

BOOK REVIEW

Vishal Chandra (ed.), *India and South Asia: Exploring Regional Perceptions*, (New Delhi, IDSA / Pentagon Press, 2015), Pages 319, Price: Rs. 995.00

Regionalism in South Asia remains at best work-in-progress but it continues to be haunted by the old question as to whether it is possible and feasible to peacefully manage the socioeconomic fragmentation bred by the conflicts and violent events since independence from the British. Regional economic integration could be one of the effective means to this end. How that has progressed so far, and its likely praxis are matters for review and scenario building. The IDSA devoted its Annual South Asia Conference in 2013 to the theme of Exploring Regional Perceptions in South Asia, keeping India in the principal focus. This was a two-day conference with invited participants from all South Asian countries whose contributions covered narratives and perceptions ranging from the historical to present-day, national and sub-national to regional, intra-regional as well as trans-regional in relation to the contemporary socio-economic and political milieu. These contributions and analyses thereof form the metier of the book edited by Vishal Chandra bearing the theme in its title.

Even as one realises the daunting nature of the tasks inherent to integrating a region grown fourfold since, it requires dogged optimism to even contemplate likely evolution in the coming decades. The project that underlies this book is indeed ambitious in that it takes on board the diverse and varying perceptions of scholars from South Asia's eight countries and attempts to conclude with a way forward. It might seem easier to many to dismiss the South Asian vision as unrealistic while others would prefer to explore what alternative may be in sight. As things stand today, even the plight of the exemplary success story in regionalism, the European Union, seems to issue utterly confusing messages as the EU grapples with serious challenges; challenges that call in to question the very premise of the EU venture. While Europe can possibly go beyond the challenges one way or the other, would it be wise for South Asian countries to let the regional option run aground?

The papers compiled in this book are organised under three sectional headings to address the difficult task of systematic exploration of perceptions.

The first section concerns Shaping of Perceptions, the second spans Mutual Perceptions and Expectations and the third zooms into Regional Cooperation. Papers in the first section deal with how Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka see the region from their particular national perspectives. Pratyoush Onta from Nepal explores the role of academic community and the reasons the regional studies fall short in various academic institutions in different countries, including India, which in turn influences young scholars' (mis)perceptions about neighbours. Dinesh Bhattarai examines the bilateral relations between India and Nepal in an exhaustive essay.

An engaging piece by Yaqoob Khan Bangash from Pakistan delves into the preoccupation with identity that figures prominently in the entire context of India-Pakistan relations, and with Pakistan's narrative of itself and what the author calls, "...eternal comparison – more so in Pakistan than in India perhaps". He perceives a changing trend within Pakistan in the recent years as introspection about "increasing tide of militancy and extremism" within the country is pointing to a fledgling sense of flexibility in the hardened anti-Indian core. However, he is quick to acknowledge at the same time that the LeT, Harkat-ul-Mujahidin and the Defence of Pakistan Council keep the flame of anti-India sentiment burning. He holds that the perception of India cannot improve in Pakistan unless and until the latter becomes a stable and secure nation.

Humayun Kabir from Bangladesh situates perception formation within the rubric of social construction and unfurls an unending chain of social, political, economic and psychological factors interplaying in a complex web. His definition of the problem of perception formation, clearly sets him on a course, which might go towards no convergence or closure. He posits in his discourse the self-perception in Bangladesh as "a socially-driven, egalitarian and enterprising nation...which is fiercely independent in its outlook and attaches high value to individual entrepreneurship, social creativity and collaborative connectivity to its neighbourhood". His essay thus goes out of control and betrays the intractability of appropriate perception formation, which is perhaps inherent in an academic discourse giving free reign to expression of everyone's thoughts and imagination; if not emotions.

The exploration thus morphs into an exploration of divergences in the context of the India-Bangladesh relations, leaving the "regional" way aside. These diverging tendencies are further discussed by another scholar from Bangladesh, M. Ashique Rahman, in the next section. He elaborates upon a critical assessment of "Rising India and Bangladesh-India Relations" to lay bare the gap between the expectations from India, and the achievements so

far in the bilateral quest. These two essays together might appear counter intuitive for those today who perceive a propitious climate for improved bilateral cooperation. Maybe the assessment by these authors is rooted in 2012 whereas the same may not be perhaps as negative at present, i.e. in mid-2015, given the steps taken by the new government in Delhi over the past year. Nevertheless, some of the data and factual details given by M. Ashique Rahman about bilateral trade deficit, (unresolved) border issue, immigration, and water resources call for a focused response from the Indian side, which could make the discourse more complete. The negatives in perception formation, according to his paper, also include the role of media, which “often focus more on failures or setbacks rather than successes or improvements”. He avers that the Indian media’s size, coverage and circulation is much larger in Bangladesh than its own media – for example, the West Bengal daily *Anand Bazar Patrika* has a higher circulation in Bangladesh than that of all the newspapers of Bangladesh together.

