

Invincibility, Challenges and Leadership*

Brigadier SP Sinha, VSM (Retd)**

This book by General KV Krishna Rao covers a very wide canvas. It begins with thumb-nail descriptions of empires and civilizations of ancient times, the middle ages and modern times. In each case the author gives reasons for their rise and fall. In the next part, there are brief descriptions of the two World Wars and other major wars of the last century. The narratives highlight the role of leadership in the final outcome of the wars. The 1971 India-Pakistan War forms part of this anthology. In Part III, the author has selected twelve political and seven military leaders whom he considers the greatest. There are short biographical sketches that emphasise their outstanding leadership attributes. Two Indians, Mahatma Gandhi and Indira Gandhi are included under political leaders and Field Marshal Manekshaw under military leaders. The last part has author's reflections on the role and status of leadership in war and peace.

The canvas of subjects is so vast that to begin with the reader is unable to grasp the main theme of the book, which is revealed in the conclusion of the book. In the author's words: "From ancient times to the present and into future, I have attempted to discern the role of leadership and its status in government and functioning of the nation." That theme has been fairly well articulated in the narratives.

Reading through the chapters on rise and fall of great empires, the reader is left wondering why the author did not dwell in greater detail on the Indian situation. The book would have enriched our understanding of India's past had the author attempted a more rigorous enquiry into the causes of India's subjugation by invaders for over a thousand years.

* **Invincibility, Challenges and Leadership.** By KV Krishna Rao (New Delhi, Orient BlackSwan Pvt Ltd, 2011), pp 438, ₹ 895/-, ISBN-9788125041870.

** **Brigadier SP Sinha, VSM (Retd)** was commissioned in 9 Gorkha Rifles in June 1960 and retired on 31 August 1994. He has authored three books : '*History of 8 Mountain Division, Volume II, including Kargil Operations*'; '*History of 3 GR, Part IV, (1980-2005)*' and '*Lost Opportunities - 50 Years of Insurgency in the Northeast and India's Response*'.

The 1971 Indo-Pak War was one of the decisive wars of the last century. There have been criticisms that Dacca was not given as an objective and that forces should have gone straight for Dacca itself. The author who was one of the divisional commanders in that war defends the planning and the conduct of the war and argues that the task given to Eastern Command was to liberate Bangladesh and this naturally included Dacca. Further, the author argues that detailed planning for the capture of an objective in depth could not be planned at the very outset. As the war progressed, Lieutenant General Sagat Singh took advantage of the opportune moment to cross the Meghna by an audacious heliborne operation that contributed to the early fall of Dacca.

There are other observations of the author that have significant relevance in the prevailing context. For example, the author is emphatic in his views on civil-military relations that "the PM interacts directly with the chiefs of the armed forces. The bureaucracy cannot be a medium, but is there as a staff to the minister." It is well known that when the author was the Army Chief, he had direct access to Indira Gandhi. Later, when he was the Governor of J&K, he interacted directly with Narshimha Rao, the then Prime Minister.

The book is written in a simple easy to read style. The backgrounds of events are lucidly explained for ease of understanding. There are no charts or appendices, which make the reading easy. It is a book that will be of great value to young officers to enlarge their understanding of the role and influence of leadership in shaping the destiny of nations and armies. At another level, the author argues that leadership and preparation for the future are equally critical for any institution of the state that is mandated to serve the Country.

It may be noted that the royalty proceeds of the book are donated to the Army Central Welfare Fund.