

BOOK REVIEW

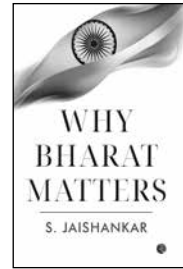
Why Bharat Matters

Dr S Jaishankar

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In the 75+ years of its glorious existence, India has stood tall like a David against the doubts and criticisms of millions of Goliaths. Even in the testing time of questionable stability in the first quarter of the 21st century, the nation has drawn lessons from its civilisational history and proved its capability. The nation known for its diversity has, however, one avenue, its foreign policy, where India embodies the popular idiom ‘united we stand strong.’ Describing the making of India’s foreign policy, Dr Jaishankar presents the book *Why Bharat Matters?* as an elucidative explanation of India’s positioning in the

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complicated global order dotted by tension in the various regions and the volatility in the US-China relations.

Dr Jaishankar brings forth his experience as a career diplomat and his recent endeavour as the minister of external affairs to tell behind-the-scenes tales of India's foreign policy under the prime ministership of Narendra Modi. The author has broadly touched on the themes of the Indian diaspora, re-globalisation, the shift in the balance of power, the aspiration for a truly multipolar world order, and India's multi-aligned foreign policy. Additionally, the book provides a strong message of not only improving the nation's global standing but also delves into a shift in the global stance towards India and vice versa.

The book, divided into 11 chapters, is a well thought out expression of the truth and determination of 'New Age India.' A significant aspect of the book is the presentation of stories from the *Ramayana* as case studies to explain the events of global diplomacy and India's role in it. Dr Jaishankar cleverly draws out the parallels from the Indian epic and elaborates on the lessons from it that India must abide by in defining its role.

Beginning with the 'Preface', which is, in essence, an appreciation of Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi and his understanding of the world order, Dr Jaishankar addresses the question of his association with the Indian leadership. The first three chapters of the book look at the quintessential role played by the Indian diaspora in India's foreign policy-making and mapping, and vice-versa. On the one hand, the author acknowledges and appreciates their role in bridging India with the world, while on the other, he goes on to boldly describe how several vital foreign policy decisions were taken to build a more confident outlook for its people in the world. The author gives examples such as the liberal usage of the Indian Welfare Community Development Fund to the signing of the agreement with Kuwait over domestic workers to bring back millions of Indians under the toughest global circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the quagmire in Afghanistan, the war in Ukraine, to strengthen his argument further. These chapters present two essential facts of international diplomacy: first, the return on foreign policy investment may not

be compounded annually; and, second, as a vivid example of how decisions made at South Block make a difference in our daily lives.

All this becomes increasingly important as the world becomes more complicated, and India prepares for a favourable environment for its countrymen to venture out and contribute with their skills while representing India to the best of their interest; this is elaborated through Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed view of the management of India's global positioning by PM Modi during his first two terms as the head of the government. Dr Jaishankar has beautifully stitched Indian foreign policy initiatives in different regions, ranging from 'Neighbourhood First' to 'Act East, Link West' and 'Connect Central Asia'. Taking a step ahead, the spotlight is shone on Africa, Latin America, Europe, the Americas, and East Asia. To counter the most often levelled criticism about India's excessive focus and attention on the continental domain, he has mentioned India's Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) initiative in the Indian Ocean and the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) in the Pacific Ocean. All these policy initiatives have been given a cushioning effect with multiple and diverse collaborations that New Delhi has invested in, from the United Nations (UN), G-20, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), I2U2, to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). All these not only mirror India's multi-directional approach in its foreign policy, but also a strategic intent and clarity. The chapter also indulges in India's creations like the International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), One Sun, One World, One Grid (OSOWOG), and Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) to show that India practises what it preaches in several climate summits. However, this is not enough, and Dr Jaishankar reiterates the words of Robert Frost, "The woods are lovely dark and deep, but I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep". The same resonates with India's rise, which the author claims is "a relentless exercise, where the sensible only pause to take stock, never to declare victory".

