

BOOK REVIEW

Why Bharat Matters

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The book “Why Bharat Matters” is authored by S. Jaishankar, India’s Minister of External Affairs and an experienced diplomat with a distinguished career in global diplomacy. Jaishankar is well-known for his insightful perspectives on international relations mainly based on his experiences drawn from key former diplomatic positions, including his appointments as ambassador to the United States (US) and China.

The book comprises eleven chapters, each focusing on various aspects of India’s foreign policy behavior and strategic positions. The introductory part provides India’s worldview, followed by discussions on the interplay between domestic and foreign policy and its proactive global engagements. Subsequent chapters address historical contexts, specific geopolitical strategies, and future aspirations. The book’s central argument focuses on India’s shift in foreign policy from a traditionally non-aligned and reactive stance to a more assertive and proactive global engagement. The author contends that this shift is essential for India to secure its national interests and enhance its influence globally. He argues that as a rising power, India must utilize its strategic autonomy to effectively manage the complexities of a multipolar world, emphasizing that India’s active par-

ticipation in global affairs is not only beneficial but also necessary for its development and security. Jaishankar emphasizes leveraging India's cultural, economic, and political strengths to develop strategic partnerships and increase its interests globally.

In the first chapter, the author delineates India's new foreign policy, emphasizing five key areas: globalization, global rebalancing, multipolarity, technologies, and evolving power dynamics. The author asserts that India should navigate these challenges by leveraging domestic strengths and forming external strategic alliances. The author underscores the significance of India's "Neighbourhood First" policy and its global engagements, including those in Africa and Latin America. He also observes that reliance on historical analogies, such as the Ramayana, may appear idealistic in the context of contemporary geopolitics.

The broader theme of the subsequent two chapters reflects the importance of foreign policy in the everyday lives of citizens, and the need for an informed public. Jaishankar analyses the impact of India's strategic responses on national security and economic priorities, using examples such as the evacuation operations in Ukraine and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly, in the third chapter, the author examines the current global landscape, identifying the vulnerabilities and dependencies that have emerged due to globalization. While persuasive, these two chapters could benefit the readers with a more detailed analysis of how these vulnerabilities affect different Indian economic sectors.

The author, in chapter four, provides a historical context of India and its rise as a proactive global actor. He discusses the challenges posed by the pandemic and geopolitical shifts, highlighting the necessity for infrastructure and human resource development. While critiquing the pre-2014 optimistic perspective on globalization, he emphasizes the significance of strategic autonomy, self-reliance, and a multipolar world order. While the emphasis on strategic autonomy is well-placed, a deeper exploration of practical challenges in achieving it amid global interdependencies is needed. Additionally, the emphasis on India's strategic autonomy and self-reliance might overlook the practical challenges and dependencies that still exist in India's economic and technological sectors.

The fifth chapter discusses the transformative impact of India's proactive engagement under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, highlighting significant diplomatic initiatives like the Neighbourhood First policy, Act East Policy, and Link West strategy. The author mentions India's efforts to improve connectivity, cooperation, and strategic partnerships, as well as its active participation in international forums such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the G20. Nonetheless, a more objective perspective would have balanced the argument, as the author overwhelmingly depicts India's diplomatic achievements. The author also commends India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic failing to address the downside of India's dealing with COVID-19. The book certainly provides a limited discussion of the challenges and criticism India faced globally concerning vaccine distribution and the domestic management of the crisis.

The sixth and seventh chapters cover the diplomatic strategies of India, highlighting the importance of building reliable partnerships and understanding global politics. He explains engagements of India with groups such as the Quad, a grouping of India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the United States (I2U2), and the India-Nordic Summit, stressing the strategic use of India's cultural, economic, and political strengths. The latter two chapters examine the geopolitical landscape and India's responses to emerging global challenges including climate change, terrorism, and pandemics, advocating for India's pivotal role in a multipolar world.

The last two chapters cover India's achievements and future aspirations, highlighting economic growth, technological advancements, and global influence. The concluding chapter, "Why Bharat Matters," presents a thorough overview of India's rising global significance, citing achievements like the Chandrayaan-3 moon landing and the successful hosting of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and G20 summit.

In sum, the book provides an in-depth analysis of India's foreign policy evolution, with an excessive focus placed on India's rise and global stature. The author overemphasizes the Indian foreign policy successes reflecting a degree of bias. Moreover, Jaishankar downplays ongoing internal challenges and regional skepticism from countries like Nepal, Maldives, and Bhutan. More so, the book inadequately addresses India's internal economic challenges, including the deceleration of GDP growth, rising unemployment, and growing income divide. The explanation of the above

aspects would have offered an unbiased and holistic understanding.

In addition, the author emphasizes India's strategic autonomy through an optimistic lens. However, strategic autonomy is not cost-free, it may lead to damaging credibility effects on its alliance system with France, Russia, and the US. Moreover, India's shift away from secular democratic values to a Hindu majority mindset under the BJP rule raises concerns about pluralism and inclusivity. The book does not cover ground on the growing marginalization of Indian minorities and discussion on recent electoral trends which are important for understanding its domestic dynamics and the broader implications of India's foreign policy.

Despite the lack of objectivity and rigor, "Why Bharat Matters" by S. Jaishankar is still a substantial contribution to the discussion on India's foreign policy and global strategy. The detailed geopolitical insights and examination of India's diplomatic strategies make it an essential read for those interested in understanding India's foreign policy behavior and its rising global profile.

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