



First Lt Gen PS Bhagat Memorial Lecture 'Legacy of Lt Gen Prem Bhagat – A Visionary and Strategic Leader'

Manekshaw Centre, 14 Jun 2023

Compiled by Tanya Jain@

LT Gen PS Bhagat, Annual Memorial Lecture

The Bombay Sappers established 'Lt Gen PS Bhagat, Annual Memorial Lecture at the USI on 14 Oct 2022 through a MOU signed between Commandant Bombay Engineer Group and Centre, and Director, Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation, United Service Institution of India (USI). The objective of the lecture was to invite strategic experts to analyse contemporary strategic and military modernisation issues. The date, time, topic, and speaker were to be mutually decided.

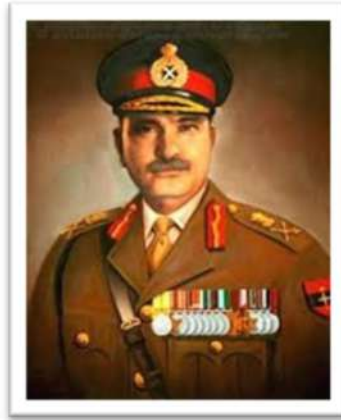
The Bombay Sappers also established 'Lt Gen PS Bhagat, Chair of Excellence' (COE) with the aim of conducting research in the fields of national security, military modernisation, leadership, and any other mutually acceptable topic/subject. The topics for the COE and the nomination of scholars would be mutually decided and the duration for the award of COE will be for two years. The research would be published in the form of a book.



Lieutenant General P S Bhagat Memorial Lecture

@ This is the compiled and edited version of the transcription of the proceedings during which the Special address was by Gen Manoj Pande, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC, COAS and the keynote address was delivered by Gen VP Malik, PVSM, AVSM (Retd), former COAS on the occasion of the First Lt Gen PS Bhagat Memorial Lecture

Excerpts from the life of Late Lt Gen Premindra Singh Bhagat



The first PS Bhagat Memorial Lecture on the topic ‘Legacy of Lt Gen Prem Bhagat – A Visionary and Strategic Leader’ was delivered by Gen VP Malik, PVSM, AVSM (Retd), Former Chief of the Army Staff at Manekshaw Centre, on 14 Jun 2023.

Late Lt Gen Premindra Singh Bhagat, PVSM, VC, fondly called ‘Prem Bhagat’ was an iconic personality. He was born on 13 Oct 1918 in Gorakhpur and was commissioned into the British Indian Army on 15 Jul 1939 as a Second Lieutenant (2 Lt) in the Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners and later posted to the 21 Field Company of Engineers at Pune in Sep, shortly after the war began in Europe. As part of the 10th Indian Infantry Brigade, Bhagat’s company was sent to East Africa on 23 Sep 1940 under the command of Lt Gen William Platt. Later, as Commandant under Brigadier William Slim, MC, he launched an attack on the fort of Gallabat. With the enemy closing in, Bhagat dashed out from under cover and, with bullets flying all around him, detonated the remaining explosives and collapsed the culvert. He was later recommended for a Military Cross for his heroic act.

His contributions to the Indian Army are legendary. On 31 Jan 1941, a mobile column of 3/12 Royal Frontier Force Rifles, including a detachment of 21 Field Company under 2 Lt Bhagat, was sent on a reconnaissance mission towards Metemma. Under close enemy fire and without food or rest, he worked for four days, clearing a total of 15 minefields over 55 miles. For his remarkable contribution during World War-II (WW II), he was awarded the highest pre-independence gallantry award the ‘Victoria Cross’ for the most conspicuous gallantry on active service in the Middle East during the pursuit of the enemy and was presented with the ribbon by Gen Wavell. He was formally invested with the decoration by the Governor General of India, Lord Linlithgow, at the Viceroy’s House in Delhi on 10 Nov 1941. To commemorate the event, the Bombay Sappers, celebrate this day as ‘Group Day’ every year at their centre in Pune. They have also built a Bhagat memorial, which is a constant reminder of the pride brought to the group by the brave soldier.

