

---

# Book Review

*India's China Challenge: A Journey Through  
China's Rise and What It Means for India*

**Ananth Krishnan**

HarperCollins Publishers, Noida, 2020,  
ISBN 9789390327683, 435 pp, Rs 599



Amrita Jash

In rhetorics, India-China relations are largely perceived to be pivoted in the bedrock principle of *Panchsheel*—the vision of “Peaceful co-existence”. With the 1962 War resulting into the departure from the sloganeering of “Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai”, the 70 years of the India-China ties have staggered over time and have increasingly become volatile as witnessed with the 2020 military stand-off in Eastern Ladakh. With the ties reaching its lowest, the unsettled border dispute holds a greater bearing on the ties—difficult to delink from the overall bilateral ties. With new differences added to the old dispute, the bilateral ties have become fragile with time despite the relative peace. Most precisely, what provides the context to the book are the three key situational factors: First, 2020, marked the seventh anniversary of the India-China diplomatic ties; second, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic from the Wuhan epidemic; and finally, the violent scuffle in Galwan Valley in Eastern Ladakh. These circumstances make

---

Dr. **Amrita Jash** is Research Fellow at Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi.

Ananth Krishnan's book on *India's China Challenge* both timely and topical given its comprehensive outlook.

What makes the book an interesting read is its articulation. Taking a closer look at China from 2008-2018 being a Beijing-based Indian Journalist for *The Hindu* and then *India Today*, Ananth Krishnan in his book has cogently put forward the criticalities of the Chinese state with lucidity. What makes the author's interventions significant is that it is heavily drawn from personal interactions and interviews with Chinese scholars, political elites, businessmen and Chinese public; extensive travel to Chinese provinces—especially to Tibet and Xinjiang; and most importantly, the author's command over mandarin; and most importantly, his personal experience from his decade long stay in China—thus, making the book a primary study based on the ground-perspective of an Indian Journalist.

In this regard, the book tries to capture India's China challenge from four key perspectives: the political challenge of dealing with a one-party state; the military challenge of managing an unresolved dispute; the economic challenge of learning from China's growth story and building a closer relationship; and finally, the conceptual challenge of how India perceives and engages with China. In this regard, the book has been divided into six themes—politics, economy, diplomacy, history, frontiers and portraits, which are encompassed under 24 chapters with an epilogue. Having a broad canvas, what makes the book interesting is the fact that the very interpretation of India's China Challenge is drawn from the way the Chinese elite/opinion-makers view India. This is complemented by the comprehensive understanding of China that is undergoing a critical transition under the leadership of Xi Jinping in all dimension—political, social, economic and the military. Owing to which, the book very well captures the divide—the Chinese state under Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping and how it has evolved both in character and form since China's rise. On the whole, the book delves on the pointed query: What China's

many transformations mean for India? In answering the query, Krishnan's insider view brings into perspective the oblivious attitude of Indians in knowing its biggest neighbour, whose political, economic and social transformations affect and will continue to affect the lives of Indians, in ways not always realised. Therefore, Krishnan's book highlights the need to 'know China' as only then one can estimate 'how big a challenge it is to India'.

To conclude, the volume makes a strong case of bringing to attention India's China Challenge from the vantage of an insider view drawn from a Chinese understanding, which makes it the strongpoint. Besides, the author's eclectic approach provides the book with a comprehensive outlook. However, although the book justifies that China has embarked on its transitional path to power, but there still remains a marked uncertainty in predicting as to what the trajectory would look like and most precisely, how will it shape the contours of India-China ties. To say so, given the uncertainty and the fallout of events, there still remain significant caveats in gauging the transition of the ties. What calls for a significant deliberation is the query: To deal with the China challenge, what should be India's China Policy?

In an overall analysis, the book is comprehensive, well-articulated, written in a lucid style and makes a significant value addition to the existing literature on Chinese studies. With its broad spectrum of assessment, the book is a necessary read for students of international relations, academicians, policymakers and anyone who is keen on understanding China from within and how it impacts India-China ties.