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BOOK REVIEWS

Teresita C. Schaffer and Howard B. Schaffer, *India at the Global High Table: The Quest for Regional Primacy and Strategic Autonomy*, (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution Press, April 2016), ISBN 978-93-5029-785-8, Pages: 384, Price: Rs. 599.

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In the light of recent events, India's aspiration to become an important player in the international arena is taking a perceivable form. Undoubtedly, India's foreign policy tactics develops its consciousness from its civilization and enduring heritage. Authors, Teresita C. Schaffer and Howard B. Schaffer dwell around a leitmotif plucked-out from India's first Prime-Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's vision for India's outlook. Unambiguously showcased in his speech, "I... dedicate myself in all humility to the service of India and her people to the end that this ancient land attain *her rightful place in the world* and make her full and willing contribution to the promotion of world peace and the welfare of mankind." The authors faultlessly bring out India's intuitive, possibly inchoate inkling of "rightful place", as a superseding intention for a strong and nascent India, actively vocal in the international arena.

The Schaffers meticulously survey three main perennial themes: first, India's quest for regional primacy and security of its borders; second, its insistence on Non-Alignment which eventually mutated to the dialect of 'Strategic Autonomy'; finally, its tactic to deploy its commodious economic potential as a tool to achieve global supremacy. The Schaffers have accurately contemplated the enduring themes that have characterized the Indian Foreign Policy from the era of Jawaharlal Nehru to that of Narendra Modi. They have embedded multi-faceted standpoints, distilled from their experience in a lifetime of a career as US diplomats in India and other South Asian countries, which provides a fresh approach and gives a rejuvenating feeling to the reader.

The first five chapters of the book examine India's foreign policy in terms of its pre-Independence legacy, and India's foreign policy before and after Cold War. Moreover, India's strategic vision and its Foreign Policy Institutions are succinctly elucidated. The special feature of this book is that it fills gaps of analysis of the Indian

Foreign Policy, which makes up a big chunk of the book; the next seven chapters provide in-depth analysis of India's negotiating style. The culminating chapter, "India in a Changing World", evaluates the feasibility of India (if it embraces it) in a global leadership role.

In the chapter, "Foreign policy: The Post-Cold War World" the authors present a panoramic survey of the foreign policy since 1991. India's subsequent opening up of its market to the world showed its inclination to exploit its latent economic power. Additionally, Indians with their traditional arrangement of non-alignment and 'strategic autonomy' were reluctant to acclimatize with the changing dynamics of a unipolar world. Its conservative interceding outlook is described by authors as:

Nor was it likely that Washington could develop strong ties with New Delhi without seeking, consciously or not, to dominate that relationship, as it often did in its dealing with allied or friendly powers. Any seemingly "unequal" relationship would inevitably disturb the Indians, who were sensitive to such treatment and quick to perceive it. (p. 45)

This disregarded the 'defensive pivot' that occurred with the 2014 Modi government, where India brazenly strived for its national interests, showcased in policies like 'Act East' and 'Neighborhood First'. The strong point of this chapter is its ability to explain the importance of the Kashmir dispute in paradoxically strengthening the ties between US and India.

Over viewing, the relations of India with China and Pakistan, the authors note that "... both are hostile countries that collude with one another in ways that threaten important Indian interests." Also, on discussing India and China relations, 'the two countries have largely insulated the rest of their expanding relationship from the intractable border issue'. Moreover, the authors describe China's brace for Pakistan as a strategic barricade to India's progress. However, it is concerned that India will incline towards United States and align with ASEAN states, which can be felt today.

The Schaffers, while describing India's strategic vision, distinguish between three schools of thought: Primarily, the 'Non-alignment Firsters' which is 'well represented in the Congress Party. (p. 65) ... They look at the leadership in multilateral institutions, notably a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.' (p. 68) However, this is not seemingly the case, Modi government has also made this their focal point. Secondly, the 'Broad Power Realists', they 'believe India can and should aspire to become an active global power, as defined by conventional economic, political, and military metrics'. (p. 69) Finally, the 'Hard Power Hawks', the arch realists, 'Theirs is a Hobbesian view of the world'. (p. 73) This segregation is not a commending depiction, but it gives some verisimilitude. Perchance the best segment of the book, the authors meticulously assign values to the reasoning of all leaders over time with wavering dynamics with regards to the International System. However, authors fail to accurately assign a single ideology on a single protagonist. All leaders have mostly followed a clubbed approach.

The authors next turn towards the structure of Indian foreign policy, basically, the role of the highly competent but undersized Ministry of External Affairs and the civil servants. They also point out the undermined role of armed services, 'The armed services' uniformed brass can make suggestions on policy and budgets, but the final call rests with the civilian bureaucrats in the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the political leaders who rely on them'. (p. 95) These bureaucrats have little or practically no military background. However, the authors make no real discussion of Indian intelligence agencies like R&AW or IB.

The following series of chapters dwells on India's negotiating tactics in the past looking "at elements that reflect the character of India, the dignity of the state, and the moral dimension of negotiating." (p. 108) The reader gets the feeling that, India is very defensive, or rather sensitive about its concerns and maintains too much caution while dealing with the world. The authors also make an important observation that vital departments are under-staffed and 'important issues further down the list of priorities are likely to suffer delay' (p. 108) as the system honors prudence and unerring work, rather than quick and risky decisions.

In turn, the book gives an impression that, India is an unyielding negotiator. Undeniably, it lacks relative materialistic capabilities to call shots at the International table, and therefore, it has to work with countries holding a superior proficiency. India invariably is on *qui vive*, and consequently, it has missed many propitious opportunities. India's perception of its own unique civilization has seeped so deep into its psyche, that it desires for India-specific agreements; which makes it hard bound in reaching any agreements and hence the unyielding verdict by the authors. Although, once the accord is hammered out, even the authors do not refute that India's is fully compliant. Despite this unique approach of India, it has been successfully able to manipulate the environmental factors into favoring it and has thus earned its place at the International Table.

To sum up, the authors, leave the discussion open ended. They ask a very important question: now that India is at the global high table, what kind of power will it be? Will India emulate the traditional notion of Western power (power aggrandizer), or a 'revisionist' power?