On 24 Feb 1942 in Pune, Bhagat married Mohini Bhandari, the daughter of a Colonel in the Indian Army Medical Corps. In Jan 1945, Bhagat was nominated to attend a course at Camberley Staff College and became one of the first two Indian officers to attend Staff College in the United Kingdom. He was the highest decorated officer in the Indian Army at the time of India’s independence. On 15

Feb 1949, he was appointed Commandant of the Bombay Sappers at Pune, and was promoted to substantive Major on 28 Aug 1951. During his tenure, Bhagat finished an intensive appraisal of the Chinese Armed Forces' danger to India. However, his report was not paid attention to before the 1962 Sino-Indian Conflict. Soon, he was promoted to Colonel on 02 Feb 1959, and to Brigadier on 28 Aug 1961. From Jun 1961 to May 1962, Bhagat attended the National Defence College course and was then posted as Commandant of the Indian Military Academy (IMA). As Commandant, he co-authored (with Lieutenant Gen TB Henderson Brooks) the Henderson Brooks-Bhagat Report, an incisive 'Operations Review' of the Indian Army during the Sino-Indian War. The report led to sweeping changes in the army. On 29 Jan 1963, Bhagat was appointed Brigadier Gen Staff (BGS) of an army corps.

Thereafter, he was promoted to acting Maj Gen on 14 May 1963, and appointed Chief of Staff (COS) of the Eastern Command and he subsequently took over as the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GOC-in-C) of the Central Command on 04 Aug 1970. He became the first GOC-in-C of the re-established Northern Command, in Udhampur, Jammu and Kashmir in Jun 1972. He was awarded the Param Vishisht Seva Medal (PVSM) on the Republic Day of 1967 for saving Lucknow city from floods in Sep 1971. There, he earned the title 'the Saviour of Lucknow' by swiftly responding to a breach on the Gomti River. Lt Gen Bhagat exhibited extraordinary courage by mobilising trucks loaded with stones and boulders to seal the breach, thus preventing further damage to the city.

In Jul 1974, he became Chairman of the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC), a major electric utility company. However, after only ten months at DVC, Bhagat died on 23 May 1975, after getting a dose of 'penicillin' to which he was allergic. As a prolific military writer, he has published two books, 'Forging the Shield' and 'The Shield and the Sword'. Later, his wife, Mohini Bhagat, presented Bhagat's medals, including his Victoria Cross, to the museum of the Bombay Sappers in Pune on 01 Feb 1976, where they remain on display today. His fearless dedication and exceptional acts of bravery exemplified his unwavering commitment to his duties.

Welcome Remarks by Maj Gen BK Sharma AVSM, SM (Retd), Director General, USI**



Maj Gen BK Sharma presented a brief insight into the life of Lt Gen Premindra Singh Bhagat and his vision, valour, and leadership. He recounted that on commissioning into the Sikh Light Infantry, they were presented with a commander's Red Diary and personal instructions authored by Gen Prem

Bhagat, which contained nuggets of the legendary Gen's practical wisdom. His daughter, Mrs Ashali Varma's book, 'Victoria Cross: A Love Story', gave a very deep insight into the profound personalities of Gen Bhagat and Mrs Mohini Bhagat, which epitomes an ideal military couple. Since his cadet days, Gen Bhagat was unique with a non-conformist bent of mind. One of the anecdotes often narrated is that Gen Bhagat was known to wear his cap in a particular style that only the Prince of Wales was allowed to wear, so when AG Bennet, IMA's adjutant, questioned him about the same. He responded, 'I am no less than the Prince of Wales'.

