



Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century

Shashi Tharoor

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A definitive account of Indias international relations from an expert in the field.

Indian diplomacy, a veteran told Shashi Tharoor many years ago, is like the love-making of an elephant: it is conducted at a very high level, accompanied by much bellowing, and the results are not known for two years. In this lively, informative and insightful work, the award-winning author and parliamentarian brilliantly demonstrates how Indian diplomacy has become sprightlier since then and where it needs to focus in the world of the 21st century. Explaining why foreign policy matters to an India focused on its own domestic transformation, Tharoor surveys Indias major international relationships in detail, evokes the countrys soft power and its global responsibilities, analyses the workings of the Ministry of External Affairs, Parliament and public opinion on the shaping of policy, and offers his thoughts on a contemporary new grand strategy for the nation, arguing that India must move beyond non-alignment to multi-alignment. His book offers a clear-eyed vision of an India now ready to assume new global responsibility in the contemporary world. Pax Indica is another substantial achievement from one of the finest Indian authors of our times.

Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century Details

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From Reader Review Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century for online ebook

Riku Sayuj says

Joe Nye aka “Mr. Soft Power” in 'The Future of Power' has argued that, in today's information age, it is the side with the better story that wins. This book is Tharoor’s conscious or unconscious attempt to ensure that India is the party with the better story (of course to one’s own eyes one always has the better story). To Tharoor, India is gentle and reasonable and completely justified in all its actions; where they cant be justified, they can be explained away with the excuse that a functioning democracy will take circuitous routes (the elephant metaphor). Thus the benign elephant dances with starry-eyed smaller countries, reluctantly peeping neighbors, a very naughty dragon, a ferocious but almost toothless opponent with a weapon that can't be used, some failed states and a big circus master with a big funny hat. But all that is incidental because the elephant is gentle enough to be above reproach. So, who is the hero of the story? I leave that to your guessing skills.

Other than that, this reads like a sequel/update (with even the metaphors not being spared) to Malone’s wonderful book - with all the edges carefully shorn off and decorated in cheerful Diwali lights.

The second half of the book which takes a look at North Block and UN and their many idiosyncrasies, arguing for and against continuing relevance is more entertaining - because Tharoor actually has original stuff to contribute here along with many anecdotes which are well-worn but still funny. And though the book's cover boasts that he tries to evolve a grand strategy (which Malone had criticized India of lacking and Tharoor wants to prove exists inside of the folds), it only delivers some passably good platitudes.

In the end though, I cannot forgive Tharoor - the primary reason for me picking up this book was my irrepressible curiosity on how the author would justify such a presumptuous title. And Tharoor never bothered to oblige, except for a two line justification which only talks about a redefinition of what the 'pax - ica' latinization means in this new century. Disappointing? Yes. But, perhaps true too - it gels well with Pinker's Angels.

Rajat Ubhaykar says

Great introduction to India's foreign policy, along with an insider's account of the workings of the Ministry of External Affairs and the United Nations. The book needs some editing though; Tharoor has a tendency towards repetitive platitudes, but I guess such is the nature of diplomacy.

Arvind says

2.5/5 Shashi Tharoor is a genuinely gifted author, but this book was written by Shashi Tharoor, the politician. Tharoor's charm lies in his wit and irreverence, his deep knowledge of history/ politics, his eloquence and the resultant snobbery too. Unfortunately, perhaps because he himself was a minister in the UPA govt at the time of writing this book, the wit and irreverence are absent. Instead, it has been written in

the tone of a political speech.

Secondly, the book barely scratched the surface and repeated oft-known facts especially in the first 2-3rds of the book dealing with India's bilateral foreign relations. I expected more behind-the-scenes approach and fresh insights.

On the positive side, in the last 1/3rd of the book, Tharoor has gone into some depth (behind-the-scenes :) into the functioning of India's ministry of external affairs and how policy is formulated in India. And its not a heartening picture to say the least. Also, the chapter on UN and impending reforms was quite good.

Overall, may serve as a good introduction to the topic for lack of alternates.

