

BOOK REVIEW

Jasjit Singh, *India's Security in a Turbulent World* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2013) Pages: 175, Paperback Price Rs 75.00.

Air Cmde (Retd.) Jasjit Singh's constant refrain and complaint was that India was "rising to power" but she did not know it, and that there was no national security consciousness amongst her citizens. On 18 July 2013, in his 80th year, he delivered a lecture on national security at the Centre for Air Power Studies in which he reaffirmed the need for this subject to be taught in all universities so that, from a young age, Indian citizens can be sensitized to the many dimensions of this topic.

It is almost ironical that, amongst the last few books authored by Jasjit Singh, there should be one on *India's Security in a Turbulent World*. The book provides a discerning study of the complex security environment that envelops India, and offers pointers on how the country should chart its course. Naturally, the author brings his experience of thirty years of research and analysis in national security think tanks to produce a rich treatise that should be compulsory reading for all Indians. Given the wide reach of the publisher of this book, the National Book Trust, this should not be difficult; and in fact, it is recommended that the book be translated into all Indian languages for better penetration. In doing so, the NBT would have fulfilled Singh's dream of imbuing a national security consciousness across all sections of Indian society.

Divided into seven chapters spread over only 175 pages, the book makes for an easy read. The author starts by explaining the events which appear to be causing a polarization of the world once again. With the end of the Cold War, the world did go through a unipolar moment for a while; but this was soon overtaken by rise of other major powers that have translated today into new kinds of polarizations, confrontations and fault-lines. In the emerging polycentric world order, Singh sees India placed "in a unique position to play the role of a pivotal state", and recommends steering clear of neo-alliances. Over the last six decades, India paid a heavy price for non-alignment. But this helped it build autonomous capacity that today commands world respect and attention. Singh urges India not to "fritter away the gains or sacrifices...now that we are able to stand on our feet and look to the future with greater assurance than ever before in the past two centuries."

The second chapter of the book brings out the many complex paradoxes that make up the reality of India. The author identifies these as the paradoxes of scale, contradictions and beliefs. He writes that “India is what you believe it is, and you cannot be proved wrong!” In order to put India’s current position and achievements into perspective, especially for the modern generation, the author provides a sense of what India was when it gained independence after two centuries of colonization. The most important question that this chapter addresses is “what are we trying to secure?” Besides safeguarding territorial integrity and independence, Singh goes further to say that we have to secure the core values and beliefs of the nation state from both external and internal challenges and threats. Amongst the core values, Singh places utmost importance on the “equality of the human being”. In fact, in order to highlight its criticality for the idea of India, he explains it by contrasting it with the example of Pakistan which, soon after Independence, began to deny equality to its citizens by adopting policies that discriminated amongst communities and between genders. For Singh, India’s security demands the protection of the ideology of the equality of all human beings, as also four other core values^{3/4}democracy, secularism, social justice and federalism. According to him, the erosion of any of these aspects would pose a threat to India’s security.

The author devotes a full chapter to explaining the logic of military spending. Aptly titled “Affordable Credible Defence”, it demystifies India’s defence expenditure, maps the trends, and explains the need for this expenditure to ensure military modernisation in view of the threats to India’s security. The chapter also addresses the critical role that defence decision making, particularly of the Higher Defence Organization, is expected to play in the wars of the future.

Chapter 4 explains the rationale for India to acquire nuclear weapons. Singh categorically states that India “does not require nuclear weapons for prestige or status”, but to address the threats that arise from the existence of these weapons in other nations that could adversely impact India’s ability to pursue an independent foreign and security policy. China, enhanced nuclear proliferation, eroding prospects of disarmament, dominant strategic doctrines reflecting the increasing reliance on nuclear weapons, and the threat to India’s ability to retain an open nuclear option were the primary factors that compelled India to overtly demonstrate its nuclear capability in 1998. However, Singh explains the Indian nuclear doctrine in simple terms, and thereby places the role of nuclear weapons for India’s security within the narrow scope of nuclear deterrence.