Gen Bhagat was a daredevil. His most intrepid action, earning him the Victoria Cross, the highest gallantry award, was described by his commanding officer as 'the longest feat of continuous cold courage'. He excelled in his courses and played a stellar role as part of the Punjab Boundary Force to control riots and provide succour to needy victims. He acted with a missionary zeal to build infrastructure and improve quality of life as GOC-in-C of Northern Command, ensuring moral superiority over the adversary. As an armed forces officer, he headed the delineation talks with Pakistan to demarcate the Line of Control (LoC) after the 1971 conflict.

However, after being side-lined to be the COAS in Jul 1974, he accepted the appointment of Chairman, Damodar Valley Corporation and with his characteristic vigour and no-nonsense approach, he got the sluggish behemoth moving. No wonder, in 1975, at IMA, a training battalion was named after Lt. Gen Prem Bhagat, whereas all other battalions were named after former chiefs. He was an exceptionally strong character and a fiercely independent minded officer. Gen Sharma also stated that he got an opportunity to glean through several books written by Gen Prem Bhagat as well as the books written about him. The works reflect his profound understanding of geopolitics, grand national strategy, military history, and leadership. In the past, he had also predicted China as a major threat to India and he will be remembered as an apolitical Gen who applied the Chetwoodian Motto in letter and spirit. The DG USI concluded by stating that Gen Bhagat's funeral pyre read "One crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name".

Special Address by Gen Manoj Pande, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC, Chief of the Army Staff



The charisma of Lt Gen Bhagat has undoubtedly left an indelible mark on the history of the Indian Army. Every aspect of his personality evokes awe and reverence which is truly inspiring. As a young 2 Lt, he was the first Indian soldier to have been awarded the Victoria Cross in WW II. The Army

Chief mentioned that he had ‘the longest continued feat of sheer cold courage’. He was a true model of junior leadership and possessed raw courage. As Commandant of the Bombay Sappers Centre in 1949, he carried out many innovations and improvements such as ensuring a common mess for all, irrespective of caste, which showed him as a man of unwavering equity, steadfast commitment to impartiality, and genuine concern for the troop’s welfare. This earned him the title of ‘Apna Sahib’. As the Chief Instructor at Defence Services Staff College and Commandant at the Indian Military Academy, he contributed towards mentoring and shaping officers. He was instrumental in writing afresh, all exercises at Staff College and introducing overnight ‘Outdoor Camps’ for the student officers. The COAS remarked about what Gen Bhagat used to say, “Do nothing petty, selfish, or mean. Be magnanimous, be loyal, be courageous and be a gentleman. You will then be an officer in the true sense”.

With his valuable experience, Maj Gen PS Bhagat was posted as Chief of Staff, Eastern Command, and there he envisioned a massive project for the accommodation of troops in forward areas. His contribution as a member with Lt Gen Henderson Brooks, in the post 1962 Indo-China war enquiry, drove him to travel widely along the Northern Lines, and study volumes of orders, guidelines, war journals and reports. This important experience empowered Maj Gen PS Bhagat, who was posted as a Head of Staff, Eastern Order to pen down key archives for the order, from a very informed viewpoint. He was captioned as ‘the Saviour of Lucknow’ for aiding during the unprecedented floods in Sep 1971. After the Indo-Pak War of 1971, 90,000 Pakistani Prisoners of War (PsOW) were to be housed in camps under Central Command. In the true spirit of the Geneva Convention, he ensured the security and coordination of PsOW. He gained praise for the way those PsOW were treated in India, and they often remarked that they wished their officers were like Indian officers.

He then took over the re-raised Northern Command in Jun 1972 focusing on improving road communications to far flung remote areas. A key task came his way during this time, and it was the delineation of the LoC, post the Shimla Agreement. As leader of the Indian Team, he discussed his mandate and had interactions with Lt Gen Abdul Hamid Khan of the Pakistan Army, in a professional and forthright manner. Despite the entrenched enmity, from the war, fought just a few months ago, his tireless work ethic, won him the admiration of Pakistani officers. His signatures on those two sets of maps, each consisting of 27 sheets formed into 19 mosaics, with the LoC marked, will remain forever etched in history as the mark of a soldier who personified meticulous attention to details.

