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# Book Reviews

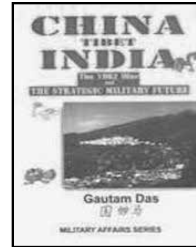
**China-Tibet-India: The 1962 War and  
the Strategic Military Future**

**Gautam Das**

(New Delhi: Har Anand Publications, 2009)

**Rs 595/-**

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Gautam Das's magnum opus *China-Tibet-India: The 1962 War and the Strategic Military Future* is an eminently well researched book that provides a wealth of historical details and insights into the Sino-Indian border dispute and, more important, the future course of relations between the two Asian giants. The author has marshalled an impressive array of little known facts about the historical interaction between India-China and Tibet. He provides fresh insights into the 1962 War and analyses the causes that led to this tactical disaster. He provides the surprising input that at one stage, India had seriously considered contesting China's march into Tibet in 1950 itself. Mr B N Mullik, then director, Intelligence Bureau, was a great proponent of this school of thought. However, the Indian Army was then reinventing itself after partition and was heavily committed in the ongoing operations in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), and later in Hyderabad. Field Marshal (then Gen) K M Cariappa had apparently expressed his inability to militarily contest the Chinese takeover of Tibet. The induction of such huge numbers of Chinese forces into Tibet led to a famine there. India had by now decided on a policy of appeasement of China. Prime Minister Nehru's self-image as a messiah of global peace led him to rely on soft power instead of hard power to deal with the Chinese threat. This *Panchsheel* phase suited China to the hilt. It was able to import foodgrain from India to not just stave off famine in Tibet, but also to feed its occupation army!

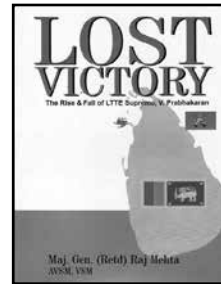
The author also feels that there was a dichotomy between the appeasement approach of the Nehruvian era and its inflexible stand on the McMahon Line as a non-negotiable border that led to the escalation of this dispute. Instead of the Johnson-Ardagh Line, India could equally have considered the MacCartney – McDonald alignment of the border as proposed by the British in 1899. This could have probably resulted in a swap of Aksai Chin with Arunachal Pradesh and resolved the dispute in the incipient stages. Positions, he feels have now hardened and it may not be possible any more to affect this swap.

The detailed analysis of the 1962 War makes for a dismal litany of one of the most humiliating chapters of our recent history. It was an amazing failure of leadership and judgement at the political, military and intelligence levels. Some civilian analysts have recently tried to place the entire blame at the doorsteps of the military leadership of that era. This was a military hierarchy handpicked by our political masters of that era primarily for its pliability. The military coup in Pakistan had cast a long shadow over civil-military relations in India. In their anxiety to prevent any Bonapartist tendencies from surfacing in the Indian Army, perhaps our political leadership went the extra mile to promote pliable and professionally weak officers. It is highly unlikely that a coup could ever have taken place in the highly diverse and heterogeneous Indian Army. However, the exaggerated fears of such a coup brought a rather inept and incompetent military leadership to the fore that glaringly lacked combat experience and handed over a cheap victory on a plate to the Chinese. The seminal role of Lt Gen Kaul in this fiasco has amply been highlighted by the author. He has also emphasised the culpability of the divisional commander, as also the entire military chain from the chief downwards in the inexplicable disaster at Sela. The appalling lack of knowledge or understanding of military matters by the political leadership was painfully evident in this humiliating episode. The worry is: have things changed? After our spectacular comeback in 1971 when our political, military and intelligence leadership covered itself with glory, we are again in a period of drift that has the disquieting air of *déjà vu*.

Apart from the wealth of historical data, the main value of this meticulously researched book lies in the forecasts of how the strategic interactions between India and China could pan out in the decades ahead. In their assessment of China's, America's and India's Comprehensive National Power (CNP), the Chinese military and civilian establishments differ significantly. There is an apparent dichotomy in China's professions about its peaceful rise and its rather aggressive pursuit of its security interests in Asia. Possibly this dichotomy stems from the differing world views of the civil and military establishments in China and an apparent lack of a coordination mechanism to coordinate the two world views. The author has painted a hypothetical scenario about how a Chinese attack on India would pan out, with cyber attacks on stock markets and rail networks and missile strikes on command and control complexes, and elaborate deception operations that target Indian ports and refinery complexes on the coast. A must read for any China watcher, this book is a most valuable addition to the fast proliferating body of literature on the India-China standoff.