Anil Swarup says

The manner in which this book enmeshes brilliant narration with meticulous research is quite remarkable. This is Shashi Tharoor at his best providing interesting insights into how the Indian Foreign Office works. The analyses is immaculate and a the prescription "do-able". The advocacy for "soft power" is very convincingly articulated.

Shrey Goyal says

Shashi Tharoor's most recent book, Pax Indica, explains why foreign policy matters for a country like India, and outlines how it could very well be a powerful instrument for her own domestic transformation. Beautifully written, Pax Indica is evocative of an engaging and exciting conversation which, while dotted with tongue-in-cheek anecdotes, misses neither the historical context nor the intricacies of the topic at hand.

In fact, it is important to point out the shades which the author has painted the work in. While Tharoor remains a celebrated scholar in the international relations space, this is not an academic work, but is instead meant to be read and understood by a plethora of readers, from the non-fiction aficionado high-scholar to the geopolitically-inclined enthusiasts. Another interesting amalgamation is that of Tharoor the former UN Under-Secretary General and Tharoor the MP for Thiruvananthapuram, both of whom can be seen and heard.

Pax Indica opens a window to the inner workings of the MEA and other domestic stakeholders in India's dialogue with the rest of the world. The book also examines these links with different partners in some detail as well. The strategic approach taken by India, especially during the Nehruvian era, is showcased and reflected upon, and helps trace an outline of India's identity and unique position in the world as a thought leader and as an emblem for self-righteousness and peaceful coexistence.

(Full review in TNT Magazine)

Vivekanand Pandey says

Currently gazing through the pages of 'Pax Indica', latest commentary on Indian foreign policy by someone as well-established authority on the subject matter as Mr. Shashi Tharoor, from Allen Lane (an imprint of Penguin Books). Still at page 158 (the book contains 450 pages), but I have already formed my opinion – interesting, lucid, informative, well-crafted, common-reader friendly language and a must read, though a little bit expensive (Rs. 799). The most important thing about the book is that it does not look at the history of our foreign policy, but, as it has been written in recent 2012, thus, catches all recent events our generation

has firsthand experience thereof. It talks about present opportunities, threats and future directions. Equipped with numerous eye-opening facts, the book enabled me to comprehend that in a well-connected global system of the day, the traditional perception of foreign policy as a reactive instrument of ceremonial nature holds no place. The world is so connected that the events taking place far-far beyond our borders have potential to exercise significant positive and negative impacts within our own borders, thus, we need to realize the importance of a foreign policy which is instrumental in achieving our internal goals by securing, and extending to, mutual cooperation from International community. And finally, the term 'Pax' in title, to the satisfaction of status-quo Indian reader, is not equitable with 'Pax Romana' or 'Pax Britannica', but this 'Pax' denotes to the Pax of prosperity, peace, and development, both domestically and internationally, through integrating Indian foreign policies with those of the rest of the world!

Sagar Vibhute says

An educational read. I have been ignorant of India's policies and roles in the international arena, barring a few newspaper articles once in a while, but those in most of India's major publications are China-obsessed these days.

It is refreshing to read about India's role in helping developing and emerging economies, especially Africa, and how we are pursuing inclusive growth in contrast with the policies pursued by some other major world powers. Shashi Tharoor is sincere in his praise as well as criticism of India's foreign policies - praise for our fairly successful non-alignment, inclusive growth, democracy supportive policies (largest single donor to the UN democracy development fund) and criticism in the case of our MEA which is still a reactive body that is even today fairly toothless and relies on the PMO for policy formulation. (Quoting "The MEA's decision making is like elephants making love. It happens at a high-level, there is much bellowing, and the results are not known for two years")

The analysis of our bilateral relationships with Pakistan, China, USA, Latin America, Europe, Russia, Middle East, South-East Asia is quite thorough (as thorough as a non-academic book can be). Tharoor draws upon various examples to make his argument about how much of the world wants India to be the counter-balance to China in the world economy, and it is an agreeable opinion.

