



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF  
SCIENCE

# SIR VITHAL N. CHANDAVARKAR MEMORIAL LECTURE



## Asian Geopolitics today

By Ambassador Nirupama Rao

### ABSTRACT

India has a multi-layered geography, it is the natural place of arrival for Asia, it conjoins both East and West, those famous twins of history. Asian geopolitics today concerns India because India is omnidirectional, facing west and east, north and south, it is both a land and sea power, abutted by an assertive China, and uniquely positioned at the head of the Indian Ocean, one of the most important and vital seaways of the world from the geo-strategic and economic point of view. Interaction and interdependence with the rest of Asia has been the central characteristic of Indian's storied and splendid history. Undivided India, before 1947, projected a physical and security presence that stretched from Suez to Singapore. Today, too, the logic of geography is relentless and India must be eternally vigilant of shifting global equations in her neighborhood and the larger world arena. The re-emergence of China and India as leading global powers has also thrown new challenges about how Asian geopolitics of the future will be molded and structured. Will India pursue a "flexible geometry", as Prime Minister Modi terms it, in its cooperation initiatives in Asia and utilize her "special place" in Asia? How will India's Act East policy of reaching out to the ASEAN countries play out in the coming years? How is India's role assessed by countries from Australia and Japan to the oil-rich Gulf states? Can India seize the moment and reap the advantage of its geography in the Indian Ocean, and leverage commerce, connectivity and its civilizational influence to build a secure and stable future for herself and through this, for the rest of Asia?



**Ambassador Nirupama Menon Rao** is a retired Indian diplomat, Foreign Secretary and Ambassador. She was educated in India and joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1973. During her four-decade-long diplomatic career she held several important assignments. She was India's first woman spokesperson in the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, the first woman high commissioner from her country to Sri Lanka, and the first Indian woman ambassador to the People's Republic of China. She served as India's Foreign Secretary from 2009-2011. At the end of that term, she was appointed India's Ambassador to the United States where she served for a term of two years from 2011-2013.

On her retirement from active diplomatic service, Ambassador Rao entered the world of academics with an appointment as Meera and Vikram Gandhi Fellow at the India Initiative at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Ms. Rao has continued to pursue her academic interests and has taught an undergraduate seminar at Brown University titled "India in the World".

Ambassador Rao holds an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Pondicherry University in India. She is currently working on a book on India's China relationship, entitled: "The Politics of History: India and China, 1949-1962".

In November 2014, the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, New Delhi, announced the grant of the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship to Ambassador Rao to enable her to work on the completion of her book project on India-China relations. Ms. Rao was a Visiting Scholar at the India China Institute at The New School in New York during April-May 2016, and was appointed a Public Policy Fellow at The Wilson Center in Washington D.C. from June 2017 to end-August 2017. She was a Practitioner-in-Residence of the Bellagio Center in Italy in November 2017. She is currently a Global Fellow of The Wilson Center.

In retirement, Ambassador Rao has also pursued her passion for music. Her first commercial album, entitled "Peace is My Dream", produced by the Peninsula Studios in New Delhi, was released in December 2017 by the Universal Music Group (India) label and can be digitally accessed on iTunes (India), Saavn.com and Spotify.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 6 2018

AT 4.00 PM

FACULTY HALL, MAIN BUILDING

HIGH TEA: 5.00 PM

PROF. ANURAG KUMAR

Director, IISc will preside

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