After the command of the Northern Army, his next assignment was as Chairman of the Damodar Valley Corporation, which depicted his characteristic vigour, ‘no nonsense approach’ as well as ‘down to earth’ attitude with subordinates. The Gen’s daughter, Ashali Verma, in her book, ‘The Victoria Cross – A Love Story’, eloquently conveys his impact on the ‘Team’ at the Damodar Valley Corporation, by recalling the words of a Durban, who had told the soldiers, who were trying to move the people during his funeral march, “Do not hurry us. He was your Gen, but for us – he was God”. He repaid the love, esteem, and respect his men felt for him with the same sincerity,

unflinching allegiance, and dedication. During a talk at the College of Military Engineering in 1967, he said, “One thing I can proudly state is that I am a Bombay Sapper - not all can have the same luck”. However, the Bombay Sappers were not his sole regimental connection. On 11 Jun 1966, he was appointed as Colonel Commandant of the Sikh Light Infantry who, till today honours him, through the regimental slow march tune, ‘The Prem Bhagat March’.

Indeed, the legendary Gen was a ‘larger than life figure’. His courage, brilliance, achievements, commitment and selfless service to the Army and the nation have left behind a rich legacy. In his book, ‘Red Book Personal Instructions by Lt Gen Bhagat’, which he had issued as the 11 Corps Commander, is certainly a bible for all in uniform. His eloquent penning of thoughts also transcended into insightful strategic writings that fructified in the release of three books - ‘Forging the Shield’, ‘The Shield and the Sword’ and ‘Wielding of Authority in Emerging Countries’. The COAS concluded by stating that Gen Bhagat’s life had indeed been a testament to the values that form the bedrock of our army, which are our commitment to ‘Naam’, ‘Namak’ aur ‘Nishaan’.

Keynote Address by General VP Malik, PVSM, AVSM (Retd), Former Chief of the Army Staff



Personality. The legacy of Gen Prem Bhagat is a lot more than his being a visionary and strategic leader. He had a colourful, romantic, and lovable personality. Socially as well as professionally, he had an uncanny analytical skill, very logical reasoning, and powers of persuasive expression. As quoted by Maj Gen Shashi Pitre, “Military leaders come in all hues and shapes the flamboyant, the scholarly, the artistic, the gregarious and the serious professional, Gen Bhagat was all these entire rolled into one”. Being lovable and romantic at heart, his source of motivation was his girlfriend Mohini as he wanted to prove to her father that he fully deserved her hand and that he was brave and a serious soldier. Proving himself, he later married her. He was a perfect example of gentlemen and an officer and he exuded a casual and carefree attitude towards life and believed that those who live well also fight well. He was a complete leader and a loveable human being.

Victoria Cross. During the period between Oct 1940 (Fort Gallabat), and Feb 1941 on the Sudan-Ethiopia front, he was recommended for gallantry awards twice. The second recommendation was for clearing 15 minefields at Metemma. Despite a punctured ear drum, he continued to work continuously to clear the minefields. The citation mentions, “His coolness over a period of 96 hours, and his persistence and gallantry, not only in battle but throughout the long period during which the safety of his column and the speed at which it could advance were dependent on his personal efforts, were of the highest order”. This got him the Victoria Cross, the first earned by an Indian Commissioned Officer (ICO) in WW II. The Time Magazine on 23 Jun 1941 called it as ‘96 hours with Death’. His concept of bravery and courage was in facing mental and physical danger knowing that the odds are against you. He had remarked “Courage is a quality by itself reticent-it does not speak for itself. It makes one humble”. He was always keen to inspire his men to work the best and wanted to prove that ICOs were as good if not better than British officers, and hence volunteered for difficult tasks.