This book was written in 2012, when Tharoor's parent party Congress was ruling in India, one that has been in power for most of our democratic existence. At the time of me reading it the single largest opposition party (BJP) is now in overwhelming power and their pro-Japan leaning is quite evident. The current government is also notoriously right-wing but ALSO more aggressive in pursuing foreign investments so it will be interesting to see how much of what Tharoor has written holds up five years down the line.

I confess, I skimmed through the final few chapters which deal with the character of the MEA and what Tharoor believes should be its focus in the next few decades. I found them weak compared to the first half of the book.

Adarsh says

Pax Indica is largely about modern India and its relationships with various other countries, as well as its role in multi-lateral organizations. Shashi Tharoor keeps stressing that in the 21st century, foreign affairs directly impact domestic affairs, and hence they are extremely important. Tharoor has an excellent vocabulary, which enables him to keep making the same arguments worded differently. He is largely supportive of the UPA

government, and while referring to the flaws of India, he is careful to distract us from the fact that his party has been in power for most of the last 60 years. He does point out the flaws in Nehruvian ideology and Indira Gandhi, but he words them extremely carefully. Otherwise, he is all praise for the UPA. The book is extremely informative, but for some reason (editorial oversight?) most facts are repeated more than once, which is kind of underwhelming considering Tharoor's command over the language. Also, the writing is conceited at times. But it is as unbiased as can be expected from an Indian politician, and quite enlightening. A worthwhile and mostly engaging read.

Meetu says

Ever since I read *The Great Indian Novel*, I have been unshakingly admiring of the writer, Shashi Tharoor. That remains the most impactful book on modern India that I have ever read. By merging the epic tale of the Mahabharata with modern Indian history, Tharoor gave a truly "incisive" perspective on India and the people who wrote its destiny. His love of Nehru and disdain for Indira Gandhi were perspectives that I adopted and till date have found no reason to change. The reason I bring up that work is because I was expecting the same wit and passion in his analysis of Indian Foreign Policy. After all he has spent the last three decades bang in the middle of Foreign Affairs.

Unfortunately, though *Pax Indica* is definitely a must-read for anyone who wishes to get an idea of India's standing in world affairs and how it happened to reach there, it is not a brilliant analysis. The book is extremely easy to read as Tharoor is a professional writer with an innate ability to entertain his reader. Every so often, you will find yourself smiling at a particularly witty aside on some observation of his. He also has a genuine, heartfelt love for the country that is endearing, with an old-fashioned charm. But by the time you are a few pages in, you realize this is more of a summing up, a chronicling of facts, that are offered along with opinions that are neither original nor deep. I would say however, that this is the sort of text that should be included in school syllabi. The self-congratulatory tone of our history and civics text books could do with these facts:

"Our foreign policy debates in Parliament and the media seem obsessed with Pakistan or with ephemera, or worse, ephemera about Pakistan. There is little appetite for in-depth discussion about, say, the merits of participating in the Non-aligned Movement or the Conference of Democracies, or the importance we should give to such bodies as SAARC or the IOR_ARC. When I was minister of state for external affairs I suppose I should have been grateful, even relieved, at being allowed to get on with foreign policy formulation without the interference of the general public. But I was not; I was deeply frustrated by the indifference of educated Indians, because in my view foreign policy is too important an issue to be left to the MEA alone. Our society as a whole, and particularly its educated young people, must care enough about India's place in the world to participate actively in shaping our international posture."

The book starts with a brief general history and goes on to look at India's relations with a few specific nations. Pakistan, China and the USA are more well-looked-into. But I especially enjoyed learning about Taiwan and East Timor. These are the chapters with the few interesting anecdotes. While there are no insights as such, it is worth noting the basic facts that often get blurred in the face of daily news about our neighbours. The sheer exasperation of dealing with hostile neighbours comes up in various instances and he expresses his wariness well - this will find a resonance with all Indian readers. But he underlines the basic facts:

"The problem with Indo-Pak Track II dialogues of the kind I witnessed in the capital is that they are essentially built on denial. They focus on making the visitors feel welcome, emphasise the feel-good aspects of their presence in our midst, celebrate the many things we have in common and try to brush the real problems under a carpet (not a Kashmiri carpet, since that might provoke disagreeable thoughts). In other words, they are a self-fulfilling exercise in self-vindication. Their success depends on denying the very

disagreements that makes such dialogues necessary in the first place."

