



VISHWA SHAstra: INDIA AND THE WORLD

DISCUSSION REPORT

Hosted by:

**CHANAKYA POLICY &
RESEARCH FOUNDATION**

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Dhruva Jaishankar
(Key Note Speaker)

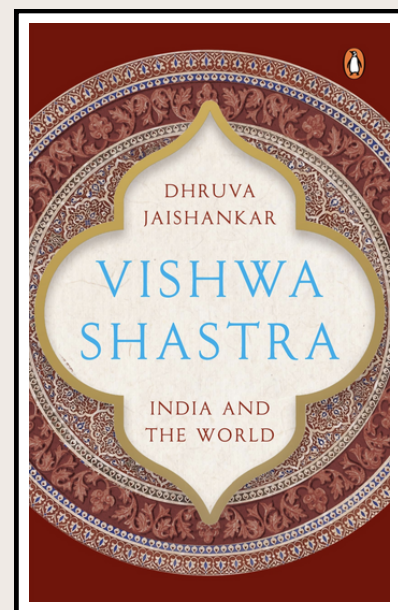


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FOREWARD

The study of and general understanding of international relations will only become more important as the world becomes both more integrated and more competitive in the 21st century. It is all the more reason why Indians, especially younger Indians, should know more about their country's past, present, and future interactions with the world.

With Vishwa Shastra, I've attempted to give them a starting point to begin to understand these issues. I hope this report on what was a stimulating discussion with the Chanakya Policy and Research Foundation (CPRF) stimulates interest and engagement, and becomes a starting point for research and analysis. My thanks to CPRF for arranging this valuable interaction.

Warm regards,
Dhruva Jaishankar

1. INTRODUCTION

On January 19, 2025, the Chanakya Policy and Research Foundation (CPRF) hosted a compelling session centred on the book "Vishwa Shastra: India And The World," authored by Mr. Dhruva Jaishankar. The event offered an in-depth analysis of India's historical trajectory, the importance of security, and opportunities in global connectivity.

The session began with a warm welcome from Ms. Koushiki, the General Secretary, who set the tone for the discussion. She introduced the guest and highlighting his illustrious career and achievements. This was followed by a brief comment on the extraordinary book Vishwa Shastra by CPRF Director and CoFounder Mr. Jatin Sehrawat for its profound exploration of India's interactions with the world, spanning from ancient statecraft to contemporary geopolitics. Attendees were taken on a journey through India's historical and current strategic engagements, with a special focus on how India should prepare for future challenges. This report encapsulates the essence of the discussion and provides insights into the critical themes explored during the session.

2. SPEAKER OVERVIEW

Mr. Dhruva Jaishankar is a renowned expert in international relations, currently serving as the Executive Director of the Observer Research Foundation America (ORF America) in Washington, D.C. Under his leadership, ORF America has become a key platform for advancing transatlantic and Indo-Pacific policy dialogues, fostering greater cooperation between India, the United States, and the global community.

With an academic background rooted in rigorous scholarship, Mr. Jaishankar has been affiliated with prestigious institutions such as the German Marshall Fund, the Brookings Institution, and the Lowy Institute. His work focuses on India's foreign policy, geopolitics, and security, offering deep insights into the evolving global landscape.

As the author of *Vishwa Shastra: India and the World*, Mr. Jaishankar provides a comprehensive exploration of India's geopolitical journey. The book traverses ancient maritime trade, colonial challenges, and post-independence aspirations, presenting a compelling vision of India's role in the contemporary world.

3. SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

With a focus on both the lessons from India's past and strategies for future growth, the session provided a structured exploration of four key themes focusing on reinterpreting Indian history, security as pillar for peace, opportunities from global connectivity and integrating domestic and foreign policies.

Reinterpreting Indian History for Global Contexts

Mr. Dhruva Jaishankar began by highlighting the importance of Indian history in shaping its future global strategies. He argued that history should not only be viewed through a social or cultural lens but also through its implications for international relations. He pointed to Emperor Ashoka as a leader who articulated a global vision far ahead of his time as Ashoka communicated with rulers as far as the Mediterranean, sending missionaries and fostering a philosophy of non-dominance. His ideas of governance and diplomacy, relected in symbols like the Ashoka Stambha and the Wheel of Dharma, were groundbreaking.

The second interesting episode he discussed, which was almost the opposite, is the Mughal Empire. Despite being one of the most powerful nations and having rulers with global titles such as Jahangir and Shah Jahan, its rulers remained inward-focused. This isolationism and neglect of naval power allowed external forces to gain a foothold in the Indian Ocean, which ultimately eroded India's dominance. Mr. Jaishankar urged that India must learn from this history to avoid similar mistakes in the future. He also highlighted the post-Mughal period (1707-1857) as a critical yet under-explored era in India's international relations. Mr. Jaishankar noted that historians often neglect this period in favour of other narratives, creating gaps in understanding. He cited Vikram Sampath's work on Tipu Sultan as an example of valuable research but stressed the need for broader studies from the discipline of international relation.