This exhaustive presentation from Bangladesh concludes with placing responsibility on India to “grasp proper understanding of the expectations of its neighbours in the context of its rising status as a global power”. The author advises incumbent governments on both sides “to incorporate the Opposition in the policy making processes” since both countries in his view assume special significance in each other’s domestic politics.

The perceptions conundrum underlying regionalism is further expounded in an erudite piece by Sri Lankan senior diplomat and scholar Jayatilleka, former ambassador to France, Belgium and EU, the title of whose paper is impressively self-explanatory: *The Geo-Strategic Matrix and Existential Dimension of Sri Lanka’s Conflict, Post-War Crisis and External Relations*. After pointing out the geographical incongruity of Sri Lanka’s location where its definition (by outsiders) as “an island off the southern tip of India” and Sri Lanka’s own assertive self-definition – “against” India rather than “by” India, the author dives deep into ancient history to say that a counter-reformation, as it were, between Ashoka’s Buddhism and the Brahmanic Hindu faith forms a long term block of thousand years of history. This profound foray into the history of religion in India appears to be of compelling relevance for him. He further elaborates in this incisive and abstract study of Sri Lanka’s perception formation on how solitary his country is in the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean right down to Antarctica except for the proximity of enormous India to its north. He introduces China in this study by posing a loaded question about the positions taken by the Indian and Chinese governments on the Sri Lankan war (against LTTE): Why did India

and China put aside their competition, and support the Sri Lankan state in the end game of the war? He answers it by suggesting the emergence in Asia of a sort of “Eastphalia”, a la the Westphalian point in the evolution of European history, as a reason for this support by placing state sovereignty uppermost.

He also introduces a South-North perspective in how Sri Lanka perceives India, drawing a laboured parallel to the North-South paradigm in the twentieth century international politics. He thus asserts a “southern” vantage point as a “rather legitimate notion” in the study of politics and goes on to invoke the Italian Marxist Gramsci in his support. Considering that he also mentioned Cuba and the US in a distant allusion to the contemporary India-Sri Lanka frame, the essay can be interpreted by simple-minded international relations theorists as a thorough expose of the element of hostility in relations between India and Sri Lanka. This learned invocation of hostility in my view may have been gratuitous especially at a time when Sri Lanka’s own political system was in turmoil due to the ruthless authoritarian streak in the then president. This was the downside of the free reign given to perceptions – as divorced from a reality check. The reality check manifested itself a year and half later in the routing of not only Rajapaksa in the elections in 2014 but also much of what he was practising and his faithful loyalists were supporting with esoteric pedantry.

It is the bane of South Asian imagination that it comprises such persistent strains of hostile intent among scholars against India as a mark of their identity and independence of thought and action. The ascendance of this tendency throws more spanners in the works of regional cooperation than any factual narratives. The essays by scholars and practitioners of regionalism who took part from India at this conference are in some contrast with their counterparts from the neighbouring countries in that their analysis of perceptions is a bit more inclined to show facts even when discussing the historical context.

Partha Ghosh, for example, even while negotiating the tortuous course of perceptions provides his view of Bangladeshi society as a society where “there are strong pro-Islamic forces as well as strong secularist forces that vie for power” and “the role played by the international community, most notably India and Saudi Arabia” matters a lot due to geo-economic and cultural connections. He supports his point by a brief historical narrative of the past century and half of the sub-continent. He then discusses contemporary developments like the findings of the 1971 war crimes tribunal in Dhaka and the turmoil in the Bangladeshi polity

about what it cannot forget (and what Pakistan might never remember), the impact of these developments on perceptions about India and the persisting lack of mutual appreciation between India and Bangladesh.

Partha Ghosh too, though, is inconclusive about what his analysis can say for regional context. This context is discussed threadbare in the pieces by Nagesh Kumar and Indra Nath Mukherji who go into the nitty gritty of the economic relationship, both at present and potential, to develop their case for the strands showing the way forward as well as the problems that bedevil it. Then there is an important contribution by S.D. Muni about how China figures in this South Asian regionalism. The essays by authors from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Maldives and Bhutan make interesting presentations of their respective national views about regionalism and India.

