

The Enemy Within

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Introduction

It is often said that more nations have crumpled from within than from external aggression. Histories of many an empire are replete with such accounts; and the subjugation of the sub-continent by a handful of mercantile nations in the not too distant a past, bears testimony to this fact. In recent years, dreaded organisations like the LeT, HuJI, Naxals, SIMI, the 'D' Company, etc, have left gaping holes in our security edifice. The attack on the Country's Parliament, the '26/11' and other devastating incidents occur not because we live in a tough neighbourhood, but because of the fact that we acquiesce ever so often. Our responses amount to couple of days of sabre-rattling followed by layers of enquiries, committees, commissions and then blame-games. What is wrong with us that we display such appalling passivity with monotonous regularity with regard to our National Security. Is it something to do with our psyche or lack of sense of history or a sheer absence of 'country first' ethos; or all three?

The First Historic Betrayal

In the book, 'Amongst the Believers',¹ VS Naipaul writes that among the first of betrayals that were to assist Arab conquests of Sind (711-713 AD) and parts of present-day Afghanistan, occurred when Mohammad bin Qasim arrived at the city of Debal. He does not attack the town till eight days, when a Brahmin comes out and informs the Arabs that "The town is guarded by a talisman - the four flags of green silk that fly on the dome of the great temple of Debal. While the flags fly, the people will fight." Bin Qasim had these destroyed with his catapults. The town surrendered. The Arab army took three days to slaughter its people. And so, many a fortified towns of Sindh were captured as a result of betrayals by nobles, Brahmins and Buddhist priests. Arab conquests preceded Muslim invasions of the sub-continent which began 300 years later.

Coming to Muslim invasions, these became common-place once the natural defence of India based on the Hindukush and Indus river were breached. According to Sir Jadunath Sarkar, the noted historian, the Islamic armies that invaded India followed one uniform pattern; based on predictability of response of Indian kings, who never fought unitedly against external aggression. At first, there were raids across the frontiers, next invasion in force where the local king was defeated, humbled into a vassal and his kingdom used as a base for further forays. And finally the vassal State, after one last futile struggle, was annexed to the Muslim empire or sultanate. Perhaps central to this theme of betrayals, greed and lack of cohesion amongst Indian kingdoms are two vital ingredients that have influenced the Indian psyche for centuries.

Impact of Kautilya's Thinking on Indian Psyche

Joel Larus in his book, 'Hindus in Pre-modern India'² tells of the impact of Kautilya's teachings leading to an inflexible stance in our thinking. As propounded by Kautilya, in the circle of 'Neighbouring States', it was axiomatic that States sharing a common geographic boundary were enemies; and natural allies were separated from one another at least by an intermediary kingdom. Thus those who shared a common boundary were natural enemies. Consequently, the Indian kings scorned at policies that would have helped pacify the sub-continent or establish some measure of co-operative relationship amongst kingdoms against external aggression. In fact, there was a collective and basic lack of consciousness of the need for a common defence against an invader before he could cross the Khyber or the Indus river. Perhaps, Kautilya never projected answers for a collective response to an invader or common foe. Such betrayals and jealousies changed the course of our history. In 1192, Mohammad Ghauri defeated Prithvi Raj Chauhan because Jai Chand, the Raja of Kannauj, had held back his support. Then in 1527, at the Battle of Khanwa between Babur and Rana Sanga, the latter's plans were upset at the very outset when Silhadi, a Rajput adventurer, walked off with his contingent of 6000 men to Babur's side from his post in the vanguard.

Role of Foreign Mercenaries in India's History

Brigadier Shelford Bidwell makes another telling point in, "Swords For Hire"³. He questions, as to why it was necessary for so great and gifted people, heir to a brilliant civilization and whose martial qualities are second to none, to rely for their defence on mercenaries officered by foreigners, who, when the hour of decision arrived, so often deserted. The answer to all this perhaps lies in a complex of factors; political, religious and military that reach back into the country's past - that India, its rulers and people alike had long since stagnated. These observations may hurt the sensitivity of many a good Indians but truth cannot be wished away; especially where it concerns the security and well-being of the Country. The Chinese proverb, that the fish starts rotting from the head; aptly describes the guano-heap we are buried under.

Stock Taking - Where do we stand now?

