

**Varghese k. George, *Open Embrace: India-US ties in the Age of Modi and Trump*, (New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 2018), 304.**

The focus of the book "*Open Embrace: India-US ties in the age of Modi and Trump*" by Varghese k. George is on the convergence of foreign policy goals of Prime Minister of India Modi and President Trump. Furthermore, it gives an overview of the shifts taking place in America's relations with some major world powers under the Trump presidency, and what all these changes mean for India.

The author, Varghese k. George is the associate editor and US correspondent for *The Hindu*. Prior to joining *The Hindu*, he was bureau chief at *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi. He has written extensively on the foreign policies of India and the US, particularly on the rise of Modi in India and Trump in America. His reports have won several awards in India and abroad, including the Ramnath Goenka Journalist of the Year, the Prem Bhatia Memorial Award for Excellence in Political Reporting, the Transparency International Award for fighting corruption and the International Press Institute Award for Excellence in Journalism.

The book under review comprises five chapters in addition to the 'Introduction' and the 'Afterward', which discusses latest developments in India-US relations. The author dilates on the evolving bilateral relations between India and the US under Narendra Modi and Donald Trump. Both leaders have vowed in public of making their countries 'great again' and working to achieve goals set by them for their respective countries.

The author has used the lens of strategic culture to define what he terms 'the self', 'the enemy', and 'the allies' of India and the US. 'Hindutva', the political Hinduism, is the BJP's political framework on which Modi's policies have been developed since Modi's electoral victory in 2014. This has not only given him dividends domestically, but also the foreign relations of his government are being promoted

under, what the author calls, “the Hindutva Strategic Doctrine’. Donald Trump with his ‘anti-Islamism’ approach has made ‘America First’ the central piece of his domestic and foreign policies since 2017. Basing his analysis on this hypothesis, the writer has surveyed Modi’s and Trump’s politics that according to him, would shape India-US relations in future.

In Chapter One, *America First, Slogan of a Retreat in Slow Motion*, Varghese discusses the Trump’s approach to foreign policy i.e. ‘America First’. Trump is quite certain that US policies have been unable to yield desired results in the last three decades. He blames it on the strategies adopted by the unwise leaders in the past particularly, President Obama. For President Trump, ‘America First’ means that US will not restrain its military actions and use its power and authority whenever and wherever it was necessary. The author adds that Trump and Modi are allies and both have framed their domestic politics on the promise of revival of past glories of their countries. The Hindutva strategic agenda of Modi is unlikely to be achieved without a partnership with America, as strong US and American leadership will always be in India’s interest.

Chapter Two, *Modi’s World View, Hindutva Strategic Doctrine?* It goes on to discuss Modi’s strategy of bringing India closer to the US in order to achieve its foreign policy objectives. His government has brought about ‘Paradigm shift’ in foreign policy orientation of India through bold and more innovative ideas when compared to his predecessor. In this chapter, the author has extensively dilated on the ideas of Kanti Bajpai, a notable Indian international affairs analyst. Bajpai has categorized India’s contemporary strategic thought into three schools: Nehruvian, neo-liberal and Hyperreal Schools. The ‘hyperrealist’s’ emphasis that “conflict and rivalry between states cannot be changed into peace and friendship; they can only be managed by the threat and use of violence”. The Hindutva Strategic Doctrine is closer to ‘hyperrealist’s’ view. This doctrine has certain other features which endorse market economy, meritocracy and rule

of law within the framework of its idea of nationalism. Moreover, this doctrine is particularly suited to explain the current global situation marked by the continuous threat of Islamism, the rising challenge from China and the rise of capitalism, according to the author.

The friendship between India and the US is built on shared value of commitment to democracy and geopolitical interests. Hence, their relations are often defined as a convergence of values and interests. Both follow the policy of 'No to ideas and goods: but yes to technology and capital'. Secondly, according to the author, there's increase in the popularity of Modi among Indian-Americans who also support Hindutva ideology and are playing an important role in developing stronger relations between the two states. An off-shoot of this phenomenon is that India is now largely seen as a Hindu state internationally.

The following chapter discusses how respective leaders of the US and India have actually shaped their relations with China, which has added complexity to the relation between the two countries. India's trade with China is expanding, besides India needs China's diplomatic support at international forums and China is trying to expand its military and economic presence overseas. Chinese supremacy in Asia and Africa would be detrimental to the promotion of the US interests in these two continents. Modi is working quietly to attract Chinese investment in India but these investments may lead to take over of the American companies by the big ticket Chinese companies, which may become a major source of conflict between India and the US. Thirdly, both India and the US, with Chinese cooperation also want to maintain triangular relations to contain the spread of Islamism and terrorism. However this delicate equation can be disturbed with a single misstep of any of the partners.

The last chapter of the book, '*Islam and Terror*', labels the rise of 'Islamist terrorism' as a global challenge especially for US and India and both the leaders have accused their predecessors of being weak in their policies against the menace of terrorism. According to the writer,

the America first politics of the US sees Afghanistan as a mess created by the American elites. He singles out the strategies of Pakistan as the most destabilizing factor affecting the stability of the entire region which includes the Afghanistan conflict, the Kashmir conundrum and the spillover of Islamic terrorism into India. The author insinuates that Pakistani leaders had actually misled the Americans in the past into believing that it was fighting the terrorists. This has also been the refrain of the several US administration in the last two decades or more. The US in the author's view, lacks a long term vision for the region and has often chosen to use one country against the other, based on the need of hour.

Varghese k. George's book is a detailed account of changing India-US relations under the Modi's and Trump's administrations. Although the writer has explained India-US relations in terms of political beliefs and objectives, he has failed to address many questions. This is understandable as the book was written barely two years after Modi's and President Trump's elections, which is quite a short time to judge the fundamental strength of the bilateral ties between two big states. The author finds a negative convergence between the US and India on so-called Islamic terrorism, but also the communality of two democratic states, as a basis of close relationship. The author dilates further on this hypothesis and predicts that the US relations with Muslim states would deteriorate in the future. His many comments on political and military situations in the Middle-East (where most of the Muslims live), Afghanistan and even South Asia are already proving inaccurate if not completely wrong. Similarly, the US has enhanced its stakes in the security of Saudi Arabia and has indicated its desire to have a rapprochement with Iran.

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