The most difficult part for the editor is the last chapter on key recommendations for the way forward – without which, this two-day deliberation on perceptions might hang in mid-air. Like everything else in argumentative South Asia, these recommendations too lay themselves open to disagreements and counter points. However, that task is best left to the reader who benefits from the valiant attempt regardless of the differing takes on it. The IDSA made a major effort to come to grips with how South Asia looked in early 2013 to its constituents, and this book gives a faithful snapshot, albeit a tad skewed against what is termed as “statist mind-set” of India’s political and bureaucratic elite towards neighbours, a judgement that may not be entirely fair. It is doubtless true, as the book concludes, that “at the civil society level, at track 1.5 or track 2, it is important to churn out consensual models and practical ways forward...”. What governments fall short of accomplishing let other tracks help to achieve. Good luck to such optimism.

SHEEL KANT SHARMA

Former Ambassador of India to Austria
and former Secretary General, SAARC

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Oliver Stuenkel, *The BRICS and the Future of Global Order*, (Maryland, USA, Lexington Books, 2015), Pages: 212, Price: \$ 85.50

In the international relations literature, full-length books on evolving institutions being written by authors from developing countries are rare. To add to it, when the author has an empathetic perspective, is himself from a non-western emerging power, and combines rigorous research with a sound theoretical analysis, the product is especially welcome. Brazilian scholar Oliver Stuenkel's book *The BRICS and the Future of Global Order* fits this description. It is, to the best of my knowledge, the first comprehensive book on BRICS, a forum that is as yet less than ten years since its inception.

There is no denying that BRICS is a strange international grouping. The countries that come together under this evocative acronym - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, are from four continents and the grouping thus transcends a regional dimension. In terms of political orientation, they are all different: three are noisy democracies, China has a one party system and Russia is a democracy with some question marks. In terms of the "great power" phraseology two are traditional great powers and are already permanent members of the UN Security Council; two are prominent aspirants (India and Brazil), and South Africa maintains an ambiguous position. Similar is the divergence on nuclear policy. The differences are thus obvious. What brings them together then and what holds them?

This question has been frequently asked and in fact, much scepticism has been vocal. Stuenkel does a thorough job in addressing this question and going beyond, places BRICS in the framework of the larger international architecture. His stated objective is to document a "definitive reference history of BRICS as a term and as an institution, (and to provide) a chronological, fact – focused narrative and analytical account". The author's aim is to undertake "...a critical historical biography of the BRICS concept" and he does this in eight chapters with a sound analysis of the various historical and conceptual elements, followed by a detailed compendium of all the documents and data.

Let us examine the author's credentials for the project. Stuenkel is a professor at the well known FGV foundation in Brazil. He has been interested in the perspectives of the South, is a noted commentator on the notion of "emerging powers", and runs a well regarded website called "Post – western world". For this project, he held discussions in all the five member nations and had access to diplomats and policy makers from

all the countries. (As a matter of disclosure, the author had discussed with the reviewer his perspectives on BRICS). The results are the rich notes that follow each chapter and the detailed references that corroborate or amplify the conclusions.

Stuenkel's analysis of BRICS' salience can be described as maximalist and forward-looking. "The transformation of the BRICS acronym from an investment term into a household name... is one of the defining developments in international politics of the first decade of the 21st century", he writes. The institutionalisation of BRICS, and later G-20, are seen by him as the most significant innovations in recent times.

How sound are these assessments in mid-2015, in an economic and geopolitical scenario, which is significantly different from the one prevailing in mid 2005, when the BRIC acronym was gaining ground? We will return to this question later, but first, let us turn to the factors that led to the formation, as the author delineates them.

The global financial slowdown and stagnation in Western economies is identified as a factor that led to awareness about the importance of the *other* "significant" economies, (a concept that came to be adopted later in the formation of G-20.) As is well known, the term BRIC was a clever acronym coined by an investment banker, Jim O'Neill of Goldman Sachs, who was looking for new centres of economic growth and investment opportunity, going beyond the usual. As early as in 2001, he had seen in Brazil, Russia, India and China some attractive features from a market and investment perspective. The financial crisis of 2008 destroyed the dogma that only the highly developed economies of the West as in North America, Europe and Japan mattered in the global macro economy. "2008 caused a legitimacy crisis in the international financial order which led to an equally unprecedented cooperation between rising powers".

These developments led to O'Neill's acronym being acquired for a larger purpose. Russia is credited as having first thought of creating a grouping of the four large "non-western" economies with a growth potential and to invest it with greater political symbolism. The first meeting of the leaders was convened by Russia in Yekaterinburg in 2009. The other impulse for the grouping pointed out by Stuenkel is the desire for greater intra-BRIC cooperation in areas other than finance. Once the entity came into being, following the proclivities of all multilateralism, which has a tendency to proliferate in terms of agenda and meetings, BRIC began to expand by searching for commonalities in objectives and concerns.

