

BOOK REVIEW

Hirabayashi Hiroshi.

India: The Last Super Power (1st Edition). Aleph Book Company, 2021, 203 p.
₹- 699.

The book extensively gives the reader a panoramic view of India as a whole, where the author has touched upon aspects of Indian history, religion, caste, society, economy and diplomacy, and security, focusing on India-Japan relations. Further, Hiroshi Hirabayashi traces the entire relationship between India and Japan from ancient times to contemporary times, where India and Japan are considered all-weather friends due to their unique strategic global partnership’.

The author has spent over fifteen years in India as a Japanese Ambassador to India and the President of the Japan-India Association. So, he has had the opportunity to observe India closely and understand India deeply, which he wrote about in his first chapter, ‘The Key to understanding India’. The exciting part about this book is that the author has tried to consciously write on things that have not been mentioned earlier as these things were deliberately overlooked. Hirabayashi has also tried to remove some of the stereotypes that have been formed by the Japanese people over the years and hence, elaborated on the various facets of the Indian tradition to make it comprehensible for the Japanese.

Chapter two, ‘the Origins of Pro-Japan India’ very elaborately wrote about how ‘India and Japan are like siblings’ (p. 56) as it traced their relationship to the time of Buddhism, to Okakura, Okuma and Shibusawa (p.59) and Rabindranath Tagore’s visit to Tokyo. A significant highlight of this chapter was the establishment of the Japan-India Association in 1903. The author wrote about Japan’s influence, and contribution to India’s independence like India was exceptionally motivated to fight as Japan as a small country could win a war over a large country like the Soviet Union. Japan also supported India in the freedom

movement by helping the Indian National Army and giving asylum to freedom fighters like Rash Bihari Bose. Subhas Chandra Bose was also invited by Tokyo when he did not receive support from other countries for India's independence (p.68-69). The author wrote about the kindness shown by the people of the northeast when Japan had planned to invade Northeast India under the British and further mentioned the tombs and monuments in the memory of Japanese soldiers, and to date, Indians are pro-Japanese there. Justice Radha Binod Pal took a stance against the majority and gave a non-guilty dissenting judgement which has always gained respect from Japan. Hiroshi Hirabayashi mentioned that "the Indian Parliament offers silent prayer every year on Hiroshima was bombed". (p.82) This chapter highlighted the incident when India had tested nuclear bombs and how that incident halted the relations between India and Japan, but gradually both sides came to understand each other's stance and paved the way for stronger economic relations with Suzuki wanted to invest in India.

The author highlighted that since the 1990s, the objectives of India had drastically changed as it was elevated from a regional power to global power. India became a market-driven economy, and it swiftly changed relations with western nations and built relations with nations in the Asia-Pacific. All these are being depicted in the third chapter, 'The Metamorphosis of India'. India's move from breaking away from non-alignment to working toward the 'Act East Policy' to BRICS and G20. Interestingly, the author has focused his attention on the tension between India and China, where he emphasised how China has been displaying its hegemonic behaviour in the Indo-Pacific. He also mentioned how China used the 'string of pearls strategy' around India and the 'Diamond strategy'. Hirabayashi opined that China had become a significant cause of threat to Taiwan, India, Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines, and thereby, there was a need to protect the South China Sea, The East China Sea and the Indian Ocean Region. It needs to be understood that authors like Shamshad Ahmed Khan¹ and Titli Basu² have spoken about the China threat theory have not been as explicit as the author has been.

¹ Khan, Shamshad. A. (2014). India-Japan Cooperation towards a Rule-Based Order in the Asia-Pacific: Mapping Indian and Japanese Strategic Thinking. Research Paper presented in The Japan Institute of International Affairs, 2014. pp.1-21.URL: https://www2.jiia.or.jp/pdf/fellow_report/151218_Shamshad_Khan_JIIA_paper_Final.pdf(Accessed on 11th August, 2021)

² Basu, Titli. (2014). "India-Japan Relations: An Enduring Partnership" in Indian Foreign Affairs Journal Vol. 9, No. 3, July-September 2014, 266-279.URL: <https://idsa.in/idsanews/india-japan-relations-an-enduring-partnership> (Accessed 13th August, 2021).

Chapter four focused on 'Economic and Business Cooperation' and explained in detail the efforts made by Japan to emphasise its presence in India and nation-building. There was a need for human resource development through ODA, like enhancing connectivity, strengthening industrial competitiveness, and supporting sustainable, inclusive growth. The author discussed the high speed rail project along with the Delhi metro project regarding transportation development and wanted to invest and develop Northeast India and Southeast Asia. The last and final chapter, 'How to live and work in India', was instead an interesting take as it spoke about how Japanese people needed to be mentally prepared to interact with Indians and focused on the greater need for people-to-people communication.

The positive aspect of this book is that it has covered all aspects of India-Japan relations, which previous scholars have mainly focused on literature studies that have not been done. Secondly, as a former diplomat, the author has incorporated anecdotes from his experiences and made the book come alive. Third, the author wrote a guidebook for the Japanese to understand Indians. The negative aspect about this book is that though it says India: The Last Super Power, the book only deals with some aspects of the title; instead, this book is based more on India-Japan relations, and it would have been better if the title of the book was different. The book lacks aspects of defence relations and the future recommendations between India and Japan relations. Overall, this book is a must-read for academics and policymakers.

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