— Maj Gen G D Bakshi (Retd)

**Lost Victory:**  
**The Rise and Fall of LTTE Supremo,**  
**V. Prabhakaran**  
**Maj Gen Raj Mehta (Retd)**  
(New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2010)  
Rs 995/-



As the oxymoronic title of the book suggests, having almost succeeded in his goal of getting a Tamil Eelam, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) supremo, Vellupillai Prabhakaran made some cardinal and irreversible blunders. At a seemingly impregnable position in 2004, Prabhakaran's unbridled, overweening ambition and a total misreading of the Sri Lankan government's resolve and capability, contributed to his downhill slide. From then on, he never really recovered lost ground and it ultimately resulted in his inglorious death in 2009 along with most of his family members, key henchmen and supporters, and the collapse of the entire movement. This book captures the period of history in which the war for an independent Tamil state/ country on the Sri Lankan island was almost won and then ultimately lost—perhaps forever. However, this book is not all about the 'life and times' of Prabhakaran.

The book discusses at length the undeniable fact that Prabhakaran's life and death remains the pivot around which the last 30 years of Sri Lankan history revolved. The stance of the book is not a linear, one-dimensional biography but a multifaceted comprehensive coverage of all the relevant events and personalities. The book has been divided into five distinct parts. The first part gives an overview of the conflict—essentially a contest between the majority Sinhalese inhabitants of the island, a sanctuary from the forbidding vastness of the Indian Ocean, called Serendip by the European mariners (based on the word 'serendipity' meaning 'the making of pleasant discoveries by accident') and the minority Tamil dwellers of the island.

Sri Lanka's independence movement concluded with the departure of the British from the island in 1948, and the political parties that progressively ruled and formed the governments at Colombo thereafter were overwhelmingly pro-Sinhala. Over the years, a series of acts of commission and omission effectively marginalised the Tamils and after years of suppression, deprivation and humiliation, they took up the struggle through peaceful and political means. However, having made almost no headway in the improvement of their cause, a number of militant organisations sprang up to forward it, of which, the LTTE emerged the strongest, primarily due

to the single-minded devotion of its chieftain, Vellupillai Prabhakaran. His name, thus, became synonymous with the struggle and vice versa. A chapter each in the book is dedicated to the two chief protagonists, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces. A separate chapter on the “Eelam wars” gives a synoptic overview of the four phases of the wars fought between the two.

In the second part, the book deals with the life, philosophy, ideology, thoughts and actions of a man who rose from a humble background to meteoric heights, gave a new dimension to the meaning of terror and brought in unprecedented ruthlessness in his efforts to gain Eelam by any means and at any cost. It aids the reader in understanding how he was in his early years, what were his motivators, his attitudes towards his family, colleagues, the LTTE and his vision for Tamil Eelam. A brilliant strategist and tactician, Prabhakaran mastered the art of using communications and electronic means. The interception of the Indian Peace-keeping Force (IPKF) transmissions led to the disastrous Jaffna heliborne operation in which the IPKF suffered heavy casualties. His cold-blooded operations and uncompromising utilisation of resources, be they cadres, weapons or arms, to achieve shock effect, which is a primary ingredient of guerrilla warfare, got him noticed the world over.

The third part of the book includes three chapters which focus on “propaganda” by the various players, the funding of the LTTE for its Eelam struggle and the human rights violations, all of which have an umbilical connection with the four Eelam wars. The “propaganda war”, as the author states, was fought in a ‘no-holds-barred’ manner with allegations, half-truths, modifications of facts and counter-allegations on both sides. An LTTE sympathetic group in Europe, uploaded a video on the Internet that showed Sri Lankan troops allegedly executing naked and bound LTTE cadres—which was attempted to be proven as fake by the Sri Lankan government. The LTTE, which was funded initially by voluntary contributions from the resident Tamils and then by the displaced population (the Tamil diaspora in various countries), had, of late, started using coercive and extortionist tactics from those who were not entirely convinced by its “means towards the ends”. These observations in the book have been based on a study by Human Rights Watch.

The Indian intervention in the conflict is the focal point of the fourth part of the book. The reasons for the involvement of the Indian government, the deployment of the IPKF, the compulsions under which Indian soldiers had to operate and the subsequent withdrawal have been analysed in great detail. The sources again are interviews and publications of retired senior military officers who were key players in the IPKF. An entire chapter is dedicated to the unfortunate assassination of former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi.

