

## Short Reviews of Recent Books

**China Threat or Challenge?** Edited by Lt Gen JS Bajwa, PhD, (Lancer Publishers, New Delhi, 2017), pp.361, ISBN: 978-81-7062-315-1

The book is a collection of 27 essays about China by a galaxy of experts who have spent many years studying China. The essays deal with almost all aspects of China as a nation state and its behaviour; and how it impacts globally and regionally.

China's rise has a degree of mystique attached to it and is viewed with some trepidation in various capitals of the world. The essays cover wide ranging subjects: PLA reforms and its future war fighting potential, regional security, forays into the Indian Ocean, neighbourhood challenges, territorial disputes including its claims in the East and the South China Seas, state of the economy and internal fissures, the Tibet issue, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor; and a host of other contemporary topics. Most of the essays have also analysed implications for India, wherever relevant.

Undoubtedly, the book provides a rich and multi-disciplinary fare to a scholar of Chinese affairs. However, at the end of it all one is still left wondering – whether China is a threat or a challenge as the title suggests; or perhaps both, depending upon how one views it. Perhaps, the Editor could have tried to encapsulate China's capabilities, strategic behaviour and likely scenarios in a concluding chapter to provide an overall sense on this very vital subject about which the whole world is concerned.

In a work of this nature where many experts have given their views on different aspects it is but natural that there would be some repetition and overlapping in the contents. However, that does not detract a discerning reader from the overall value of the book as the contents have been arranged in a very logical sequence.

Most of the essays follow a standard narrative depicting China as an unreasonable and assertive power, intent on securing its national interests by any means, including use of military power. India is invariably seen to occupy a high moral ground. It would be more pragmatic, if India was to consider itself an important player

whose actions would have a great impact on shaping the regional environment. This ought to be reflected in its policies.

*Major General PJS Sandhu (Retd)*

**'Les Hindous: The Indian Army on the Western Front 1914-1919'** by Rana Chhina, (New Delhi: USI Centre for Armed Forces Research, New Delhi, 2016), pp..148, Price Rs 2000.00, ISBN: 9789384695118

It must be remembered that although India sent its expeditionary forces to aid the British during World War I, it was on French soil that Indian soldiers landed and it was there that many of them fought and died.

The people of France were aware that the German juggernaut aimed at conquest of France and that they would be far outnumbered if aid did not come in time. It was in this context that they welcomed the arrival of the Indian soldiers with great warmth and enthusiasm as the photographs in this book so lucidly bring out.

Indian troops were ill-equipped in weapons and equipment to fight a war in Europe. As a case in point, they were in cotton uniforms in the face of a severe European winter. Their situation, all the more endeared them to the French people. The arrival of the Indian Corps was timely and providential, and it is widely acknowledged that they were mainly instrumental in stopping the German offensive in its bid to roll up the Allied defences, bypass Paris and head for the Channel ports in October-November 1914.

This book has been compiled as part of the joint USI-MEA 'India and the Great War' centenary commemoration project, that highlights the role played by Indian soldiers and aviators on the Western Front during World War I. It befittingly carries a Foreword by the President of India.

India's sterling contribution to the Great War subsequently laid the foundation for her representation on the international stage. Indian delegates represented India at the Paris Peace Conference and were signatories to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. The participation and conduct of Indian troops during World War I set

into motion a chain of events that led eventually to freedom from British rule.

This book touches upon the many facets of the Indian soldier's experience in Europe during World War I, and rare archival photographs bring to life the long forgotten circumstances in which Indian soldiers fought in foreign lands over a hundred years ago. The book is an excellent combination of text and photographs that tells a powerful story of India's French connection during the Great War.

*Major General Ian Cardozo, AVSM, SM (Retd)*

**China Strides in Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar : Options for India.**  
By Subodh Kumar Shahi, (New Delhi, GB Books, 2017), pp..193,  
Price Rs 995.00, ISBN: 9789383930579.

The book is a useful compilation of history, political and economic situation, foreign policy of Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar; and the development of their relations with both China and India. In particular, it describes China's increasing influence in the three countries on the back of its economic and military muscle, and the implications and options for India.

It describes how geography and economics closely tie both Nepal and Bhutan to India. It outlines how the growing presence of their other neighbour, China, in the two countries is loosening the Indian embrace. It deals in detail with Bhutan's dilemma on how to proceed on settling its disputed borders with China and when and how to establish full-fledged diplomatic relations with it. It criticises Indian ham-handedness in dealing with Nepali sensitivities, which has helped increase China's influence in that country.

Myanmar is another important neighbour of both China and India. It is also geographically linked to ASEAN countries. The book contrasts China's increasing influence in these countries with the lack of substantive engagement by India. It describes the strategic importance of Myanmar in the context of India's security in the North-East and connectivity to South-East Asia. The book criticises the lack of effective implementation of projects by India in the three countries, which handicaps its ability to rise to the challenge from China.

The book provides useful set of references for scholars. However, it would have benefitted from better editing, fact-checking and more detailed maps. It also expresses certain debatable opinions but that is the author's prerogative. The book holds the reader's attention and is a useful addition to the literature on the subject.