In detailing the evolution of BRICS from 2009 to 2015 and in covering a full cycle of meetings that would be completed when Russia hosts the summit in 2015, the book covers every milestone in the path traversed hitherto. More importantly, it makes some substantive political points, apart from the chronological narrative. Some of them are summarised below:

- It is pointed out that Russia realised that the grouping can be a “status enhancer” for itself and for other countries, by clubbing countries with a high-growth trajectory.
- The grouping is not anti-western. The bilateral relationship with the U.S. is vital for each country. It is more accurate to see the BRICS position as a projection of ‘the other’ perspective, that of the South on economic and some political issues.
- China was primarily responsible for bringing in South Africa in 2011 and transforming BRIC to BRICS. The weight or growth of the South African economy is not commensurate with that of other countries in the group and purely on economic parameters, there are better candidates for an expansion: Indonesia, Turkey, South Korea and possibly, Nigeria. However, by co-opting an African country with a commendable political profile, it was possible to enhance BRICS’ global appeal.
- The year 2011 saw all the five countries in the Security Council, a happy happenstance.
- As BRICS evolved, it took positions on the critical political issues of the day, like Palestine, Libya, Syria and others, and these have been different from that of the West. The most significant political challenge, however, will be Russia’s rupture with the West after the Crimean issue.
- The book has an important chapter on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, where BRICS have been constructive and yet cautious, and have contributed to the shaping of the international discourse.
- Similarly, on major issues relating to sovereignty, intervention/non-interference, reform and democratisation of the international order, equity, a larger voice for developing countries in international institutions, climate change and other global issues of this order, the collective positions of BRICS will be watched.

A separate chapter looks at intra-BRICS cooperation. Of course, the forum has had a number of meetings in areas ranging from security to energy, but the most tangible form of institution building is the decision on the New Development Bank or the BRICS bank. The bank is about to be made operational

and the way it evolves and its profile, priorities and lending practices will be a test of the ability of BRICS to make a difference. This is a story that is still developing, though.

At the time of writing this review – in mid-2015, certain questions arise, which are not sufficiently dealt with in the book, partly because of the rapid change in circumstances and partly because these are problematic issues for a believer in a bright future for BRICS. First, the growth story of the five countries has altered dramatically. China continues to do extraordinarily well and has now become the second largest economy in the world; India too continues to grow at a satisfactory pace; however, Brazil, South Africa and Russia, can no longer be termed as dynamic in their respective growth trajectories. The economic fortunes of these three have taken a dive, an aspect that negates the identity of BRICS in the economic dimension. Russia's political difficulties at present are an altogether different story, but those too affect its prospects. These negative developments have inevitably affected the profile of BRICS and strengthened the sceptics. Second, it is clear that of the five, China overwhelms others in almost every category and that the collective economic muscle of BRICS is primarily because of China's performance. Given this increasing asymmetry of power within BRICS, there are some worries about China using the forum and its institutions for its personal purposes, though experience hitherto does not support such a thesis. Third, the stature of some BRICS leaders, notably Presidents Dilma Roussef of Brazil and Zuma of South Africa have suffered; nor are they as committed to the project as, for instance, President Lula was. Thus, the shine of BRICS has dimmed somewhat.

Stuenkel does not address these issues frontally, but the next edition may have to come to terms with these questions, depending on the state of the five countries at that point in time. He does a good job of pointing out the larger ramifications of the grouping in the framework of a multipolar world. BRICS is an illustration of the "manyness" in multilateralism reflecting a multipolar world with new powers and diverse interests. Its promise and prospects in the next decade are worthy of study and Stuenkel will be a good guide in doing so.

B. S. PRAKASH

Former Indian Ambassador to Brazil

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Deepak Bhojwani, *Latin America, the Caribbean and India: Promise and Challenge* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press/ICWA, 2015), pp. xii + 212. Price: Rs. 795.00

A genre typical to Latin American literature is known as *realismo fantástico* (magical realism) in which creative writers – like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende – engage readers in narratives where fantasies are ingeniously portrayed as part of the normal and the real. Diplomats who have served in missions in distant Latin America very often engage us in ecstatic refrains of the rich potential latent in the region, waiting to be developed by India.

Many scholars have also pointed to the existential ground reality of contemporary Latin America. Today, the powers that be all across the world are vying with each other to get a foothold into the resource-rich sprawling sub-continent of South America. This is not to say that potentials for the mutuality of relationship are non-existent for India.

If that be so, why are bilateral relations between India and Latin America far from satisfactory? That is the overarching question the author attempts to answer in his book titled *Latin America, the Caribbean and India: Promise and Challenge*. In a sense, the sub-title of the book admirably paraphrases his response. To him, no doubt, Latin America is a land of great “promise” for India. But no less are the insurmountable challenges that India has to face in turning the promise into reality! In other words, Latin America is not “waiting” for the Indian *mañana*.