"There is also the question of China's view of the world and its own place in it, going well beyond India. In his 2011 book "On China", Henry Kissinger, architect of the United States' 1971 opening up to that country, portrays this in almost mystical terms. Kissinger's book is replete with genuflections to the Chinese people and their 'subtle sense of the intangible', as he seeks to explain 'the conceptual way the Chinese think about problems of peace and war and international order'.This sounds alarmingly like the G2 condominium that some Washington strategists would like to see run the world of the twenty-first century – and it doesn't leave much room for the rest of us (though Kissinger, never one to shirk a contradiction, is simultaneously an advocate of close American relations with India too)."

He then looks at a concept he apparently advocated long back: using India's soft power in its international relations. Going on to the woes that befall the Ministry of External Affairs, he devotes an entire chapter to this sad state of affairs. The phrase "headless-chicken" was used by an Indian diplomat recently who was later severely criticized by the government (admonishments being every Indian government's favourite to-do thing). But Tharoor says exactly that about the rotting system. Only, having learnt from his previous mistakes, and as a member of parliament now, he couches it in more anguished, less accusatory tones. I consistently felt that his writing throughout the book was too cautious. While he invokes his favourite Nehru every now and then, he does not criticize any politician and does not even broach the subject of endemic corruption that is to blame for the situation in the MEA being as structurally inefficient as it was in the seventies when the first committee to address its failures was set up.

"As for the annual report of the MEA, an inscrutable collection of banalities and itineraries, one critic biting observed that "the only explanation for this consistently dull, drab and un-illuminating document is the assumption at the political level that the conduct of foreign policy is an esoteric subject best known to its practitioner"."

The end is devoted to reflecting on India's current international status and the possibility of adopting an articulated strategy in world affairs that is decisive and clear rather than merely non-aligned. While the writer is enthusiastic and articulate, I couldn't help feeling a prevailing sense of cynicism. Hopefully that is not the case with the younger readers(!) whom Tharoor seems bent on exhorting.

"When researching in 1977 the doctoral dissertation that became my first book Reasons of State I was told by a (then already retired) Indian diplomat that 'Indian diplomacy is like the love-making of an elephant; it is conducted at a very high level, accompanied by much bellowing, and the results are not known for two years.'"

Vadassery Rakesh says

"We should wipe out that enemy nation", is a knee jerk reaction of all those coffee table revolutionaries from the great Indian middle class, whenever there is an atrocity in India, engineered from the foreign soil. Shashi Tharoor has pragmatically highlighted the fallacy of such an action. A war which will erase at least two decades of our hard earned development. By doing so we fall prey to the evil designs of the enemy nation's power hungry military leaders, a foe who has nothing to lose.

Pax Indica, the latest from the stable of the eminent diplomat turned politician, is a must read for all those who are worried about India's standing in the emerging world order. It weighs down the opportunities and the threats that our nation has to face before it emerges and occupies its rightful place as the world's biggest economy.

One thing that we can be proud of our predecessors, who ruled the country since Independence, is that, on the foreign policy front, India has always walked that tight rope quite well. We have never been seen as parroting some else's script. Nor have we allowed anyone to train their guns over our shoulders. The foreign policy experience of Mr Tharoor gives the reader a comprehensive outlook towards the various regions, be it Latin America, Africa or the Arabian lands, where we are fighting out with our large neighbour for the future resources.

It also touches upon the severe talent crunch and the neglect that the Foreign Service is facing, after the economic liberalisation, wherein the best of the talent are being whisked away by the private industry, notably the IT sector. It is painful that our Foreign Service personnel lack the language skills for the respective places, and most of the places are inadequately represented.

He also stresses upon for the first time by any author on the importance of Soft-power. Soft-power is defined as the influence a nation has on the external world by way of its culture, art and media. India by good fortune is the only nation on the earth which can match the USA in terms of soft power, thanks to our Cinema, Yoga, Chicken Tikka and Music. Let us wish all the best to both India and Mr. Tharoor.

