehruvian plinth of non-alignment, for both of these approaches are wedded to the prescient element of strategic sovereignty. India and China should pragmatically envisage an upswing in their ties predicated upon the *grail* of a global power nucleus reflecting the current geopolitical fashions, which will not only devitalise the hegemonic and parochial Western institutionalism but also make international regulatory centres more representative and inclusive as Jaishankar writes, “For all their other differences, the demand for a contemporary global order does put India and China on the same side of table” (p.113). However, what should be flagged as a fundamental ideological error is his labelling of the Indian economy as a “credible market economy” in a bid to locate areas of convergence between India and the West (pg.117). Our constitution makers, in their profound sagacity, officially adopted the equilibrium of mixed economy which lies between the two extremes of socialism and capitalism in the oscillatory scope of architectural economic policy.

In nationalist vogue, the book gives utterance to New Delhi’s strategic interests, which does not seem to be in tandem with passionate Eurocentrism as evinced by Prof. Christophe Jaffrelot’s review, the Avantha Chair Professor of Indian Politics and Sociology at King’s College (London), “... contrary to the appearances of the book – and the very confident tone of its author – India is perhaps not in control of its diplomatic strategy, at least not any more so than before.” Contrary to legitimate academic surmise, Jaishankar’s opus neither delves into the theoretical anatomy of foreign affairs nor does it cash in on his diplomatic insights to prop up notional prescriptions rendered through the book. Taking a cue from the book and in

intellectual vitality, this descriptive literature befits *the Goldilocks* contours. Jaishankar ennobles teleological ethics in the 21st-century world through different schemes of his treatise. Ardent followers of pragmatic conventions in particular should certainly peruse this book to elicit more robust endorsement, and students of International relations may too exploit the South Block's changing outlook towards geopolitical tides. In the spirit of a witty ironic conclusion, it is worth noting that what Jaishankar advocates as the India Way through his chic folio was once voiced by an Italian diplomat, Niccolo Machiavelli, for this is what Machiavelli reasoned long back, "Ends justify means."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:-

Padmanabh K. Sharma is pursuing B.A. (Honours) in Political Science from Deshbandhu College (NIRF 16; NAAC A++), University of Delhi. He has been designated as the Honorary Advisor to the International Youth Edu-Skills Foundation. As regards his responsibilities in college, he currently serves as Editor of the Political Science Society of Deshbandhu College and has been enlisted into the Student Executive Board of the Deshbandhu Journal of Social Sciences, ISSN: 2853-7974 (Electronic). In addition to his editorial engagements in college, he has been selected as an author by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, University of London, for its programmes in India under the auspices of the Alumni Community Engagement Fund, United Kingdom. He has been contributing literary pieces to various journals and magazines on the relevance of ancient Indian philosophies, global affairs, political events, public administration, and social norms.

His one such Research Paper entitled “CITIES: Demystifying and Tracing Urban Governance in India” narrated the evolution of urban governance in India and attracted applause from the academic community.

Mail Address: sharmapadmanabh1516@gmail.com