

India in the Cold War



BOOK REVIEW

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Manu Bhagavan proved his credentials as an accomplished political historian with his earlier work, *The Peacemakers*, on India's active and influential diplomatic role in the early years after its independence. His considerable and pioneering research pointed to a hitherto unacknowledged role that India played in the negotiation of international norms on a number of key issues despite being outside the league of major powers. India's non-alignment gave it the credentials to play the

go-between in the emerging polarisation of the Cold War. Its much-derided moralist "pretensions" enabled it to carve out a favourable niche for itself in the post-Second World War international order. The current volume, *India and the Cold War*, takes that story further, providing greater detail and more nuanced perspectives, putting together contributions from several well-known analysts, who have drawn on more recently available archival material. It is commendable that the authors of various chapters represent a younger but nevertheless promising generation of scholars, whose rigorous scholarship and attention to historical detail stand out.

It is inevitable that when you have a number of contributing scholars covering a wide spectrum of issues, adhering to a broad but consistent theme is difficult. Bhagavan makes a valiant effort to pull the various threads together in his fine Introduction, but the disconnect between

the chapters remain. There is no clear story line except in the broadly defined title. Mr Bhagavan refers to Odd Arne Westad's work, which attempted to put the binary nature of the Cold War in a broader global context, with impacts on other regions and relationships not directly implicated. The latter, in turn, did influence the manner in which Cold War equations played out. This is the backdrop to examining India's role during the Cold War and contesting the perception that it was a marginal, though sometimes an irritating player.

The contributions themselves are of variable quality. Srinath Raghavan's piece titled "A Missed Opportunity? The Nehru-Zhou Enlai Summit of 1960", provides fresh archival confirmation of what has been fairly well established in various studies on the India-China boundary issue, that there was a possibility of reaching agreement on a boundary roughly aligned to the McMahon Line in the East in exchange for accepting Chinese claims in the West in Ladakh. This might have prevented the slide into the India-China war in 1962. Though not cited by Raghavan, this so-called "package pro-

posal" continued to be on offer at least till 1985 when the Chinese side began insisting that India had to make "meaningful concessions" in the east in exchange for which the Chinese side may make appropriate concessions in the West. This was accompanied by a new demand that Tawang had to be conceded by India in any boundary settlement, a claim that continues to be politically unacceptable. It would be interesting to explore through further research whether Cold War dynamics as it prevailed in the 1980s had anything to do with this change or whether it was mostly a reflection of the altered balance of economic and military capabilities between the two countries.

Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu's chapter titled "The Accidental Global Peacekeeper" traces India's role as the chief provider of peacekeeping forces for UN missions in various conflict zones. He has highlighted the role of General Indarjit Rikhye, who as military advisor to the UN Secretary General was instrumental in working out the basic norms and institutional processes in mounting peacekeeping operations. This is another example of India taking active part in

international rule-making despite its relative lack of substantive power.

Rohan Mukherjee analyses India's nuclear posture during the period 1962-69 and correctly describes it as maintaining nuclear ambiguity, pressing for nuclear disarmament while developing the nuclear capabilities which would enable a nuclear deterrent should that become necessary for safeguarding India's security. In my view he over-emphasises the prestige factor as driving India's nuclear policies, downplaying the security aspect. Every nuclear weapon state has, to an extent, been driven by notions of prestige and belonging to a select club and India is no exception. However, once China became a nuclear weapon state and Pakistan's relentless drive to develop nuclear weapons became well known, the security driver in India's case became compelling.

Two other contributions are worthy of mention. Rahul Sagar's chapter on Hindu nationalists and the Cold War provides a useful narrative on the mutually contradictory foreign policy prescriptions of the RSS and the BJP. There is a greater affinity with

the West but at the same time a preoccupation with its corrupting influences on India's cultural ethos. There is an emphasis on economic and military muscle but unwillingness to accept economic strategies that go beyond self-reliance.

Lastly, Syed Akbar Hyder's chapter on the Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, may seem an incongruous inclusion in the book but was interesting as a counterpoint to the Cold War binaries that were dividing countries and people into opposing categories. Faiz's poetry refused to acquiesce in these binaries and sought to evoke sensibilities that transcended boundaries and ideologies: A reminder that there is a common humanity and innate empathy that the politics of division are sometimes unable to suppress.

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INDIA AND THE COLD WAR

Manu Bhagavan (ed)

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