Rightly, therefore, very early in his book, he forewarns Indian enthusiasts for Latin America, given the “bewildering complexity and ever changing political and economic landscape, [Latin America] needs to be *understood* before it can be *studied*”. (Emphasis added, p. xii). In an effort to help understand the region, the book purports to proffer rich and useful data and details, crisply collated in as many as nine chapters, each of which are given a catchy title for the informed reader to savour.

To be posted in countries encompassing the vast tropical South and Central America as well as the Hispanic Caribbean for a dozen years and, the exceptional timing – right at the dawn of the new millennium when the region as a whole was pulling out from the ‘labyrinth’ of its five hundred and more years of ‘solitude’ – is an unusual treat, and as much a challenge for any seasoned senior diplomat. It is no wonder that the absorbing descriptive accounts of his personal reflections on the unique historical and contemporary features of

Latin America bear ample testimony to his candid acknowledgement of this rare privilege. Thus, the prognoses and policy prescriptions that he offers for India's "proactive" approach towards Latin America need serious consideration and deliberation by the larger policy-making community in India.

An unstated yet underlying ancillary question the author poses is in respect of drawing parallels between India and other 'late-comers' to this part of the world, such as, currently, China. In parenthesis, mention may be made of the "return" lately of the erstwhile European colonial powers to this region.

However, in the short span of the immediate past three or four decades, China has made considerable headway – to the point where today its presence and influence is felt throughout the length and breadth of Latin America as well as in the numerous Latin American regional institutions. Citing the instance of the recently set up (2010) regional arrangement viz. the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (*Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños* (CELAC)), the author admits that the failure of the CELAC to "articulate, leave alone promote, a proactive relationship with India" is because of the "diversity of political opinion and activism" within the regional institution. But, one could ask by the same stroke or token, how China – a country as far removed from Latin America as India and is placed no differently from India in respect of linguistic and cultural barriers with Latin America – could succeed in already setting up a "CELAC-China Forum at ministerial level" (p. 194).

Reading between the lines, China's success in the region, according to the author, has largely been on account of the country's proactive political leadership in devising a carefully crafted policy mix for each of the thirty three nation-states of the region, and judiciously implementing them through a variety of objective-specific strategies. No wonder, towards the end of the book, he once again draws our attention to his earlier suggestion that the vital need for India is to "*understand the reality* and appreciate the idiosyncrasies of each individual country" of the region (Emphasis added, p.197).

Instead, South Block's current practice of lumping and labelling the entire region with a lacklustre acronym such as "LAC", and do nothing except use occasional 'feel-good' rhetoric is unlikely to yield any positive gains. However 'benign' this approach towards the Latin American region – a region vast and richly endowed and five times the size of India – may be, in today's rapidly evolving, highly competitive globalising world is as much short-sighted as it could be disastrous for India in the coming decades. This is as much an admonition as it is advice to scale up our efforts on multiple fronts to leverage the full potential of the region.

On the whole, the author is of the view that the track record of India's

policy initiatives in respect of Latin America over the last sixty long years has not been edifying. If at all there has been an official policy pronouncement on the region, it was sometime in the 1980s when the foreign office (LAC) announced what it called ‘selective bilateralism’ with some countries in the Latin American region identified as the “thrust” countries. What came of this policy approach, of course, is anybody’s guess. Again, since recently we are told that LAC is considering setting up a permanent ‘dialogue mechanism’ with the countries of the region – one that is very similar to that of the India-Africa Forum Summit that was commissioned in the year 2008. Details about its role and functions are not as yet clear.

In the second half of the book, the author devotes attention to preparing a policy blue-print based on some innovative proactive initiatives and practices. Among others, one is the exercise of soft power for forging robust ‘people-to-people’ interaction in different sectors. He also underlines two important areas that merit mention: one, keeping track of Latin America’s regional integration processes and, the other, forging closer contacts between India and Latin America through the Indian Diaspora resident in the region.

As part of India’s proactive policy initiative, the author welcomes India’s earnest participation in monitoring as well as participating in the regional integration processes and institutions in Latin America as these exercises seem to be aimed towards consummating global integration. True, the story of Latin American regional integration has been an unending, and sometimes an intractable, account of acronym organisations since the second half of the 20th Century beginning with generic organisations like Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA), Central American Common Market (CACM), Andean Nations Community (CAN) and the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA). However, a new phase of regionalism has hit the map of Latin America in the past two to three decades – such as the South American Common Market (Mercosur), Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA), Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), and CELAC.

