

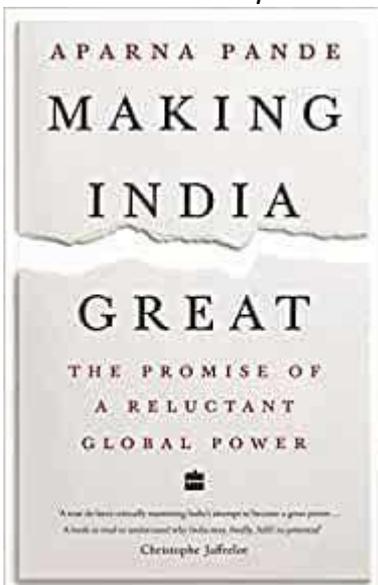
Unleashing India's True Potential



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As India strives to unleash its true potential to rise as a global powerhouse, it is tasked with a series of challenges that stunt its aspirations. To put this ambition into perspective, Dr. Aparna Pande discusses the various internal issues that have hampered its global aspirations and plagued the socio-cultural, economic, political and military dimensions, in her recent book *Making India Great: The promise of a reluctant Global Power*.



The book is structured in five chapters besides the introduction and the conclusion. The fundamental argument of the book sets out to delineate India's ambition of becoming a world power in the 21st century. The author discusses the contradiction that exists within Indian society that is 'although India aspires to become a global power, it lacks the ability to draw long term strategic plans that are necessary to achieve and realise its ambitions'. To attain this vision, India must overhaul its attitude and mindset to prescribe a course of action that is deemed fit to bridge the gap between India's potential and its policy outcomes. Dr. Pande rationally deconstructs the reasons behind India's economic slowdown and sheds light on the country's pursuit towards realising its true potential.

In the introductory chapter, the author revisits India's ancient heritage and modern history and spells out various historical accounts to depict the immature, parochial and tactless decisions and judgments made by the Indian political elite that have repeatedly toyed with India's ambitions. These vested interests have hindered the country's progress and fractured its strategic disposition in spite of possessing a robust ethical foundation, a secular religious society, a rich linguistic and cultural diversity. Furthermore, the author elaborates on India's achievements since its independence while knitting history with contemporary international politics.

By 2024, India will be the most populous country globally (p.X) and will be the world's third largest economy by 2050 (p.53). The author raises key arguments that address India's trajectory to become a major global power. She advocates for the need to focus on its important national subjects such as enhancing the country's defence capabilities, upgrading its military industry and expanding its diplomatic outreach globally, instead of focusing on the traditional problems related to religious vigilantism, caste and ethnic prejudice, and cultural divisions.

In the first chapter, "Ancient Culture, Modern Times", the author illustrates India's ancient culture and the faith in Indian exceptionalism. She beautifully explains the ancient history starting with the idea of renaissance and enlightenment and journeys through the social changes brought over time by various reformist movements namely the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj. The idea of Indianness as conceived by Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore indicates that modern India was built on its rich and ancient heritage. The two different traditions are highlighted within the Indian social order: one discussing India as a vibrant, inclusive and open society, while the other views India as an obscurantist society due to the existence of social practices of patriarchy, feudalism and chauvinist behaviour by Indian society. The country's progress is impeded by society's myopic vision and bigoted fabric.

The author opines that legislative decisions and political events in India are scrutinised by the public from the religious and cultural lens that hampers the growth and progress of the country. Rather than investing in strategic planning for defence and education, the Union Government has been spending more resources to protect cows with the intent to safe guard the religious sentiments of its people. Subsequently, these provisions adversely affect beef production countrywide and weakens the leather industry, affecting the Indian economy at large. As alluded by the author, such a comparison of the religious practices with the economic benefits could hurt the sentiments of the public, leading to undermine the majoritarian faith. In the larger context, among the many prevailing social and national issues there are far greater problems that need immediate redress to which the author has failed to shed adequate light on, such as gender inequality, patriarchy, the promotion of women empowerment, improvements to the national literacy rate and addressing the issue of poverty.

The second chapter discusses human capital, which acts as a pre-requisite driver for the modern Indian economy. In the ancient times, the country's potential for human resource can be viewed through an archaeological lens and has also laid the foundation of the world's oldest civilisation, the Indus Valley. In addition to the Indus valley, the subcontinent has witnessed the establishment of the well-engineered twin cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Dr. Pande supports her argument on the country's human capital by supplementing the reader with a similar view from Gurcharan Das' book, where the author conveys that India's biggest failure has been in building human capabilities. Further, he states that to build human potential and capabilities, there is a need for an investment of human capital particularly in education and the health sector.^[1] In concurrence with Mr. Das, Dr. Pande explicates that the failure of building human capabilities is due to misgovernance. Hence, she suggests that the Government should take pragmatic steps for policy formulation and skill development.