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The final portion of the book titled the “Way Ahead” addresses several matters besides speculating what should be done to maintain peace that has been attained after years of fighting and bloodshed. The Sri Lanka government managed to adroitly manoeuvre amongst the three big powers of the Asian continent i.e., India, China and Pakistan. Astute relations with all these countries ensured adequate supply of arms and ammunitions to the Sri Lankan war machinery and especially at the time when the LTTE faced a restriction from the world at large due to its proscription by as many as 34 countries. This, inevitably, turned the tide in favour of the Sri Lankan Army. The author quite candidly points out the follies of Indian diplomacy and opines that it needs to come quickly of age lest it does irreversible damage to Indian security interests in its immediate neighbourhood as well as in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The amazing, epochal transformation of the Sri Lankan Army has been assessed in detail in a separate chapter and might be of particular interest to military historians and strategists alike.

Of particular interest will be the tactics employed by the Sri Lankan Army while operating at night in the mine-infested, heavily defended LTTE strongholds. Adequate accolade has also been paid to the resilient synergy and determination of the now famous troika of Mahinda Rajapaksa, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa and Gen Sarath Fonseka for successfully turning around what many had long termed as an “unwinnable war”.

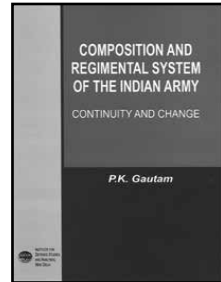
By the author’s own admission, *Lost Victory* is an unabashed military book. Having drawn heavily from primary and secondary resources, the author has made an effort to provide a multidimensional and dispassionate account of the conflict. Unsurprisingly, the last part of the book discusses the lessons learnt and the way forward for the military, polity and populace of the country. As the book was being written, Gen Fonseka resigned as Chief of Defence Staff and another chapter was added to update the readers on the genesis and possible fallouts of the crisis—indicative of the troubled times ahead in Sri Lanka. Although, the book would prove to be of useful reading to historians, military researchers, diplomats and the lay readers alike, the author has quoted a substantial amount of material citing websites as the source, the authenticity of which can always be placed under a realm of doubt and debate. Nonetheless, the author has put together an exhaustive compilation of the times and beyond of the Sri Lankan conflict.

— **Manish Girdhar**  
Research Fellow, CLAWS

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**Composition and Regimental System  
of the Army:  
Continuity and Change**  
**P K Gautam**  
(New Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2008)  
**\$ 20.00**

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In the “Charge of the Light Brigade”, Alfred Tennyson speaks for the soldiers, “Theirs is not to reason why.” Vikram Batra, Abdul Hamid and many such great soldiers of the Indian Army laid down their lives in the spirit of ‘not to reason why.’ They are the symbols of regimental traditions and ethos which are built over the years. The Indian Army is unique in composition, its rank structure and military traditions. It is an amalgamation of the State Forces and British Indian Army of post World War II and carries the accumulated history and traditions of more than 300 years. Unquestionable loyalty and nation before self is the ethos ingrained in the regimental traditions. Col Outram, Naik Jadunath Singh and the martyrs of the Saragarhi Battle may have faded from public memory, but they still live in these units and continue to be a source of motivation to the past, present and future generations of soldiers. The Indian Army, despite being so diverse, is integrated by military ethics and regimental traditions. Indian Army soldiers have done it every time they were asked to do the impossible, guided through the testing times by the unparalleled bravery of their illustrious predecessors to uphold the honour of their regiment and units. They never questioned, and never buckled. This is indeed the legacy of the rich regimental traditions.

The regimental system of the Indian Army has attracted the attention of historians and military thinkers alike. The debate for a change of the present regimental system which is based on class, caste, region and language has often come up. The questions often asked are: is there a necessity to continue with the British legacy of caste/class-based regimental system or to change the regimental system to an all-India composition in an environment which is increasingly becoming divisive due to language, region, caste, class and religion? Does this system provide adequate human resource to absorb the skill and technological threshold required to fight modern wars? The author has taken up these issues to put things in the correct perspective and has analytically examined the existing system and the need for review, by taking into consideration the societal changes

to make the army more professional, with the changing nature of conflict. The author has highlighted that the units which are organised on class-based compositions, have often performed better than others. During the various wars India has fought since independence, the units organised on the class-based regimental system have performed very well. Even during the Kargil operation, 2 Rajputana Rifle, 13 Jammu and Kashmir Rifle and 8 Sikh performed exceptionally well. Examination of some famous battles fought by the troops highlights the fact that soldiers do not fight for political ideologies—they fight for the honour of their battalion. Regimental traditions, history and ethos play a greater role in motivating the men and officers during war, especially in the case of the infantry.