Prioritising Security to Ensure Peace

Mr. Jaishankar delved into the theme of security as an essential pillar for peace. He argued that global politics have historically been defined by competition rather than cooperation, a concept rooted in the realist framework of international relations. Countries, shaped by their territorial boundaries, have clashed over resources, wealth, and ideology. While India's historical leaders, like Ashoka, presented alternative frameworks based on peace and mutual welfare, the competitive nature of international relations cannot be ignored.

He warned against the complacency seen in Europe and Japan, which have relied on the United States for security rather than building their own capabilities. Drawing parallels to India, he argued that the nation must avoid such dependency and take charge of its security. Mr. Jaishankar emphasized that spending on security should not be seen as a contributor to conflict but as a necessary investment for preserving peace. He also stressed the importance of maritime security, particularly in the Indian Ocean. India's failure to secure its maritime borders in the past led to colonization, a lesson that remains relevant in the face of contemporary challenges. Maintaining control over this strategic region is crucial to preventing external powers from gaining dominance

Leveraging Opportunities for Global Connectivity

One of the more optimistic themes of the session focused on the immense opportunities for integration and connectivity. Mr. Jaishankar highlighted India's progress in both the digital and physical spheres. He cited examples such as hydroelectric power coming from Nepal, renewed rail links with Bangladesh after decades, and direct flights to Sri Lanka as steps toward regional integration. He is optimistic about South Asia's integration despite political friction, as the multimodal corridor with East Asia provides strategic opportunities that were traditionally not possible due to the legacy of partition.

However, he acknowledged the challenges that come with such efforts. For instance, the ongoing war in Gaza has complicated attempts to normalize relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, which could have significant implications for India's connectivity strategies. Despite these obstacles, Mr. Jaishankar envisioned a connected world with India at its center, stretching from the South China Sea to the Mediterranean.

Aligning Domestic Policies with International Objectives

The initial theme of the session focused on the integration of domestic policies with international relations. Mr. Jaishankar noted that India's early leaders prioritized territorial security – absorb the princely state and creating buyers through countries like Nepal and Bhutan. However, he emphasized that India's current needs are access to markets, investment, and technology for scaling up. While India has pockets of excellence in certain fields, the goal is to make them the norm.

Dhruva Mr. Jaishankar also highlighted the need to learn lessons from other nations which started from similar positions but have achieved remarkable progress, such as South Korea and China and we can apply those lessons on India. Additionally, he pointed out that India can draw lessons from its own experiences, such as the development of the Delhi Metro, the telecom revolution, the software boom of the 1990s, the Green Revolution and the IITs.

4. Q&A SESSION

Q: What is the thought behind the title Vishwa Shastra?

A: The title, “Treatise of the World,” reflects the book’s expansive and “timeless ambition”. Mr Jaishankar explained that the term “Shastra” evokes the tradition of the Arthashastra, a treatise that encapsulates deep, empirical understanding and analysis of statecraft. However, unlike normative theoretical texts, Vishwa Shastra is intended as a descriptive and explanatory work that delves into the empirical realities of global politics, offering a nuanced understanding of contemporary challenges.

Q: What role does “human security” play in policy development?

A: The relevant concept of “human security” lies at the heart of policy development, particularly in economics and development. While “security” is often employed in discussions about state or military interests, Mr Jaishankar emphasised that human welfare should remain the central concern in global policy. In this light, “human security” is not merely a subset of traditional security issues but a foundational pillar of comprehensive, humancentred policy.

Q: How is Artificial Intelligence (AI) shaping the future of international relations, especially in securitisation?

A: The combination of large datasets, improved algorithms, and reduced computing costs fuel the rapid advancement of AI. However, the most significant hurdle in AI development remains acquiring top-tier talent to train AI models, making data access, talent, and computing power increasingly competitive. While AI holds vast potential, especially in areas like intelligence gathering and geospatial analysis, there is a growing concern about its regulation. Mr Jaishankar highlighted that the United States, in particular, has adopted a deregulated approach to AI, complicating efforts for international coordination. Moreover, Jaishankar added that AI's integration into military decisionmaking is a hotly debated issue, with many experts agreeing that using force should always involve human oversight to prevent the abdication of responsibility.

Q: What is the concept of "strategic autonomy" in the context of Indian policy?

A: Mr Jaishankar answered that it is concerning how strategic autonomy is mistakenly viewed as a goal of Indian policy. On the other hand, strategic autonomy is the default for any sovereign country. He also suggests that focusing on strategic autonomy as a goal could lead India to miss opportunities that would improve its well-being, emphasizing that strategic autonomy is “a means to an end, not an end itself” .