Political Awareness and Patriotism. India was partitioned while Bhagat was attending the course at Camberley. As a patriot, he had been deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi’s perceptions and went to pay his respects to him in 1940. Prem Bhagat as a true patriot wanted to help further to gain freedom from the colonial rule. Gandhiji remarked that “Indian soldiers could best serve it by continuing in their chosen professions because when the country achieved Swaraj, it would need the dedicated professional soldiers”. He, like Gandhiji, was opposed to India’s division and was dismayed by the dearth of understanding about India in the UK, even though everyone liked to talk about it. Bhagat, then 29, published ‘My Land Divided’ in mid-1947. Harper Collins was interested in publishing it. However, Bhagat did not obtain authorisation from India. He had conveyed his unhappiness and sadness with India’s split and had remarked, “Let us march forward together, with India as our common goal. Whatever our country’s future holds, our people of diverse religious faiths are so intertwined that they will have to coexist, whether controlled by one community or another. Let us then discard this mistrust of one another, born of a century and a half of seeking foreign favours, and forge a tie of nationality rather than a petty one of communalism”.

A Fun-Loving Leader. He was a fun-loving leader and had the exemplary ability to create rapport with his peers, juniors and seniors which was one of the most striking features of his personality. During his tenure as Commandant, Bombay Engineers Group, morale and spirit de corps were at an all-time high in the group centre. His troops in Bombay Sappers called him “Our own VC General”. Bhagat exercised full authority in his command. He was open-minded and very sensitive to others’ difficulties and distress. He was a man with charity towards all, and he had a tremendous zest for living. He was a farsighted leader. Gen and Mrs Bhagat always had a clean house. Their hospitality was the buzz of the town wherever they were posted and one felt comfortable in their company. He did, however, adhere to a rigid code of behaviour. An untidy appearance, unclean surroundings, or a loud and vulgar display of social behaviour always enraged him.

Bhagat and India-China Dispute and Conflict.

- During the 1962 India-China conflict, he made a visionary statement on the subject. Although Prem Bhagat played no direct part in the 1962 China-India conflict, he was intimately involved in its pre-war and post-war history as Director Military Intelligence (DMI). Later, he became a member of the committee set up to inquire into the causes of the losses suffered in the conflict. In Jun 1959, Prem Bhagat took over as DMI amidst the Intelligence Bureau's (IB) strong sway over the government. Military Intelligence's (MI) influence within Army Headquarter (HQ) was weak. A committee under Maj Gen Himmatsingh Ji proposed merging MI with IB for border pass surveillance. 1959 was an eventful year as it was the culmination of China's designs on Tibet. Several significant events unfolded in the context of China's influence and India's response. The completion of the Sinkiang-Tibet Road led to the Chinese capture of an Indian patrol sent to verify its construction under Lt Iyengar. Meanwhile, China quelled the Khampa rebellion and forced the Dalai Lama to seek refuge in India. The initiation of Project Amar, was marked by the construction of houses by the 4 Infantry Division inaugurated by Nehru and Gen B N Kaul's entry into Army HQ. In Ladakh, the Chinese encroached on the Pangong Lake area, establishing a camp at Spanggur. Escalating tensions Indian policemen were arrested by the Chinese in 28 Jul, and an armed Chinese patrol breached the Indian border at Khinzemane on 07 Aug, and a significant clash took place at Longju on 25/26 Aug. In a moment of crisis, Gen Thimayya submitted and then withdrew his resignation on 01 Sep. India's stance on its boundary remained resolute, with Nehru's 1950 affirmation of the McMahon Line as India's boundary echoed in a 1959 White Paper, underlining the historical, geographical, and treaty-based significance of the boundary. Within three months of taking over as DMI (by 15 Sep 1959), Prem Bhagat wrote a 31 page 'Intelligence Appreciation of the Situation.' According to him, the Chinese intention of coming over the Himalayas on the Indian side was apparent. They were prepared and in fact would continue to create border incidents unless threatened by major retaliatory action by India.
- Despite being assigned the responsibility for the border areas of the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), Prem Bhagat took a broader perspective, considering the entire India-China border. His recommendations included establishing a Ladakh brigade with militia battalions, creating Assam Rifles battalions for the Himachal Pradesh and UP sectors, forming a strike division with armour for the Chumbi Valley threat, and setting up a NEFA division with reserve and sector-based brigades. Bhagat also proposed raising local militias and scouts, enhancing intelligence capabilities, deploying more intercept stations, and constructing motorable roads to battalion bases. These forward-thinking and strategic suggestions were made three years before China's aggression, some of which took decades to implement. Bhagat's foresight laid the foundation for crucial preparations in the face of future challenges along the India-China border. By the end of 1959, the Army was given operational responsibility for the defence of the entire India-China border. But the Assam Rifles, CRPF and other civilian elements remained deployed on the border. They continued to report directly to the Home and External Affairs ministries.