Anant Mittal says

Lovely book this. Mr. Tharoor has certainly penned down the thoughts for India and its future specially for its foreign relations. What makes it even better is the fact that he has tried to evaluate nearly all relationships that India has globally and gives feedback and even suggestions to improve the same.

His fresh takes on not only India-Pakistan, but also India-China and even India-US are quite good and give one much food for thought, albeit there are some sentences that become used and abused by the end of the book.

Another gem was his insight on improving India-Africa, India-Latin America and India-Central Asia relationships. He has even analysed countries like Turkey which have never featured in the Indian foreign policies before. But what I loved most in the book was his advocacy of Soft-power and Public Diplomacy (which I'm a personal fan of). The stress on developing these two is unique and shows how these are tools of the future. Mr. Tharoor's insight into the MEA (Ministry of External Affairs) was also quite a read. Although it started to get a little dull at times unfortunately. However, his 30 years of work with UN truly reflected in his analysis of Multilateralism and India's role in the UN. By the end of the book, one starts to see his vision and share it in a sense where one understands the role that he expects and the world expects India to play in the coming time.

A truly wonderful read for anyone interested in foreign policy, world affairs and diplomacy.

Vishal Kale says

As usual, I start with excerpts from the book that will make the Indian reader sit up... "India was much more open to the west than hindsight suggests... it was driven away by western condescension... and the western leanings towards Pakistan... The US congress once passed a resolution refusing to help India construct a steel plant since it was not the US business to help build socialism in India... The west was noticeably sympathetic to Pakistan over Kashmir... The Soviet Union frequently vetoed anti-India resolutions"... "And yet, if there is another Mumbai – another horror perpetrated on a scale comparable to 26/11 with similar proof of Pakistani complicity - comparable restraint may be impossible, and all bets will be off"

A book on foreign policy sounds a pretty boring affair – one does not keep high expectations from a book

that deals with such an esoteric topic. And to compound matters further, if this book is written by someone like Shashi Tharoor – who is known for his rapier-like wit and penchant to introduce a quip or a witticism; or outright humour in the most unlikely of paragraphs in a book - this raises expectations of 2 types: one that this book might be boring; and for those who have read Tharoor, there will be the expectation of a witty exercise. The book is neither heavy, nor is it witty.

This book has introduced a refreshingly different side of Tharoor; on reading this one can understand how this person rose to such mercurial heights in the United Nations. It is a mature and balanced look at the Indian Foreign Policy Scenario, and has taken a look at both sides of every coin. We also get to see one side of his writing that all of us are used to: bluntness and straightforward to-the-point statement of intent, or realities. The combination of these 2 factors elevate this book from a mundane one; it is a high-quality and power-packed book. In typical Tharoor fashion, he has not held his punches; the punches flow thick and fast – but are grounded in a superb factual, mature analysis. The western reader will be able to understand Indian approach to foreign policy much better – although some passages might be highly disconcerting; for the Indian reader, the book offers a wholesome fact-based understanding of our policy imperatives and direction.

Read More @ <https://reflections.vvk.blogspot.in/20...> {This review was sent to the Author as well, who did revert on twitter}

Siddharth Nishar says

I picked up this book with the intention to address my ignorance on India's foreign policy; this book has gone over and above my expectations in educating me.

Having said that, I went through the Five Stages of Grief with this book's writing. Tharoor's rhetoric, eloquence and wit become irritating very quickly when every point is repeated five times in different guises. The segues between logical ideas are torturously slow and even then disjointed.

Foreign Policy is, by the sheer nature of the topic, quite difficult to write about. The abstract and sensitive nature of the topic makes story-telling an invaluable skill and I have seen other non-fiction writers pull it off with subjects as dry as Number Theory and Philosophy. The second half of the book, thankfully, draws from events and experiences from Tharoor's life and he manages to weave concepts around examples that stick with you (with a lot of fluff, sadly).

This is just one of those books.

William Joseph says

Good book. Give me an insight of Foreign policy of India in 21st century. Simple language easy to understand.