*Shri Sanjay Singh, IFS (Retd)*

**The Peacock Feather.** *By Sunil Kapoor and Sudhir Kapoor (Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2017), pp..195, Price Rs 395.00, ISBN 978-81-291-4459-1*

Nothing in the bio-data of the authors (monozygotic twins who are Tax Consultant and Chartered Accountant by profession) at the back of the book prepares the reader for a barrage of ten beautifully written stories based on real-life incidents. That the number-crunching minds could also write such fascinating tales of love, hope and emotions is a refreshing revelation.

The authors take the readers on a journey where one experiences myriad of emotions. While 'The Peacock Feather', a bittersweet love story brings a smile on the face; the depiction of extreme trauma of having lost one's family during the bloody riots of 1947 leaves the reader teary-eyed in 'Train to Wagah'. 'The Wambesi Throne' is a strange yet humorous story of a young American-educated King of Mwanga Tribe of Congo, who takes revenge from the Americans in his own discreet and amusing way for death of his father and tribesmen caused by illegal mining of Uranium in his land by the Americans. 'A Misplaced Draft' and 'A Deceitful Paramour' are two stories that depict the numerous societal and family pressures that dominate the personal lives and decisions of girls in India and how the women protagonists in these stories turn the tide in their favour with their grit and resolve.

Likewise, each of the ten stories, very subtly brings out various facets of human nature – good, bad and ugly that binds the reader to its pages as the authors enthrall us with their compelling narration, replete with twists and turns and many a time unexpected happy endings. It is a perfect book to pick up if one is planning to go on a vacation to be read on leisurely evenings with a cup of hot coffee.

*Major Sonali Gupta (Retd)*

**Battleground Chhamb: The Indo-Pakistan War of 1971.** By Major General AJS Sandhu (New Delhi; Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2017), p.. 372, Price Rs. 1395/- ISBN:9789350981504

Chhamb has been the core of Pakistan's attention in the Indo-Pak wars of 1947-48, 1965 and 1971 and without doubt will once again figure in the calculus of Pakistan's strategy, should we go to war with Pakistan again. Notwithstanding this repetition of military history, we have each time been found unprepared for Pakistan's repeated aggression in this sector in terms of ground, relative strength and time and space - all vital factors in a military appreciation that assesses enemy intentions and our own responses. This specifically proves that, 'the only lesson we learn from history, is that we do not learn from history'.

In 'Battleground Chhamb', the author walks us through the battle that was fought in 1971 when all factors were loaded against the General Officer Commanding 10 Infantry Division, Major General Jaswant Singh, whose mission was to retrieve the honour of the Division, because in the previous encounter, the Pakistan offensive succeeded in reaching within spitting distance of Akhnur, a strategic area located on the communication highway between Jammu and Poonch and close to Jammu itself.

Whereas intelligence has failed the Nation time and again and in every war, it is difficult to understand how 15 Corps failed to appreciate that Pakistan would once again attack in the Akhnur Sector in 1971, after her success in 1965. Instead, in the run up to the war, the task given by the Corps to the General Officer Commanding 10 Infantry Division was changed four times. The fourth change was given the evening before Pakistan attacked in the Chhamb Sector.

Despite these handicaps, the Division fought resolutely and with courage and managed to stop the enemy on the Manawar Tawi, but there was some loss of territory and story of how and why this happened has been clouded with doubt and innuendo that had not been cleared all these years.

It remained for Major General AJS Sandhu, the son of General Jaswant Singh, to clear the air with his deeply researched book that covers every possible angle of the battle, the events that led

up to it, and its aftermath; in an excellent narrative that tells us what really happened forty six years ago.

The book is easy to read and is very well referenced indicating the thoroughness with which the story of the battle has been researched. I found the book difficult to put down and am sure that readers will find it equally absorbing and interesting.

India has lost territory repeatedly in the Chhamb area in the 1947-48, 1965 and 1971 wars, thanks to the failure of the military hierarchy to give this area the importance that it deserves.

Will it happen again? Who knows? Perhaps, if those who matter read this account; the situation may hopefully change.

*Major General Ian Cardozo, AVSM, SM*

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| 12 | Lt Gen AK Sahni, PVSM, UYSM, SM, VSM (Retd)           |
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The *USI Journal* is the oldest surviving defence journal in the country and in Asia, having first appeared in 1871. It is supplied free to all members, and in an era when there is a feeling that free expression of views by Defence personnel is not looked upon kindly by the establishment, the Journal in fact provides just such a forum, without regard to seniority and length of service in the Armed Forces, subject of course, to propriety and quality of the written work.

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The Erstwhile Centre for Research and its resources have been merged into the new Centre named as USI Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (USI-CS3) wef 01 January 2005. The Centre aims at conducting detailed and comprehensive enquiry, research and analyses of national and international security related issues, and gaming and simulation of strategic scenarios, to evolve options for wider discussion and consideration.

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For further particulars, please write to Director, USI of India, Rao Tula Ram Marg, (Opposite Signals Enclave) Post Bag No. 8, Vasant Vihar PO, New Delhi – 110 057