



CEACOP SEMINAR

What Kind of Great Power Will India Be?: The Ideas and Choices That Are Shaping Its Rise

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Abstract

As India rises, there is growing interest in understanding what it considers the nature and purpose of international politics to be. Previously, this question was answered by referring to the renunciatory morals articulated by the figures such as Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru who led India to independence in 1947. However, with India now bidding for greater power and influence, these ideals do not seem as germane today. So where has India's ambition emerged from? The paucity of historical evidence has led observers to conclude that it constitutes a radical departure from the past. This view is mistaken, however. Drawing on extensive archival research, this talk brings to light a wealth of documents, including essays, letters, and pamphlets that are transforming our understanding of modern India. These materials reveal that the contest between pragmatism and idealism is not a new development. India's tentative forays into traditional great power politics can be traced back to the nineteenth century when a divide appeared between those who urged India to emulate the great powers, and those who, having grown disenchanted with avarice and violence, urged India to turn inwards. A clearer sense of this history will help observers better grasp the sources of India's international conduct today.

About the Speaker

Rahul Sagar is Global Network Associate Professor of Political Science at NYU Abu Dhabi. His most recent books include *To Raise a Fallen People: The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Indian Views of the World* (Columbia University Press 2022), *The Progressive Maharaja: Sir Madhava Rao's Hints on the Art and Science of Government* (Oxford University Press 2022). He was educated at Oxford and Harvard, and has served on the faculty at Yale NUS College, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, and Princeton University.