Over the past sixty two years, we as a Nation, barring a few islands of excellence; have become obsolescent. Patriotism is at a premium; so is inspirational leadership and personal example. There is lack of accountability in public life. Seldom have heads rolled for non-performance, treason or where National or public interests have been put to stake. While rules and laws exist, these are seldom followed in letter and spirit. Coupled with all this

is inept governance, where the best of brains are busy ‘re-inventing wheels’, diluting norms or are hankering for plum jobs, chairmanships and extensions. So, where do we go from here?

Future Insight and the Way Ahead

First and foremost, the Country’s security is most vital. For this, India must set its house in order by a ‘leap forward’; and quickly, so as to safeguard her National interests. For starters; we need to seriously review our form of governance; warts and all, because there are deep chasms between performance and the Country’s expectations. The Civil Services, the ‘faceless government,’ must be held accountable and rules recast, ensuring a merit based mobility. Then, posts above joint secretary level should be tenable through competition, so that the best talent and expertise are available at the conceptual level. Implement long overdue police and judicial reforms. Further, the Centre-State responsibilities need to be re-calibrated; ensuring a rapid and effective response to proxy-wars, terror, subversion—including home-grown insurgencies born out of misgovernance, neglect and corruption. Ban ‘bandhs / chakka jaams’ for the next ten years. For the good of the Nation, raise a domestic Peace Corps as a National obligation for the youth in undertaking social engineering, rural development programmes and civic action within a district. Secondly, exploit the mosaic of the Territorial Army for providing specified developmental work or services in insurgency-prone areas and remote districts. Thirdly, the para military and police forces (PM & PFs) designed to act as ‘trip-wire’ along the Country’s borders or those earmarked for counter-insurgency operations, seem deficit in combat leadership, motivation and tactics. The officers are good men but they happen to be ‘cops in some other clothing’, and ‘cops are essentially for law and order’. Even during the British Raj, militias/rangers/PMFs etc, who were tasked for border management etc, their officers were drawn from the Army. It is also on record that raising of the BSF was first offered to the Army. Much would be said to counter this proposal; including quoting of the classic turn-around brought about by the Punjab Police in tackling militancy. They did a commendable job; but what is often untold is the deployment of over thirty seven Army brigades in the Punjab at the height of militancy. So in the Nation’s interest, the officer cadre of 128 odd police battalions under raising, so also assets of PM & PFs meant for border management and counter-insurgency operations should be drawn in a phased manner from the Services, after such officers have met their minimum obligation there; and inducted on completion of a re-orientation capsule. A new Force, call it the Internal Security Force (ISF), be raised by incorporating assets meant for counter-insurgency operations, rear area security, etc. Later, Persons Below Officers Rank (PBOR) be inducted into this Force and others; bringing in huge savings in the Pensions Bill. Fourthly; resuscitate the old Frontier Administrative Service (FAS) which was scuttled by the ‘Bureaucracy’ by merging it with the IAS cadre. Fifthly; the Country must accept as credible a two-fronts war along its borders with flash-points spread across its frontiers and be prepared for such an eventuality. The Government should immediately appoint a Chief of Defence Staff and give necessary teeth to this integrated office. The DRDO must focus on a very selective range of cutting edge weapon systems and technologies and deliver against a time based programme leaving the remainder to Indian industry to develop indigenously or through foreign collaboration.

Conclusion

Lastly, it is a myth that India lives in a tough neighbourhood. The truth: India is often found timid, unsure or waspish when dealing with its immediate neighbours. We must engage them pro-actively. Leaving Pakistan aside bolster their economies, extend generous military and financial aid while projecting India’s soft power. Address their grievances perceived or otherwise. Start with the achievables first; these, then are not magic mantras but a ‘bottom - line’ for building a resurgent India. However, the common refrain in all these suggestions is perhaps the lack of a ‘Resolute Will’ which long fed on, ‘status quo’, compromises and appeasements, has led to sloth in decision-making. If as a Nation we do not even now wake up to realities, then we are likely to be consigned to the dump heap of history. One recalls from the popular comic-strip where ‘Winnie the Poo’ exclaims, “I have found the enemy, it’s us”. But more pertinent is what Babur is reported to have said when cautioned about Delhi Sultanate’s formidable Army, “I have studied the Indians; they never learn from their history’. That was in 1526 AD. Not much has changed, or has it ?

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