Harini says

The DNA has carried a slightly shorter version of my review of **Shashi Tharoor's** book **Pax Indica**

Pax Romana or the Roman Peace is a Latin Term used to describe the, slightly over two hundred year period, when the Roman Empire saw relative peace and prosperity. It was a period when the Republic made way for the Emperor (Augustus); various warring factions within Rome were brought to heel; the Empire was kept safe from invasion and the military expansion was kept to a minimum. It was a time when Rome became the focal point of culture, trade and influence and was the dominant power. The term has been used for other Empires – Pax Americana (the period post the Second World War), Pax Britannica (the century leading up to the First World War), Pax Mongolica (the height of the Mongol Empire in the 13th & 14th centuries). In each of these cases the power of the Empire – military, economic, and cultural combined with internal political stability – ensured Peace. In each of these cases the core of the Empire – Rome, America, Britain and Mongolia – were protected from war on, while they expanded outwards with their military and trade might. This Pax Imperium was great for each of the States that were the power centres, but it had a mixed result vis-à-vis regions & people that came in the path of the Imperial Juggernaut.

Pax Indica or the Indian Peace is Shashi Tharoor's look at modern India – that has come out of the shadow of internal divisions and external invasion – to take her rightful place on the world Stage. Tharoor's basic hypothesis is that India can use a combination of her size, her trade prowess, her soft power and her growing influence in the world to ensure an age of domestic transformation. He sees word Pax Indica not to imply world or regional domination, as much as foreign policy that allows India to play a role in developing a 21st century "Peace System" that will help 'promote & maintain a period of co-operative co-existence' and in 'helping shape the global order'

Pax Indica looks at Indian foreign policy from both a historical perspective, and a normative one. He is rather uncritical in his assessment of history. His great admiration for Jawaharlal Nehru probably gets him to see Indian foreign policy through rose tinted glasses. For example, the entire 1962 debacle in which China wrested '23,200 square kilometres of Indian territory' is explained away in one paragraph. His defence of non-alignment is robust. And he believes that those who "critique Nehru for not taking the 'winning side' speak with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight'. He also says of non-alignment as Indian foreign policy in the first 40 years after Independence gave India an advantage in the last two decades because that policy 'enabled us to work with all the major powers without exception – and to get help (if I may be allowed to mangle Marx) from each according to their capacity, to us according to our need. In this period (post 1991) the 'post-colonial' chip has fallen off India's shoulder and she can look at the world from a position of authority.

In a world where it is acceptable, indeed expected, to berate the problems of non-alignment, Tharoor offers a perspective on why the path of foreign policy independence in the years following 1947 was the correct path for India to follow. However, he also says that in the years to come foreign policy cannot be led by belief and ideology as much as with one single goal – that of 'facilitating India's economic growth in order to bring our billion strong masses into the 21st century.' And he talks about the need to 'cultivate good relations with countries that can assist us in that process – trading partners and investors in the economy; suppliers of energy resources and assurers of food security; and partners in our fundamental objective of keeping our people safe, secure and free '

This kind of explains the seeming contradictions in India's foreign policy – the friendship with Iran and the desire to boost trade ties despite the west having issues ("Iran's natural resources, particularly oil and natural gas, have been increasingly important to India for decades') at the same time as strengthening her ties with the West; the growing relationship with Israel ('India is now Israel's largest market for defence products and services') along with a continued support for the Palestinian cause ; India's increasing influence in Afghanistan – not through the display of naked power or military might, but through kinder and gentler ways; an enhanced involvement in Africa – through trade, government credits and private sector involvement. All these, says Tharoor makes India a very influential player on the world stage.