It is hardly surprising that Singh has devoted one full chapter to the threat that is posed to India's national security by terrorism. He examines both the dimensions of this phenomenon—the threat posed by terrorism as it is prosecuted and promoted from Pakistan, as well as the problems created within the country to provide fertile ground for terrorism to operate in terms of the “revolution of rising expectations that creates a ground swell of disenchantment, sense of relative deprivation, and alienation from the organized state.”

After comprehensively addressing the external challenges and threats to India's security as emanating from China and Pakistan, the last chapter of the book spells out the Security Strategy for the 21st century. Singh identifies the rivalry between the USA and China as the greatest challenge that India will have to face in the coming decades. He argues in favour of maintaining friendly and cooperative relations with both, much along the lines of non-alignment that India has always pursued. At the same time, India will be required to pursue a military strategy that is based on self-reliance. In fact, as India rises in its economic and technological prowess, its vulnerabilities will increase too, and its interests extending far beyond the borders would have to be defended. Military capabilities will have to be developed for this purpose, and adequate thought will have to be given to the utilisation of these capabilities, keeping in mind the presence of nuclear weapons.

This book provides a comprehensive understanding of all the major dimensions of India's security in the turbulent world of the 21st century. It will benefit both the lay reader as well as the seasoned strategist as India grapples with the security challenges of contemporary times. It is recommended that the book be adopted as a text book in the curriculum of defence and national security departments of universities.

MANPREET SETHI
ICSSR Senior Fellow
Affiliated to the Centre for Air Power Studies
New Delhi



Shrikant Paranjpe, *India's Strategic Culture: The Making of National Security Policy* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2013), Pages: xv+184, Price: Rs. 695.00.

Cogent and conflicting expressions on India's "strategic culture" are often heard from scholars. While George K. Tanham found little evidence of the Indian elite "having thought coherently and systematically about national strategy", Rodney W. Jones found Indian strategic culture more distinct and "is mosaic-like, coherent than that of most contemporary nation-states". The plethora of writings available today on the subject revolves round this binary narration. Distinctively, Professor Paranjpe, in the book under review, by juxtaposing Indian strategic culture in its entirety with "India as a civilization-state" has attempted to locate the answer "whether 'deliberate ambiguity' can be a strategic doctrine for India in terms of its utility for addressing problems of national security" (pp. xiii-xv).

Though the analyses in the volume is confined to strategic thinking of India in the post-Soviet world order, the author has strived to locate the roots of its strategic culture in its historical, cultural, geopolitical, socio-economic compulsions that goes back to several thousand years. The author begins with the argument that independence, internal security and territorial integrity have always been overriding priorities in India's strategic perspectives. However, the uniqueness of India's strategic perspective, as the book distinctively opines, is its non-focus on the issue of "survival of nation-state", even though it always accepted the state-centric formulation of approaches to the security policy by taking a global/international perspective of security (p. xiv). In that context, the Indian strategic perspective predates the modern Westphalian nation-state system (p. 15).

Normally, the peaceful approach, diversity and the assimilative culture during the ancient and medieval period, and the influx of successive streams of people and culture all merging in mainstream India have been described as the major components of the Indian strategic perspective. However, the author questions if one can generalise these traits as "all India" phenomena (p. 27). Moreover, the author brings to notice the lopsided projection in the writings on the nationalist phase of Indian history. Deliberate or otherwise, the expansionist phase of Indian history – the expansion of the Chola Empire of

the South into Ceylon or the colonisation of South-east Asia, has been overlooked.

While addressing the question—why do countries make specific strategic choices in terms of their national security in general, and the ambiguous nature of Indian thinking in particular, the author has referred to relevant literature available. While K. Subrahmanyam admits the absence of strategic tradition in India that resulted in adhocism, Rodney Jones highlights the “Hindu mindset” to contextualise Indian strategic thinking. However, Professor Pranjape has brought to the fore quite succinctly, the rationality and utility of “deliberate ambiguity”, which has been the core of Indian strategic thinking since 1947.