Q: What are India's key challenges in its neighbourhood policy?

A: India's relationships with neighbouring countries have become increasingly complex, especially as these nations adopt more assertive and nationalistic foreign policies. While historically aligned with India, countries such as Nepal, Maldives, and Sri Lanka are now turning to alternative partners, complicating India's neighbourhood-first approach. India, according to Mr Jaishankar, "must remain sensitive to its neighbours' security concerns, including the acquisition of weapons targeted against India". India's economic outreach, particularly in countries like Bangladesh, must also be handled carefully, considering these nations' political changes and financial vulnerabilities. Bangladesh, in particular, presents a unique challenge that requires sustained diplomatic engagement and investment.

Q: How has the geopolitical importance of the Indian Ocean changed over time, and what is India's role in it now? What initiatives is India undertaking to enhance maritime security in the Indian Ocean?

A: The Indian Ocean, an area of growing geopolitical competition, was highlighted as a key arena where India's strategic autonomy and partnerships must be carefully balanced. With its critical trade routes and choke points, the region sees an influx of global powers, particularly China, which has invested heavily in ports and military infrastructure in Djibouti and Pakistan.

In response, India is enhancing its naval presence and maritime security efforts, building stronger ties with regional partners and participating in collaborative security frameworks. Mr Jaishankar discussed the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean and its key choke points, such as the Strait of Malacca, which is critical for global trade and energy flow.

India's maritime strategy now focuses on increasing investment in naval capabilities and maritime infrastructure, including in the Nicobar Islands and through partnerships with countries like Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and the Maldives. The Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative, a collaborative effort with the US, Japan, and Australia, aims to improve information-sharing on maritime traffic with smaller regional countries.

Q: What are the lessons from India's nuclear era that can be derived?

A: Jaishankar suggested that India should have had a nuclear deterrent on its own due to the nuclear capabilities of China and Pakistan. It is also worth considering whether India could have aligned itself more closely with nuclear power or prioritised its nuclear program earlier.

Q: What is India's approach to political volatility in its neighbouring countries? How does India balance its relationships with neighbouring countries while considering its security?

A: The speaker suggests that India should not intervene aggressively in the politics of its neighbouring countries because it is up to the electorates to decide who their leaders are. However, these countries should be sensitive to India's security interests. India wants good relations and increased economic welfare for its neighbours. However, India also emphasises that those neighbours must be sensitive to India's security interests, such as not acquiring weapons that could be directed against India or providing bases to external powers. Bangladesh presents a unique challenge due to changes in government and economic vulnerabilities. India has significant loans to Bangladesh and is a major trading partner, and some old border issues have been resolved. However, there are still issues, such as water sharing. India will need to invest more in this relationship, as Bangladesh matters more to India than any other country.

Q: What are the key factors defining West Asia in terms of international relations? And how should India strengthen its ties with the GCC countries with the growing influence of other powers in the Gulf?

A: West Asia is denied by multiple significant powers, such as the US, Russia, India, and China, as well as potent regional powers like Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran. Unlike the IndoPaciic, Mr Jaishankar says, the region is not dominated by USChina competition. The Gulf region is increasingly important to India regarding energy, trade, investment, tourism, and defense. There is a potential for transformative relationships with Gulf states. Significant investments are expected from the GCC countries because the US is pulling back, Europe has limitations, China has security concerns, and Russia has its challenges.

Q: What is Mr. Dhruva Jaishankar's opinion on the rise of nationalism and protectionism in Western countries, as seen with the example of the USA?

A: The speaker says that it is somewhat typical for countries to be nationalistic about their interests, and the current stance of the US is not a significant aberration in their history. The US is still the most open economy in the world, but Trump is saying that this openness has not served everyone. What he is advocating for is to be less open in some areas. India will have to deal with a world where the US is not moving towards more openness but less, and the same is true with the EU. This could result in trade protectionism, increasing over time and in non-tari spaces. The speaker also notes that many policies are not directed against India. Instead, they are directed at other areas or partners of the US. The most pressing issues India will have to deal with are direct taris and some immigration issues.

5. CONCLUSION

Mr. Jaishankar concluded by addressing the challenges in policy research. He noted that many interactions with policymakers focus on the wrong questions or offer unviable recommendations. To improve, researchers must maximise engagement with policymakers to ensure they are addressing relevant issues. Additionally, there is an overreliance on secondary materials, which often do not add new insights. Mr. Jaishankar urged researchers to engage with primary sources and original contexts to produce higher-quality policy papers.