In the past two-three years more have appeared on the Latin American horizon – such as the Pacific Alliance formed in 2012 which was an outgrowth of the Pacific Arc Forum that “shared a pragmatic vision of the...multipolar, interdependent” global reality. There has even been an effort to move beyond the region, and reach out across the Pacific. Indeed, by 2014, the Alliance had “thirty-two countries as observers, including India” (p. 69) stressing on the principle of “open regionalism” (p. 70). It seems as if Latin American regionalism has now come of age, and is moving towards global integration.

Yet another area that deserves the careful attention of the Government of India is the Indian Diaspora resident in Latin America and the Caribbean. Although the government has recognised the cultural bond that tie the Indian Diaspora with their ancestral lands, and thereby put an end to “official apathy” (p. 188), the author is of the view that meaningful and purposive initiatives have to be devised based on the cultural relations engendered by the Indian Diaspora, especially in countries like Guyana, Jamaica, Surinam and Trinidad & Tobago. He underlines the need to develop further promotional efforts in the Caribbean, given the fact that the Indo-Caribbean community as well as other later-day Indian immigrants scattered in the mainland of Latin America (such as the Sikh, the Sindhi and the Gujarati communities) are neither a major source of remittance back to India nor precursors to bilateral trade. However, the author is of the view that ways and means can be devised that “will enable India to strengthen its presence there” thanks to the Indian Diaspora (p. 190).

In conclusion, there is no doubt that this book will be a welcome addition to the existing meagre literature on India-Latin America.

PRITI SINGH
Assistant Professor
Centre for Canadian, U.S. and Latin American Studies,
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi

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Poonam Surie, *China: Confucius in the Shadows*, (New Delhi, ICWA / Knowledge World, 2015), Pages: 284, Price: Rs. 830.00

China is one of the most important nations in the world today. It has risen at a headlong pace in the last few decades to become the major rival to the United States, and appears determined to try and regain its role as the centre of the world. Leading those who brought China to this pinnacle as a world civilisation was the sage Confucius who lived in the 5th century BC. His ideas enshrined in the Analects have inspired emperors and mandarins, generals and statesmen, teachers, philosophers and practitioners in every fine art ever since. His ideas have been challenged by the followers of Buddha, Lao Tse and Marx. The Chinese mind is undoubtedly conditioned by all of them in varying degrees. Most of East Asia too, including Japan, Korea and Vietnam, acknowledges the influence of Confucius.

Poonam Surie in her book *China: Confucius in the Shadows* explores his ideas in almost every aspect and includes glimpses of his life, his home and its neighbourhood. After tracing his influence through Chinese history, she focuses on the 20th century and the inevitable confrontation that arose between his ideas and the revolutionary ideology of the Communist Party as it took over the country. She brings out vividly in prose and poetry the differences between Mao and Confucius. These climaxed with Mao's final surge to the Great Cultural Proletarian Revolution. However, the author also believes that Mao was sensitive to China's past legacy, especially Confucius. She goes on to wonder whether the present leadership is allowing a Confucian comeback as they promote a proliferation of Confucius Institutes in foreign countries, high profile celebration of his anniversaries and serious study of his ideas and teaching in several major universities. Her analysis is detailed and precise, only perhaps influenced by a romantic nostalgia for the past, better revealed in her poetic passages.

Like all the great reformers Confucius was intent on improving the moral fibre of society and of every individual by instilling in them the value of responsibility towards the family, which would then extend to the community and the state. This reform process would be gradual as perceptions improved from an Age of Disorder to the Age of Ascending Peace, and finally to the Age of Universal Peace. A hierarchal state led by an emperor endowed with the Mandate of Heaven assisted by wise and learned mandarins selected on merit would provide the framework but the people would themselves act correctly with only limited guidance. Most civilisations have yearned for such golden

ages, and historians have tended to portray some periods as having achieved that goal. The Tang and Song periods in China, the reigns of Ashoka or Akbar in India, the Greek city states, and the Renaissance in Europe might be cited as examples although there is no likelihood of unanimity. However, the unpalatable reality is that no human society has ever been able to retain a state of perfection even if it was actually attained.

The author draws a vivid picture, glamorous but also somewhat tawdry, of how society is evolving in China's major cities today with the advent of prosperity, modernisation and globalisation. However, her overall evaluation is both optimistic and sympathetic as she quotes several instances to show that Chinese values have not changed drastically. Prosperity always eases the pressures at first, but new pressures develop and corruption in newer and varied forms resurfaces. Even as growth and development bring a better life this does not always translate into a better society. Would a more democratic regime help? Neither the experience of the West, India nor elsewhere would suggest that this is automatic. Democracy brings its own poisoned chalices with it and eternal vigilance is required. Deng Xiaoping, having eliminated Mao's successors in the Gang of Four put in place a system by which the leadership was replaced every ten years. Chairman Xi is the first leader who has come to the top without being in Deng's pre-ordained order of succession. Yet he is from among the first families of the CPC. While Confucius may have approved of the continuation of the hierarchical system, would he not want a more open order where dissent is more welcome and competition for the leadership is more open?

