

Book Review - ' The India Doctrine'

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Adorned in a saffron red jacket and embellished with a detailed map of South Asia the concept of an India Doctrine has been introduced to the readers in Bangladesh recently. The book 'The India Doctrine' has been published by the Bangladesh Research Forum and edited by Barrister M.B.I. Munshi and is priced at Tk. 300. Munshi's contribution to the book constitutes the largest section with several other writers from Bangladesh , Nepal and Sri Lanka providing some useful and informative chapters.

The book comes complete with a foreword written by esteemed scholar, Professor Ataur Rahman of Dhaka University who sets the theme of the book. We are reminded by Prof. Rahman that while India might have its own rationale for framing its regional policy compatible with its national interests, the fact remains that constant apprehensions, mistrust and tensions between India and the smaller neighbors including Bangladesh had its negative effects on any meaningful cooperation and security in the region.

This introduction neatly moves us into the chapters written by Munshi which are a series of discussions that covers the relations between India and East Pakistan/Bangladesh from 1947 to the present. It attempts a historical and geo-strategic appraisal of relations between the two countries but also offers a more wide ranging analysis involving the Indian external intelligence operations in Bangladesh and outside. The central idea of the chapters when taken as a whole appears to be that the India Doctrine as implemented by successive administrations in India is not limited to simply harming the economic interests of its neighbours but also has a historical and intellectual underpinning that comes from the thoughts and writings of Jawaharlal Nehru and Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar amongst others. The idea of a United India (or an 'Akhand Bharat') according to the author is still a goal of Indian policy making in South Asia.

Prof. Rahman is forced in his foreword to contend that this thesis may seem implausible and 'far-fetched' but also points out that Munshi supplements his ideas with an exhaustive and elaborate set of references and notes to back up his argument. However, a defect in this intricate framework of references is that the chapters lack a bibliography which would have made it easier to verify the arguments advanced by the author. The chapters also seems to be hampered by the fact that they were written originally as a 3 part article and the author clearly has had some difficulty in framing his arguments within this constriction. However, as we all know Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington both started their seminal works in a similar manner with articles in prominent journals before they were rendered into book form and this does not seem to have affected the stream of their discussion and thoughts.

As this may be, the principle cause of disquiet will certainly be Munshi's interpretation of significant historical events and his commentary on the motivations of characters such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ayub Khan who are all now long dead. I was certainly surprised by some of his findings but it was difficult to find fault here as most of his views are backed-up with thorough research and investigation. His chapters on the 1971 war and the insurgency in the CHT are probably the most tantalizing in terms of historical data and comparisons.

Some of Munshi's arguments are further buttressed by a short chapter by Khodeza Begum who makes reference to events that occurred during the 1990's related to clandestine meetings held in Dhaka concerning the reunification of the subcontinent. In her chapter, there is an extensive discussion on the policies being pursued by the Indian government that according to her is detrimental to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bangladesh. She analyses the concept of a United Bengal that has featured in some of the Indian political literature in recent years. She has also summarized the tactics and strategies adopted by the Indian government and its intelligence agency to undermine the unity of Bangladesh and to inculcate the population of the country with a perspective adverse to the nations integrity.

Although solidly written there is a problem with the length of the chapter as well as the dated materials used by the author. A more contemporary approach may have served better but the evidence seems irrefutable and the author should update her research before a second edition is considered.

In a sudden change of location Brig. Gen. M. Sakhawat Hossain inexplicably takes us all the way to the Indian Ocean and the emerging strategic scenarios being played out in the area. One may legitimately question the relevance to the overall context and theme of the book but the author makes this abundantly clear when he remarks that rivalries in the South Asian region are primarily based on events in 1971 and India's intent on dominating the region has had to appreciate the ground realities that this cannot be achieved alone. Hossain expertly explains the intricate alliances being forged in the region and the importance of the Indian Ocean in the strategic thinking of India , China, the USA and Pakistan. His comments on the North-East insurgency and the recent uprising in Nepal are highly commendable and very insightful especially in the latter case where he had visited prior to writing the chapter.

Following the chapters by the Bangladeshi authors mentioned above come the section written by the Nepali writers. In the case of Madan Prasad Khanal, Nishchal Basnyat and Sanjay Upadhya their contributions to the book are highly articulate, elegant and almost near impeccable. Each author discusses differing aspects of Indian interference and intervention in Nepali internal affairs and in some cases provides possible solutions to these problems. But

with a clear conception of the implications of Indian domination on Nepal Dr. Shastra Dutta Pant appeared a little confused in his expressions.

The final chapters of the book are by two Sri Lankan writers Dr Rohan Gunaratna and Arbinda Acharya. Both writers collaborated to produce a single chapter on the Sri Lankan attitude to Indian interference or as the authors themselves put it, "India's involvement in Sri Lankan ethnic imbroglio has been one of the most controversial, ironic as well as tragic aspects of New Delhi's foreign policy." While concentrating on the Sri Lankan situation the writers also manage to draw in examples from Bangladesh, Pakistan , Nepal and Bhutan to back up their case on Indian aspirations in South Asia . Of significance is the Indian involvement in the protracted and apparently insoluble conflict with the Tamils. The chapter also involves a geostrategic appraisal of Sri Lanka and its growing relationship with China and Pakistan . It is unfortunate therefore that the authors were not as forceful about Indian interventions in Sri Lanka especially during the time of the premiership of Rajiv Gandhi. The chapter seems somewhat apologetic about Indian intervention rather than condemnatory which would have been an appropriate response from Sri Lankan nationals.

The India Doctrine

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Published by Bangladesh Research Forum

Dhaka July 2006

Pages: 288