The session with Mr. Jaishankar offered a profound reflection on India's evolution as a global actor, seamlessly weaving history, strategy, and statecraft. From ancient maritime trade routes to modern connectivity initiatives, he illustrated how India's past informs its present ambitions. He highlighted the transformative journey of Indian foreign policy—from non-alignment to strategic partnerships like the Indo-Pacific collaboration with the United States. Emphasising the dual importance of digital and physical connectivity, he outlined their pivotal role in driving regional integration and global influence. With a forward-looking lens, he underscored India's leadership in digital infrastructure and the transformative potential of AI in shaping future policymaking, leaving the audience inspired by India's growing global vision.

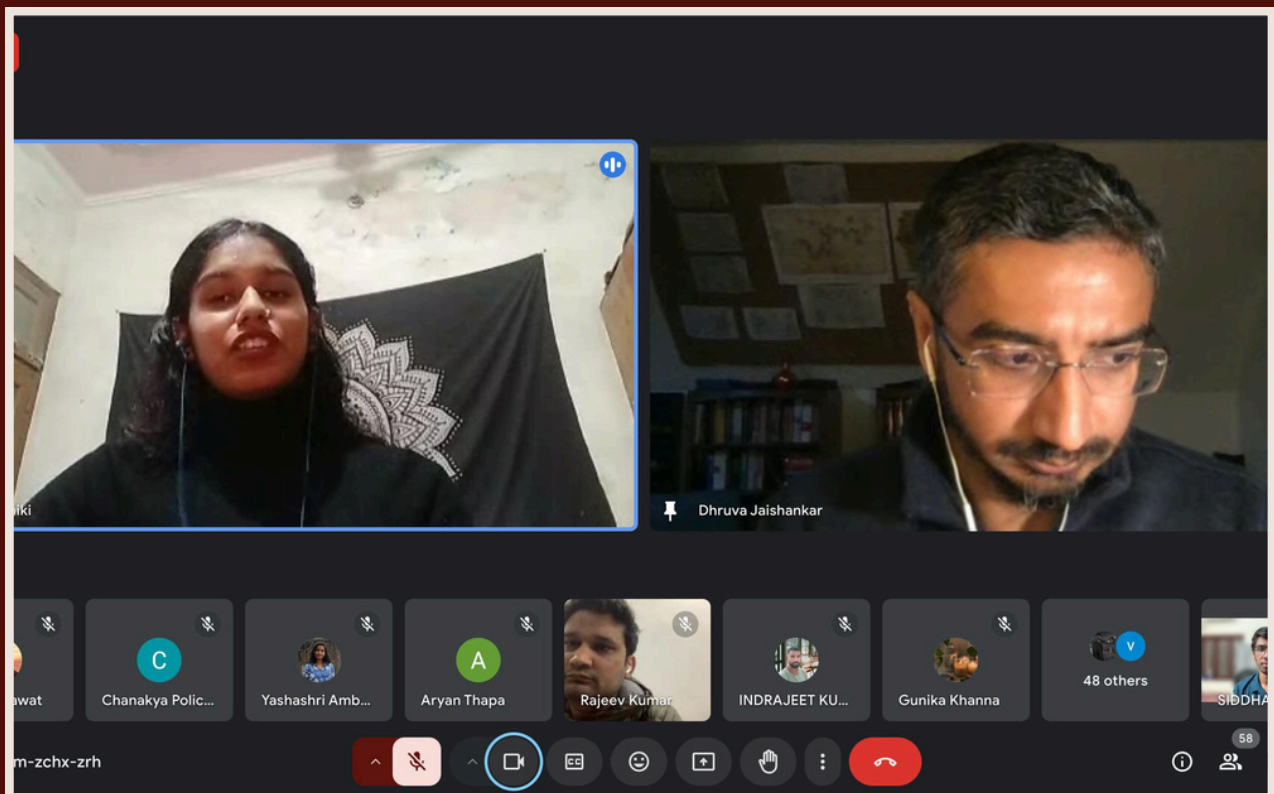
6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Chanakya Policy and Research Foundation (CPRF) extends its profound gratitude to Mr. Dhruva Jaishankar for his thoughtprovoking presentation and invaluable insights, which enriched the discourse on India's geopolitical strategies and its aspirations for global leadership. We are also deeply thankful to Ms. Koushiki, General Secretary of CPRF, for her exemplary management of the event, and to director and co-founder Mr. Jatin Sehrawat for his inspiring introductory remarks that set the tone for the session. A special acknowledgment is due to Ms. Tamanna Sharma, President of CPRF, whose dedicated eorts and seamless coordination were instrumental in making this successful session possible.

The event reairmed CPRF's commitment to integrating India's rich intellectual tradition with forward-looking policies aimed at fostering equity, sustainability, and global cooperation. The CPRF and its team further express their sincere appreciation to all participants for their active and thoughtful engagement, which played a pivotal role in making the session a resounding success.

7. VISUALS/ PHOTOGRAPHS







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