- Bhagat emphasised the significance of military intelligence as the key player in collecting and evaluating information, stressing its impartiality and insulation from external pressures. He advocated for trust in processed intelligence based on source reliability, attained through rigorous verification. According to Bhagat, both the government and military must place faith in intelligence, as selectively accepting or rejecting information would lead to self-deception. He underscored intelligence's critical role in policymaking and planning, highlighting its capacity to prevent excessive resource allocation or unpreparedness. Bhagat's insight highlighted that superior intelligence equips a side to make informed decisions, minimising risk and ensuring optimal use of troops and resources.

The NEFA Enquiry Report. In Jan 1963, Prem Bhagat was assigned as BGS to GOC 11 Corps. The subsequent enquiry, conducted from Feb to Apr 1963, addressed critical aspects of military effectiveness. The report, submitted on 12 May to the Army Chief and on 02 Jul to the Defence Minister, was prompted by the Prime Minister's direction. The enquiry's specific terms included investigating training, equipment, command systems, troop physical fitness, and the commander's influencing capacity. Despite the scope constraints, the report was comprehensive. Bhagat noted that the government had underestimated the Chinese mindset, and the critical error was not adopting a military posture but allowing an indefensible stance against expert advice from commanders. Neville Maxwell granted access to the report for his book 'India's China War' observed that the enquiry lacked full access to the bigger picture, focusing instead on the disastrous impact of decisions made at higher levels and the military leadership's failure to resist policies known to be impractical. In his later work, 'Forging the Shield', Gen Bhagat reflected on the overlooked aspect of warfare and the nation's accountability in higher-level war direction. After the 1962 setback, a renewed resolve to enhance defence readiness emerged, leading to the creation of six new infantry divisions proficient in mountain warfare. This period also witnessed a shift in the army's relationship with bureaucrats and politicians. The lessons drawn from the report prompted a halt to civilian intervention in internal military affairs, ensuring a stronger focus on military expertise and decision-making autonomy.

Chief of Staff (COS), HQ Eastern Command. In May 1963, shortly after submitting the Henderson Brooks Report, Gen Bhagat assumed the role of COS in Eastern Command. He was promptly assigned the task of crafting an 'Administrative Appreciation for Eastern Command', which he accomplished within a two-week timeframe. Armed with insights from the NEFA Enquiry and enriched by his time at the Nation Defence College, Gen Bhagat was well-suited to discard the outdated 'Forward Policy' and design an improved defence strategy against the Chinese threat. Leveraging his understanding of the Chinese logistical constraints, he advocated for protracted operations and an offensive-defensive approach, emphasising the need for adequate reserves.

