

Book Review by Vipin Malik,

Chairman and Mentor, Infomerics Ratings

A New India by Arun Jaitley. Published by Juggernaut Books. 2020. Pages 369. Hard cover Price ₹799.

I had the pleasure and privilege of knowing late Arun Jaitley for several decades. Shri Jaitley was not an obscure person; he was a towering personality- a legal luminary, an astute Minister in the Union Cabinet, an excellent communicator. But above all, he was a very decent human being- the kind they seldom make today, a perfect gentleman and a close family friend.

Since he did not drive, I often picked him up from his house and used to drop him back home. In morning walks, we used to take a round of Lodi Gardens. My fellow walkers were S/Shri Jaitley, Virendar Kapoor, Mukul Rohtagi and Narendra Modi, when he happened to be in town. In one round of 2.2 kms., Jaitley ji used to analyze the happening events and the shape of things likely to come. In retrospect, almost all his futuristic assessments came true.

He was an astute public intellectual, who had the uncanny ability to read between the lines, to analyze and explain complex socio-economic and legal issues in a simple and easily understandable manner-in a manner that very few persons can. In the Supreme Court, Jaitley ji was respected by all judges. His mastery of politics can be seen in his active participation in University politics from his student days.

He was a man of great optimism and faith in the India growth story and an effective communicator at that. And this underlying sense of faith, optimism and resilience permeates this eminently readable book. Shri Jaitley is no longer with us but he lives and resonates with his speeches, writings and blogs-which sometimes seem to be ahead of his times (as, for example, in the case of Jammu and Kashmir). His thoughts and works present a kaleidoscope, which would stand the test of time. He left a deep void in our lives- a void, which would be impossible to fill.

This book, which is a collection of blogs by late Arun Jaitley, has been published posthumously. These blogs cover a wide canvas from the enigmatic persona of Shri Narendra Modi to the complex issues of demonetization and the rolling out of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), from BJP's key reforms, such as, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, enhanced amounts paid to Anganwadi workers, the Ayushman Bharat Scheme and the Aadhar Scheme to the collapse of the dynasty. These issues certainly need careful consideration and examination as ably done by Jaitley. His

suggestions to go full steam ahead in respect of important measures, such as, Swacch Bharat, Smart Cities, Ayushman Bharat Scheme and Aadhar are eminently sound and sensible and need to be seriously implemented for India to move to a new and higher development orbit.

With his passion, an indomitable sense of optimism, honesty and transparency cutting across party and government lines, he played an important part in rolling out the GST. The remarkable significance of this historic ‘one nation, one tax’ measure is manifested by the fact that after initial teething troubles, GST monthly collections seem to have stabilized at ₹ 1.4 lakh crore to ₹ 1.5 lakh crore; i.e., an yearly figure of about ₹ 18 lakh crore-no mean achievement this!

There is also an incisive examination of dark chapter of the Emergency in the Indian history, the rancorous debates among regional forces, and the crisis in the Congress Party-what Jaitley calls inimitably “*the Congress leadership is determined to succeed in its race to the bottom*”. The implosion of the Congress Party since then is reflected in the quitting of important Congress leaders, viz., Ghulam Nabi Azad, Kapil Sibal, Sunil Jakhar, Hardik Patel, Ashwani Kumar, RPN Singh, Jitin Prasada, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Kuldeep Bishnoi, etc.

Jaitley’s critical examination of the “*temporary provisions with respect to the state of Jammu & Kashmir*” starkly brings out how it was “*oppressive, discriminatory and violative of the fundamental rights*”. Hence he demonstrates-and demonstrates quite tellingly-that the abrogation of Article 370 and Article 35 A was both contextually significant and entirely in conformity with the needs and requirements of a transforming India- an idea, “*whose time had come*”. History shows how prescient Jaitley was!

Perceptive reflections on important individuals, such as, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Dr. Man Mohan Singh, Jag Mohan Dalmiya, Arvind Subramanian, etc. add value to this book, which is of considerable contemporary significance.

Shri Jaitley’s vision of “*a new India*”-an India, which is fully developed, just, inclusive and equitable is unmistakably discernible here. This vision needs to be implemented in complete earnestness for India to move from “*swaraj*” (self-rule) to “*suraj*” (good rule”) and India to consolidate its position in the comity of nations. This is important because with the greatly reduced significance of geographical frontiers, the world has become increasingly inter-linked and inter-

dependent-what we in India visualized possibly thousands of year ago – “*vasudhaiva kutumbkam*”, i.e., the world is a community. In this increasingly globalized world, no country can be an island.

Clear thinking and effective communication is the key to success in all spheres of life and economic activity. This book clearly reflects both clear thinking and effective communication.

I am reminded of Oscar Wilde’s powerful words in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* “*books are well written, or badly written. That is all.*” I have no doubt that this is a well written book. This excellent book, which ably isolates and identifies major issues and clearly delineates the pathway to the future, is an essential reading for all persons interested in India’s development discourse, its political process, the vicissitudes of development and the pathway to the future.

The Jaitleys have two children-one son and one daughter. Both of them are exceptionally bright. I am sure they would follow in the footsteps of their illustrious father and effectively carry forward the legacy of this great man.