Re-globalisation is the need of the hour to create a more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable global order. Dr Jaishankar's firm belief in this is reflected through its repeated occurrence in various chapters.

The need to re-do the globalisation of the past, which benefitted a few at the cost of others, is further amplified as we step into the tech-driven era. The new globalisation must not only rectify the past but also depict the present and future in a way that enhances the capabilities and capacities of individual nations to chart their own trajectory. To this end, Dr Jaishankar rightly opines that “India has to not just prepare for a re-globalisation that corrects economic and technology concentrations, but also use that opportunity to strengthen comprehensive national power”.

On the lines of being the *Vishwa Mitra*, Chapters 6 and 7 present the importance of expressing and defending one’s relations with others, be it in sickness or health. Dr Jaishankar provides a brief history of the evolving relations of India with Russia, the then USSR, the UK, France, and the West in general. The dedicated section for France as an important strategic partner shows the indispensable role Europe commands in the strategic aspiration of India. Dr Jaishankar also draws the focus on the complicated yet ambitious policy of India towards its neighbours. Regardless of the tumultuous events that dot the relations, India has been the first responder whenever its neighbours have been in distress. The chapter also brings into focus the growing importance of Africa, and India as the voice of the global south. Further, in Chapter 7, Dr Jaishankar breaks down India’s relationship with the QUAD, grouping it into the questions of need, history, and impact.

Being the longest-serving Indian ambassador to China, Dr Jaishankar has dedicated a complete chapter on China. Concisely, the chapter delves into the ebb and flow of Sino-India relations. The fast-paced chapter is a ready reckoner for a brief understanding of the complicated relationship between the two Asian giants. Starting from Nehru’s China policy to the debacle of relations post-Galwan, Dr Jaishankar provides a concrete historiography. The chapter presents a pragmatic outlook for dealing with the superpower aspirant China. While discussing the drawbacks of Nehruvian naivety, Dr Jaishankar expresses confidence in the way India is countering China’s aggression. Through the chapter, he further prescribes India’s need to concentrate on developing resilience and gaining a concrete share in the global supply chain as an effective counter-measure to the China

question. The chapter also elucidates the importance of focussing on the maritime boundary as a new frontier against China.

Dr Jaishankar focusses the spotlight on the nature of security concerns in contemporary times. What stands out in this is the discussion initiated in regard to the new aspects of non-traditional security concerns of trade disruptions, actions by big business conglomerates and other private enterprises, and even tourism and education in the increasingly globalised world order or “war by other means”. Drawing a contrast with the imperialistic actions of yester-centuries, Jaishankar points out the silent penetration of commercial enterprises. However, at the same time, self-reliance, resilience, and a multipolar world order have been argued as a way out of such undue pressure.

In the penultimate chapter, Dr Jaishankar presents a short critique of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and juxtaposes the decisions under Nehru in respect to India’s foreign policy with those of Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, Dr BR Ambedkar, and Minoo Masani. In the chapter, Dr Jaishankar credits PM Modi for fulfilling the aspirational policies of the stalwarts whose standing was, as put in the chapter, overlooked. Specifically, Jaishankar lays down parallels between Patel’s stance on Israel, Mookerjee’s stance on aggressive retaliation and on Pakistan, Ambedkar’s on the US, and Masani’s viewpoint on geopolitical alignments.

In conclusion, *Why Bharat Matters?* throws light on the pathway for India in a foreign policy that is independent but with a bit of bias towards strategic significance. The fact that foreign policy is more or less immune to the party-line division will prove that Dr Jaishankar’s craftsmanship will paint India’s standing in the world for the next foreseeable decades. While it might not be evident now, years down the line in hindsight, one may be able to pinpoint the shift of India’s standing to this period of governance, for better or worse. To this end, the book is an invaluable read for students, policy-makers, military personnel, and people keen on understanding the foreign policy of India.