Forging the Shield

The 1962 Sino-Indian Conflict. The 1962 war exposed India's glaring unpreparedness, both mentally and materially, to counter China's limited offensive. Gen Bhagat, profoundly affected by his personal involvement in the conflict's details, dedicated a significant portion of his subsequent career to addressing identified weaknesses. During his command of the 9 Mountain Division in Ranchi, he embarked on writing the book 'Forging the Shield', which delved into the essentials of war preparedness. The book's focus was on the post-1962 Sino-Indian conflict scenario in India. Bhagat's observations underscored the lack of understanding among even highly responsible individuals regarding the nature of war and its concomitants. The book 'Forging the Shield' opened with the introduction that war's execution rests with the government, yet war preparedness encompasses the entire nation. Fear of the unknown is proverbial leading to either exaggerated dangers or misplaced security. Bhagat's pragmatism shone through his emphasis on nurturing a nation's will to fight, recognising that war and civilisation are inseparable. He underscored the alignment of military and political objectives, cautioning against setting unattainable military goals or pursuing military victories detached from political aims. Regarding defence planning, he stressed the link between long-term force development and national policy, noting that transitioning from defensive to offensive postures requires time. He warned against succumbing to public pressure for ill-advised military adventures and advised against relying solely on diplomatic manoeuvres for survival. Bhagat's insights offered a practical framework for understanding the intricate relationship between national policy, military preparedness, and effective defence strategies.

- **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).** In an intriguing revelation within Chapters 3 and 4 of his book, Gen Bhagat foresaw the necessity of a CDS for comprehensive policy and service coordination, an idea he strongly advocated for about 60 years ago. Bhagat envisioned the CDS as a coordinating entity and chief military advisor rather than an authoritative figure. He also proposed the integration of service HQs into the Defence Ministry, suggesting that the Secretariat of the Ministry of Defence and the service HQs merge into a unified entity. Bhagat advocated for the transformation of service branches into ministry branches, and public service officers collaborating with their civilian counterparts, operating conjointly as part of the government. Through this structural alignment, he believed that military responsibility and governmental authority would be harmonised, offering a unified approach to defence governance.
- **Theatre Commands.** In the subsequent chapter, Gen Bhagat explored the concept of 'Theatre Commands' and 'Field Forces'. He defined 'Theatre Commands' as encompassing a defined geographical area where operations are interconnected and compact for effective command and control. Bhagat highlighted those theatre commanders, operating away from political pressures, can offer impartial military judgments.

- **Large Scale Conventional Wars and Limited Wars.** In a different chapter, Gen Bhagat delves into the distinctions between large-scale conventional wars and limited operations. He highlighted that knowledge of the general course of the war is necessary, but for the latter, knowledge of fighting is needed. Bhagat points out that public frustration and loss of confidence in the military can arise from prolonged, slow-moving, or negative outcomes, unless there's a comprehension of actual combat. He also underscores the significance of winning over local populations and their sentiments in counterinsurgency operations, emphasising the importance of securing hearts and minds for success.
- **Vision and Strategy to Defend Vulnerable Frontiers.** Prem Bhagat was a great visionary leader. Following the 1965 India-Pakistan war, he recognised the political unacceptability of territorial losses in northern Rajasthan, Punjab, and Jammu. Acknowledging the national policy against initiating conflict, he advocated for strategically positioned fixed defences such as canals, distributaries, drains, and strong points with concrete bunkers and emplacements to create attrition, buy time, and subsequently launch a decisive offensive into enemy territory. This innovative approach represented his concept of offensive defence. Bhagat's insights were informed by his study of WW II's Maginot Line and its fall, attributing the failure not to the line itself, but to the lack of a proactive mindset. He asserted that a defence line on a vulnerable frontier could offer strength when utilised as a launchpad for offensive manoeuvres, though it would not guarantee immunity from attack. This notion aligned with his belief that additional troops for offense were integral to maximising the effectiveness of a defence line.