China's greatest current achievement is the economic miracle, which has brought it from being a beleaguered economy to the foremost position in barely three decades, moving from Soviet ideas to unabashed capitalism with some socialist characteristics. The author quotes from management gurus like Peter Drucker who give Confucius credit for the management styles and business ethics that have been adopted. However, one must not forget Deng who saw the need to alter the economic policy fundamentally, to ally with Western business to make China the workshop of the world taking full advantage of the rural poor who could be dragooned to accept great inequality for the sake of an improving future. But one has to sympathise with a very senior Beijing journalist who complained to this reviewer that this was neither Marxism nor socialism. Deng and his successors clearly chose what they thought would be in the best interests of China but a colleague ousted after Tiananmen era has recently denounced his policies as corrupt.

China's external relations over millennia have been crafted on the premise that it occupied the centre of the world. And yet there was no sustained effort to conquer territories beyond the areas of classic Chinese civilisation. Rather there was the acceptance of tributary states on the Chinese periphery. From some Burmese chronicles it would appear that the relationship was less of dependence than of deference and courtesy to a major neighbour. Adept diplomacy by Chinese intermediaries such as the Governor of Yunnan enabled both sides to maintain acceptable images of each other.

The bellicosity currently being displayed over territorial claims in the South China Sea has no earlier parallels. Rather it was the openness of the Chinese Empire to the exchanges of ideas, culture, services and goods that made the Silk routes so valuable to all who were involved. The modern concept of connectivity improving economic, cultural and people to people contacts along the land economic corridors that will become self-sustaining, contribute to development and prosperity and thereby foster peace and harmony would be in that tradition and would surely have won the approval of Confucius. The Maritime Silk Route differs from this concept and appears to have a concept of naval superiority that harks back more to Britannia ruling the waves. As the world is moving towards multi-polarity and empires have become obsolete, the super powers who replaced them are finding it difficult to maintain an exceptional role claiming to represent the international community. Economics, technology and communications now demand convergence rather than confrontation, and there is a hankering for rule based systems in international affairs. This has moved from purely services like communications to trade, and it is targeting climate and environment, and hence, security and geopolitics cannot stay outside forever. It will be interesting to see how the USA and China will respond.

Confucius had no doubt that the final stage would have to be Universal Order. Would that be a UN with a P5 or a larger number endowed with a veto? With his belief in meritocracy would he have preferred a more democratic multinational institution? Today's China may talk of harmony, but seems to be considering imposing its will slowly but steadily.

Observers of China are currently debating the latest version of its military doctrine. The author, like most others, draws our attention to Sun Tzu who gave China its definitive text in the Art of War, which has guided Chinese policies as long as Confucius has done. That was based on avoiding actual fighting if that was possible by using stratagems and deceit. Does the latest White Paper on Military Policy make a fundamental change by suggesting an "Active Defence" and talking in terms of balance of power strategies? Certainly

Chinese actions in the South China Sea seem to be based on creeping incremental acquisition of territory while continuing interminable talks. A settlement of the India China boundary issue is also not likely soon.

China will be a major determinant of any future world order. India can be another, if we follow the correct policies. Consequently, it is vital that we should be well informed about China, its leadership, policies, and all the factors that go into their making.

The great value of this book is that in this author we have an objective observer who has acquired a wide knowledge of Chinese civilisation, history, philosophy, culture and statecraft. Fortunately, she is so secure in her Indian roots that she has almost none of the prejudices, positive or negative, most people bear towards foreigners. Consequently, her contributions and conclusions must be taken seriously. Indian academia needs many more like her to help us understand our neighbours and the world better.

ERIC GONSALVES

Former Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs
Former Ambassador of India to Japan, Belgium,
the EEC and Luxembourg

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Sitakanta Mishra, *Parmanu Politics: Indian Political Parties and Nuclear Weapons*, (New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2015), Pages: 326, Price: INR 950.00.

Why do states build nuclear weapons? Explaining this age-old proliferation puzzle has been an important scholarly endeavour for nuclear policy analysts since the end of the Cold War. The renewed proliferation threats in the post-Cold War years marked by a change in global distribution of power has necessitated that the proliferation problem must be addressed with new non-proliferation policies. The quest for understanding the proliferation dynamics thus has yielded a substantive body of scholarship, with diverse theoretical approaches, such as classical realism, neo-realism, organisational culture and domestic politics models, and psychological and sociological approaches. Although the realist approach dominates much of the scholarship on proliferation behaviour, the insights into the proliferation dynamics as revealed by approaches like domestic politics have been found to be particularly useful for predicting proliferation behaviour and formulating new non-proliferation strategies.