The third chapter elucidates about 'Economic Potential' of the Indian state. She discusses the success and failures of the Indian economy. Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi accentuated on economic independence and self-sufficiency. The Indian economy has been growing since independence but is insufficient to cater to the needs of its growing population. Despite being a developing economy, there are millions of people in India living below the poverty line. The 1991 reforms were a shot in the arm for the Indian economy through the process of liberalisation and privatisation. As India is on its way to becoming one of the three largest economies by 2050, New Delhi is required to bring more reforms to its land, labour and financial policies. It needs to give up its paternalistic approach which hinders its economic growth. Dr. Pande also highlights India's obsession with producing everything within the country which leads to hyper-nationalism and proves to be one of the major drawbacks for the Indian economy only weakening its rise as a global power.

In the following chapter, the author analyses the country's foreign policy and geopolitics. While debating the geopolitical nature of the country, Dr. Pande enlightens the reader about some of the inevitable features of the Indian state. As one of the oldest standing civilisations, its geographic position is strategic and its vast population is an asset for the country's growth. The ancient sages have ascribed India as *Vishwa Guru* (world teacher) and have adopted the philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakkam* (the world is one family). Prime Minister, Narendra Modi in his historic speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2014 underscored the driving force of India's philosophy, reminding the world community about India's ancient history since the Vedic era, with the intent to bring reforms to the United Nations (UN), making it more democratic and participatory.

The author presents a case to underline the existence of India's strategic disposition through an adaptation of the Non-Alignment Movement. To establish and maintain its clout in the world order, India is associated with various organisations like the UN, the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and several other multilateral institutions. The author presents a strong case for the need to introduce new reforms into the UN Security Council (UNSC) but also into the international economic order, including various multilateral economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. More importantly, she advocates the need to promote India as a permanent member in the UNSC with the backdrop of India's rise in contemporary international relations given the country's growing economic, political and military prowess.

Talking about its foreign policy, India is considered a geographical, socio-cultural and economic centre for South Asia and plays the role of a 'Big Brother' within the South Asian region. India has always followed the 'Neighbourhood First' policy to maintain strategic relations with its immediate neighbours. Apart from South Asia, the chapter presents a stark contrast regarding India's relations with China and its economic and military rise which pose a threat to India and South Asia.

The last chapter examines India's "Military and Grand Strategy" and what India actually requires in order to become a global power. She illustrates the features of great powers as described by Hedley Bull. According to Bull, great powers are identified by 'comparability of status', 'rank in military strength', and the ability and recognition to 'play a part in determining issues that affect the peace and security of the international system as whole'.^[ii] To incorporate these factors in its foreign policy, India needs a grand strategy in place which could be formulated through four major strands: Imperial Legacy, Messianic Idealism, Realism and Isolationism, as discussed by the author in her previous work.^[iii] To achieve these goals, India can exercise the Kautilyan principles of Saam, Daam, Dand and Bhed (persuasion, temptation, punishment and exploitation respectively) as a means to achieve an end.

To this end, *Making India Great* is a well-researched handbook with various mesmerising facts but with a contested title which questions the greatness of the country. It allows readers to comprehend various reasons for India's reluctance and flawed progress on the global stage. The author suggests that the Government of India should introduce new reforms that would enable it, to take pragmatic measures in the economic, military, political and social spheres, which would provide greater impetus to its growing aspirations as a global power. Lastly, Dr. Pande fails to identify and analyse the loopholes existing in both, the decision-making apparatus and implementation process of various policies at the economic, political and military levels.

Nevertheless, this work is of immense relevance to understand India's position as an emerging global power, in the context of the contemporary state of global affairs.

[i] Gurcharan Das, *India Unbounded: The Social and Economic revolution from Independence to the Global Information Age*, New York: Anchor Books, 2002, p. xviii.

[ii] Hedley Bull, *The Anarchial Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, pp. 200-03.

[iii] Aparna Pandey, *From Chanakya to Modi: Evolution of India's Foreign Policy*, Noida: HarperCollins India, 2017.