Subsequently, the author studies the British-India phase that marks a clear shift of India from a “civilizational” entity to a “nation state” and how the freedom struggle has infused certain ideological currents into India’s post-independence worldview. In Chapter II, III and IV, the author analyses the application in the post-Independence period, of strategic perspectives, which India has accumulated over many centuries. The three factors as offshoot of the geopolitical setting in which India found itself, seem to have shaped its strategic decision-making. The author points out that in response to the “regional threat perception”, and limited choice to preserve its hard-won independence in a bi-polar world order, and ethnic nationalism (secessionist and autonomy seeking ethnic groups) at home, the Indian security policy culminated in two predominant trends (pp. 54-55). The first is the urge to retain sovereignty in the practice of the security policy, and the second is the application of the self-reliance principle and peace approach in the context of building regional solidarity. How far India has succeeded in both aspects is a matter of introspection. While smaller neighbours have often invited outside powers to counterbalance India’s predominance, regional solidarity has not moved beyond a point.

Accordingly, the author has demarcated four distinct phases in the evolution of independent India’s strategic thinking concerning its security policies. First is the “defence through diplomacy” phase – the period ranging from independence to the 1962 Sino-Indian border clash; the second and the third phase characterised as “defence through military preparedness” and “crystallization of a South Asia-centric perception of India’s power status” respectively are not demarcated under any specific time frame by the author. For that matter, it is debatable if this interim period (1962-1990) can really be earmarked into two watertight phases as India’s defence modernisation and military involvement in the neighbourhood had taken place

simultaneously. This is amply clear in the explanations the author has furnished in pages 61-63. The fourth phase that began with the end of Cold War and is identified as “a more realist frame of reference”, is equally debatable (pp. 57-58).

More importantly, in chapter III, the book touches upon the intricate issue of India lacking a long-term strategic doctrine. The author says that the “reactive” policy, built on ad hoc responses to conflict situations has given rise to this criticism. For example, the Indian response to the Chinese threat appears to have been more “tactical” than the product of a strategic doctrine (p. 68). The author has also touched upon the issue of “strategic restraint” and India’s “lack of strategic intent” as argued by various scholars but has not attempted advancing his own judgement. It would have been better had he made an attempt to answer in a straightforward manner, the unanswered question, whether “Indian strategic behaviour is a product of restraint, of lack of strategic culture or a policy that is based on deliberate ambiguity” (p. 71). However, in the last chapter (VI), he put forth views that “deliberate ambiguity” continues to be a strong feature on India’s strategic thinking and there seem to be a distinct reluctance to present a clear-cut strategic doctrine, which stems from its belief in the realistic utilities of being ambiguous. This has, as the author argues briefly, given India “a manoeuvrability that was required to protect its national interests” (p. 153).

Lastly, though characterisation and the identity of strategic thought of a nation rests on several factors and the approach in their interpretation, the manner in which they are presented for public consumption matters the most. The author has used the phraseology of “marketing the identity” in this regard (p. 71)., Though the Tibet Agreement of 1954 was India’s recognition of Tibet as a part of China, it was successfully and “deliberately sold to the Indian public opinion as the *Panchsheel* treaty”, the author says. Similarly, in defence of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of 1971, India went to great lengths to explain that the treaty did not violate the fundamental principle of its non-alignment credentials. However, with regard to the India-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987, the author points out that the government did very little to “sell” it to the public to garner favourable opinion.

Undoubtedly, India’s strategic identity in the decades ahead lies in its popular decision on what kind of nation it wants to be. Can it effectively utilise its usable strategic behaviour and experience to manage its self-image, and ascend to world power? Will it resemble the existing norms of global power status or will it chalk out a distinct path to become a force to reckon with? The author prescribes, “India needs to assert its

commitment to national security and hence the legitimacy of use of force ...” (p. 156). At the same time, he visualises “a mixture of power and ideas that is likely to feed into a strategy for national security for India” in the long run (p. 160).

Overall, the volume certainly throws valuable insights into India’s post-1947 strategic-security discourse and forms an important reference for the students of international politics in general and India-watchers in particular.

SITAKANTA MISHRA
Research Fellow,
Centre for Air Power Studies,
New Delhi

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