Right at the beginning Tharoor says that the book is 'like an onion' begins with Pakistan and peels outwards,

from South Asia and neighbourhood to the world beyond.’ There is a whole chapter (entitled “Brother Enemy”) devoted to our troublesome neighbour in the west. A State whose own internal divisions are so vast that the rulers of Pakistan ‘do not feel able to challenge militant groups and their leaders because they have become too popular with a radicalized and pro-Islamist populace’ – the charitable explanation; or ‘those in power are happy to allow the terrorists to run free and wild, as long as they are only threatening India’ – the sinister excuse. Tharoor is of the firm belief that it would not be realistic to expect Pakistan to change fundamentally for there to be peace – there are too parties jostling for power in Pakistan to allow that. He spends quite a bit of time listing those parties and their positions vis-à-vis India in public and private. But, in his opinion, ‘we want peace more than Pakistan does, because we have more at stake when peace is violated’ and therefore India should ‘seize on whatever straws in the wind float its way from Pakistan to explore possibility of Peace’. It is possibly the only controversial statement in the entire book. And also rather simplistic. He believes that stronger economic ties, a MFN status, and trade could enable Peace, while more contentious issues like Siachin or Kashmir get discussed separately.

There is an entire chapter on China that doesn’t say too much except that we can’t compete with them, we shouldn’t have conflict, maybe we should co-operate. He says that the normally complacent Elephant (us) is naturally wary of the “hissing dragon”. History, the last 60 years including India’s support and sanctuary to the Dalai Lama and the Chinese support of the Indian communist movement – plus the war of 1962 and China’s territorial claims on parts of Arunachal Pradesh have kept relations between the two strained. He lists all the advantages that China has “India’s sclerotic bureaucracy versus China’s efficient one, India’s tangles of red tape versus China’s unfurled red carpet to foreign investors, India’s contentious and fractious party politics versus China’s smoothly functioning top-down communist hierarchy,” and then says, without a trace of irony or sarcasm “India has become an outstanding example of the management of diversity through pluralistic democracy’. But he says, “India is a fractious democracy, China is not. But as an Indian, I do not wish to pretend we can compete in the global growth stakes with China” . He sees India and China following different paths and both making the future their own.

The first 7 chapters of the book are devoted to the neighbourhood; ‘The Near Abroad’- the Arab world and the Rest of Asia; The United States of America; Europe, Africa and Latin America – bunched together in a single chapter. The bulk of these chapters are a walk through the history of India’s relationship with that country. It is in the last 4 chapters that he makes his recommendations. He believes that India ought to use a combination of soft power and public diplomacy in a multi aligned world to achieve her objectives. With the rest of the neighbourhood and the world he advocates growing trade ties to bind us together. In the case of the rest of the world the recommendation is similar – trade ties and soft power to see “peace in our times’. Tharoor is a fan of Indian soft power, though the role of the state in building that power is unexplained. Soft Power arises despite the state – from films, trade ties, cultural exchanges – all the State can do is exploit it, if it exists. The chapters on the ‘Global Commons’ and the need to move from “multi alignment’ extend his philosophy of being ‘ajatshatru’ (without enemy) and ‘sangamitra’ (friend to all) – and that is the guiding philosophy of the book. It may seem optimistic, simplistic and even naïve in parts – but it possibly has a grain of truth and practicality. Apart from Pakistan, India has decent relations with most of the world. It cannot afford to militarily engage to establish influence; nor does she have the kind of wealth to sign blank cheques for the rest of the world – so all that remains to be used is soft power. And, Tharoor advocates that India use that to the hilt.

Pax Indica is foreign policy 101 – a great introduction to foreign policy for students and those interested in reading about how India’s foreign policy evolved since independence. is a good starting point to understanding Indian foreign policy, but any reader should read more before forming opinions. Shashi Tharoor has a way with words, and the book flows easily and is immensely readable. As he admits, it is not academic, more his perspective as a ringside observer of changing world dynamics. Pax Indica is a bit like a nice breezy travelogue – the generic kind carried by tourists on visits – through the terrain of Indian foreign policy. There is a bit of history, a bit of geography, some amount of characters to know about, who to know about, the events that mattered, those that didn’t, what to see, what to avoid. It is a very first person, insider

view of Indian foreign policy. It is an easy read for a serious subject, and that should not be held against the book. If you know nothing about Indian foreign policy this is a good starting point. The book looks at India through rose tinted glasses, and it is good to discount some of the optimism. But, in a scenario where the overwhelming opinions emanating from India is one of doom and gloom Pax Indica is a good countervailing point of view.

This review appears on my blog at