This book makes an important contribution to this strand of literature by tracing the historical evolution of the perspectives of three mainstream political parties in India namely, the Indian National Congress (INC), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Communist Party of India- Marxist (CPI-M) on nuclear weapons issues. It brings out the untold story of the internal churning within these parties on nuclear weapons issues and its impact on shaping the country's nuclear decision-making in different historical periods. Political parties are one of the indispensable institutional actors through which power is exercised in a democracy. The constitutional autonomy that the political parties in India are bestowed with enables them not only to shape the political agenda but also mobilise public opinion on crucial issues, such as nuclear weapons' policy. Their ideas, beliefs and interests, thus, have become useful analytical variables in understanding the political behaviour and policy outcomes in a democracy. By dwelling on these important domestic actors, this book fills a void in extant scholarship on India's nuclear policy, which remains heavily skewed towards the role of structural conditions in shaping the country's nuclear behaviour.

At the outset, the author lays down a coherent conceptual framework by identifying four distinct characteristics of political parties for evaluating their impact on India's nuclear policymaking. The author then delineates the political-

nuclear interface by identifying relevant domestic political actors who have exerted considerable influence on nuclear weapons related decision-making. The novelty of this book, however, lies in the adoption of a unique methodological approach that relies on hitherto unexplored archival sources, such as various party proceedings, resolutions, and pronouncements for capturing the domestic impulses.

The author brings out the sharp contrast in the ways the mainstream political parties perceive various regional and international security challenges. Through comparative analysis, he highlights how the three political parties differed in their judgement of the utility of nuclear weapons in addressing security challenges facing the country. This is essential for understanding the “status-quoist” and “revisionist” tendencies that the three national political parties have come to demonstrate on nuclear weapons issues over a long historical period. Notwithstanding the dominance of perceived security threats from China’s nuclear arsenal as well as its covert support to Pakistan’s nuclear weapon programme, India exercised nuclear restraint for more than two decades after displaying its capability to build a nuclear device in 1974. The sources of India’s nuclear restraint during 1974 and 1998 can well be found within the internal dynamics of the Congress Party, which preferred to maintain ambiguity on nuclear issues as a matter of policy.

The author’s narrative also points to the competitive dynamic, which existed between the BJP and the Congress on nuclear weapons policy and the eventual radicalisation of the BJP’s views on nuclear weapons. The prolonged continuity in the attitudes of the BJP and the CPM validates to an extent the role of ideas and beliefs in shaping their respective positions on nuclear weapons policy. Although the author finds that India’s nuclear policy does not necessarily change with a change in government and may be changed by the same government, his narrative is compelling for understanding the vagaries of political change and leadership dynamics in the Indian context. While some of his assumptions may have limitations in terms of their wider theoretical applicability, they are nonetheless useful generalisations in the Indian context.

The enormity of the author’s effort lies in his attempt to cover a long period of more than six decades. His analysis of the post-1998 phase is equally worthy of note for understanding how Indian domestic politics have played out in the realm of nuclear weapons policy. The author carefully delineates how in the post-1998 period, the BJP regarded nuclear weapons as a strategic imperative for dealing with a host of regional and international security challenges; the Congress Party regarded them as a strategic compulsion borne out of the failure of global disarmament initiatives; while the Communist Party

continued its opposition to nuclear weapons. These elements of dynamism and status-quo are instructive in many ways for predicting the future directions of India's nuclear policies. Post 1998, the gamut of India's nuclear decision-making has expanded significantly. The polarisation of the nuclear debate as witnessed during the negotiation of the historic Indo-US nuclear accord only reinforces the role that the domestic political actors are likely to play in influencing India's nuclear decision-making in the years to come.

In the end, the author rightly cautions that the domestic motivations cannot be seen as the only causal factors but do provide useful insights into the shaping of India's nuclear weapons related decisions. His conclusions are significant, given the dangers involved in ambiguous interpretations of history and mindless credit taking among the political parties on the strategic achievements of the country. By rightly summing up his narrative, as all were party to the nuclear gatecrash; he sets the record straight on much of the distortions in India's domestic nuclear dynamics.

Overall, considering the vast canvas that the book covers and the newer interpretation that it offers, it is certainly a valuable addition to the existing literature on India's nuclear policy. It is a necessary read for students, researchers, and practitioners of India's nuclear policy. It is also an essential read for the spokespersons of the Indian political parties.

KAPIL PATIL
Research Associate
Indian Pugwash Society
New Delhi

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