

The myth of peaceful India

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MYTHS abound in Indian defense journalism due to the oppressive veil of secrecy that shrouds the defense establishment. The military is treated like the sacred cow, to be fed and worshipped regularly but never to be condemned. Such uncritical attitudes are fostered by the paucity of civilian defense scholars. Consequently, published reports of military exercises reflect the excitement and awe of a bunch of schoolboys watching a fireworks display.

Myth number one: "the basic Indian ethos does not permit an aggressive posture". Many Indians believe that because of Hindu tolerance and the Gandhian influence, the Indian ethos is non-violent and non-aggressive. Unfortunately, neither Hindu mythology nor Indian history conforms to this myth.

Hinduism's two greatest epics, *The Mahabharat* and *The Ramayana* which Hindu children are brought up on, are tales of violent aggression. There is violence within and between families, against women, between the Aryas and the Rakshasas and higher castes over lower castes. The most revered chapter in the *Mahabharat*, the *Bhagwat Gita*, sees Krishna evoking *dharma* to pursue a path of aggression and extolling Arjun to fight against his elders and cousins. Whole communities are destroyed — ostensibly for the victory of righteousness as result of the battles in both the epics. Thus reads the violent saga of Hindu mythology.

Indian history even in the pre-'Muslim' epoch reads no differently. Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, the history of Kashmir upto about 1,100 AD, is a history replete with violence. Blood flowed in civil wars, wars against neighbours, in the destruction of holy shrines and in atrocities against women. The greatest oppression of Kashmiri brahmins was done by Hindu kings long before the appearance of Mahmud Ghaznavi. The violent streak continues — from Partition and the linguistic riots, the Mandir-Masjid and Mandal.

Myth number two: "India has no territorial design on any other country". While Indians truly believe this, our neighbours interpret Indian foreign policy differently. In analysing the 1962 Indo-Chinese War, Indian scholars have consistently blamed China as the instigators.

However, an authoritative work by Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* which was banned in India, blames the war on India's forward policy of deploying troops in disputed areas which allegedly provoked a Chinese military response. China has always adopted this view.

India's smaller neighbours are suspicious of the "non-violent" approach. Nepal and Bhutan remain anxious of India's big-brotherly attitude and are fearful of Indian-sponsored unrest leading to the toppling of the reigning monarchies and subsequent incorporation into the Indian Union — a la Sikkim.

The Indian victory in the 1971 War, redeemed India's lost prestige but dismembered Pakistan. Since 1947, West Pakistan had denied East Pakistan the economic and political fruits of development and the Pakistani military in 1971 committed atrocities in East Pakistan. Indian military intervention proved decisive in creating Bangladesh. The

Mukti Bahini were trained in India and equipped with Indian arms. Many of them were thinly-disguised Indian military personnel. A key figure directing Mukhti Bahini operations was a guerrilla-warfare expert, Major General Shahbeg Singh who later served as Bhindranwale's military commander and master-minded the Golden Temple defenses.

Although evidence exists of Pakistan supporting Sikh and Kashmiri militants, there is also evidence that the Indian military and intelligence agencies trained LTTE cadres in Tamil Nadu, only to fight them in the Sri Lankan military fiasco. In the international chessboard of *realpolitik*, no nation can credibly claim to follow a moralistic and benign foreign policy and India is no exception.

Myth number three: The dismemberment of Pakistan was geo-political success for India. The creation of Bangladesh has perversely strengthened Pakistan and weakened India. East and West Pakistan was an unviable Pakistan and weakened India. East and West Pakistan was an unviable sovereign entity. Pakistan's national energies were frittered away in incessant conflicts between the two wings. Separated from the West by Indian territory and surrounded by India on three sides, East Pakistan was extremely vulnerable to Indian pressures. Such Indian leverage had

To assess the nature and role of the armed forces in the right perspective, the Indian public must rid of its fondness for regarding the military as some sacred cow

a sobering effect on West Pakistani support to Kashmiri militants.

Pakistan is now free to concentrate its energies and defenses in the West unmindful of Indian actions in Bangladesh. India has lost its 'Eastern' card. Moreover, the assassination of Mujib-ur-Rehman and the spread of anti-Indian sentiments has lost India the goodwill it enjoyed in Bangladesh. Worse, the unceasing waves of Bangladeshi settlers have caused significant demographic changes in Meghalaya, Tripura, Bihar and particularly Assam which sparked off the Assam movement.

Gen Niazi on surrendering his army and East Pakistan in 1971 is reported to have thanked the victorious Indian generals in Punjab for taking over Pakistan's 'Bengali-problem' and making it India's own. His thanks have proved prophetic.

Myth number four: "India has fought all its past wars with weapons inferior to that of the adversary". This myth is intentionally perpetrated by Indian defense budget and to cover up poor leadership. Brigadier John Dalvi, who was imprisoned by the Chinese in 1962 ascribed the Indian debacle to the blundering by both the Indian political and military leadership which assumed the proportions of a *Himalayan Blunder*. Col Saigal in *The Unfought War of 1962*, focuses blame on the quality of military leadership. Col Saigal has accused an Indian general of deserting his troops at the onset of the battle for Sela which thereafter fell to the Chinese. In 1965 lacklustre generalship caused a slug-fest with little grand-strategy discernible leading to a stalemate, even though India enjoyed overall superiority.

The debunking of myths is integral to the process of self-education; and it is only when the Indian public casts off its rose-tinted spectacles for gazing fondly at India's armed forces that a Cromwellian portrait of *Militaria Indica* can be painted, warts and all. □