The Chinese Mind and what will China do Next. After the 1965 Indo-Pak war, Prem Bhagat penned a paper titled 'The Chinese Mind: What will China do next?' In this document, he meticulously dissected China's approach to Sino-Indian relations until 1962, showing how they incrementally applied Sun Tzu's principles of war to achieve their objectives. Bhagat highlighted that China's actions were shrewd and concealed, carried out by a patient and enigmatic populace. He noted that China's actions were not overt, and that the confrontation did not commence in 1962 but as early as 1949, with the forcible occupation of Tibet, making them India's immediate neighbour. While China purposefully consolidated its position, India wavered and lacked a clear plan. Bhagat emphasised that Chinese history revealed aggression during periods of unity and strength, driven by the principles outlined in Sun Tzu's ancient work, 'The Art of War', dating back to 500 BC. Prem Bhagat warned that "China has never afforded to its impending adversary the luxury of a warning. A war is always based on surprise and deception" China believes in despising the enemy strategically. During the 1960s, western powers proposed that if China were to attack India, it would likely be on a limited scale, implying that India should focus solely on defence. Prem Bhagat vehemently opposed this notion, firmly believing that in the event of an attack or threat from China, India should respond with retaliation wherever feasible militarily. He rejected the idea of passive defence, asserting that failing to retaliate would play into China's strategic interests and perpetuate a harmful pattern of conflict. According to Bhagat, it was imperative to break free from this cycle and not allow the "cat and mouse game" to persist.

Wielding of Authority in Emerging Countries. Prem Bhagat penned his book in 1970, but its publication was delayed until 1986 when his wife took the initiative. The book addressed the challenges of authority, responsibility, and implementation. Bhagat himself was proactive in bypassing bureaucratic hurdles that obstructed progress, especially if they impeded the welfare of his soldiers. He underscored the connection between power and responsibility, observing that while people sought authority, they often evaded responsibility. He highlighted the typical disparity between policymaking and its execution, stressing their inseparability. Bhagat emphasised the importance of top-down guidance for effective implementation and the need for purposeful direction from political leadership. He had concluded his book with a quote from the Bhagavad Gita, “to action alone hast though a right, and never to all its fruits, let not the fruits of action be the motive. Neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction”.

Way Forward. The remembrance address endeavoured to safeguard Lt Gen Bhagat’s memory and his remarkable administration of the Indian Armed Forces. Gen Bhagat was a brave, learned, and inspiring soldier. Throughout his service, he followed the Chetwode credo- country first, your subordinates next, and you, yourself come last. He had a distinct leadership style; personal, which made him successful in whatever task was given to him. He was a Karmyogi. This ongoing admiration for Lt Gen Bhagat ensures that his legacy lives on and inspires future generations of military leaders.

Photo Gallery



Welcome Remarks by Maj Gen BK Sharma, AVSM, SM**(Retd) DG, USI



Special address by Gen Manoj Pande, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC, Chief of the Army Staff



Keynote Address by Gen VP Malik, PVSM, AVSM (Retd), Former Chief of the Army Staff



Welcome Remarks by Maj Gen BK Sharma, AVSM, SM(Retd), DG, USI**



**Token of Appreciation given by Gen Manoj Pande, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC,
Chief of the Army Staff to Gen VP Malik, PVSM, AVSM (Retd),
Former Chief of the Army Staff**

About the Speakers

Gen Manoj Pandey, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC



Gen Manoj Pandey, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC is the 29th and current Chief of the Army Staff of the Indian Army.

Gen Ved Prakash Malik, PVSM, AVSM



Gen VP Malik, PVSM, AVSM was the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee and the 19th Chief of Army Staff of The Indian Army who superannuated on 30 Sep 2000. Post retirement, he was member of the National Security Advisory Board for two terms.

About the Compiler

Tanya Jain is currently serving as a research assistant at the Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation at the United Service Institution of India. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Political Science, along with a bachelor's degree in political science from University of Delhi. Ms Jain has also pursued a Diploma in International Affairs from the Indian Institute of Leadership and Governance. Her research interests primarily revolve around South Asia and Southeast Asia.

About the USI

The United Service Institution of India was founded in 1870 by a soldier scholar, Colonel (late Major General) Sir Charles MacGregor 'for the furtherance of interest and knowledge in the Art, Science and Literature of National Security in general and Defence Services, in particular'. It commenced publishing its Journal in 1871. USI also publishes reports of its research scholars as books/monographs and occasional papers (pertaining to security matters) by its members. The present Director General is Major General BK Sharma, AVSM, SM & Bar (Retd).



United Service Institution of India (USI)

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