The author has highlighted two distinct and unique features of the Indian Army, that is, secularism and no distinction between soldiers from the Schedule Castes, Schedule Tribes and Other Backward Classes (SC, ST and OBC). The religion of the men becomes the religion of the officer cadre, irrespective of their background. Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw was a Parsi but was popularly known as “Sam Bahadur” he always took pride calling himself a Gorkha, and followed all the traditions and customs of the Gorkhas even after his retirement. The present system has stood the test of time, except for the aberration of the 1984 Sikh mutiny in a few units. Troops from Jammu and Kashmir have been deployed to fight insurgency in the state; the Madras Regiment troops did very well in Sri Lanka while operating against the Tamil rebels, and troops from Punjab were deployed during the insurgency in the state. This could be achieved due to the secular and apolitical military leadership. The author reinforces this unique character of the Indian Army which has helped this institution to remain secular and unbiased towards all sections of society, irrespective of the class composition of the units.

A large number of books have been written on the subject, suggesting the strength of the age-old, trusted regimental system, but what the author has attempted is to examine the issue of representation of the soldiers based on the population and impact of the nature of modern warfare. He has also brought out that the mixed composition units which were raised post-1984, reverted to pure class units of infantry as the experiment was not found to be very successful. Even the Rashtriya Rifles units which were raised as all class units have been reverted to the infantry regimental system, with more than 50 per cent troops deputed from parent infantry regiments and the balance from other supporting arms such as artillery/armed/air defence/mechanised infantry. On one side, he suggests continuity with the present system but he has also highlighted the success of mixed class military units which have performed well in war-like

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situations. The most striking experiments which have succeeded comprise the Brigade of Guards, Assam Rifles, Armoured Regiments, Mechanised Infantry, Signal and Engineer units. What he has brought out is that at one end, it is desirable that the existing regimental system should not be tampered with but, at the same time, the idea of all-India class composition units should also not be rejected outright. Representation based on population percentage needs to be brought in but the transition should be gradual. He has rightly rejected the idea of the caste-based reservation system in the army, primarily because this will politicise the army and create division in the cohesive apolitical structure. He concludes that dismantling the existing regimental system may lead to breaking up of cohesion which is required by the units to remain motivated and combat-worthy at all times.

This book is contemporary and makes interesting reading; however, the following issues could have been covered in more detail:

- Evolution of the modern Indian Army through the ages, including the post- and pre- independence eras.
- Impact of wars and lessons learnt thereof for restructuring the regimental system.
- Strength of the regimental system lies in tradition and warrior code rather than ideology or national cause.
- Concept of officers as the final authority. Camaraderie and absolute loyalty to officers in spite of diverse backgrounds. This, in fact, is the main pillar of strength of the combat units.

The author should also have endeavoured to make this book relevant for young officers and soldiers to understand the importance of traditions for the army. It would have served the army better if some case studies of modern-day battles such as during Kargil and Siachen had been highlighted to emphasise the fact that traditions are still as important a tool for motivation as they were in the past. Notwithstanding the above, this book is a useful addition to the work done by various military historians on the military regimental system of the Indian Army.

— Narender Kumar  
Senior Fellow, CLAWS



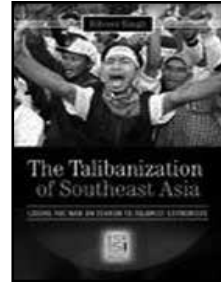
**The Talibanization of Southeast Asia**

**Bilveer Singh**

(New Delhi: Vij Books, 2007)

Rs 995/-

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*The Talibanization of Southeast Asia* is a well researched account of the radicalisation/Talibanisation of large segments of the population that cohabit the Muslim-dominated states of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Muslim minorities in Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. Talibanisation as a process has been referred to by the author as adoption of extremist Islamist ideology by a significant section of the population to pursue its extremist goals, in the face of perceived 'wrongs'. Importantly, the author avers that this process of 'Talibanisation' is irreversible so long as the governments concentrate on killing or arresting extremists, rather than identifying and eradicating the root causes of alienation.

The author has emphasised the merging lines of fundamentalism, extremism and terrorism where a good religious practitioner, be it of any religion, is required to be a fundamentalist, in case he is a good Muslim, or Hindu, as the case may be. However, the fundamentalist is a feeder to the extremist who, on drawing on perceived injustices to the religion, in this case Islam, incites terrorist tendencies. A terrorist then propagates and initiates violence as a 'justified' step to 'protect' his religion under threat: in essence, Talibanisation of Southeast Asia is a result of the perception in the fundamentalist Muslim community that its religion is being systematically targeted by the US through its invasion in Iraq, Afghanistan, its tolerance of Jewish atrocities against Palestine, Bosnia, its presence in the holy land of Saudi Arabia, its manipulation of secular Muslim countries to exploit their resources, all in the name of fighting Islamist terrorism, whereas in actuality it is endeavouring to crush Islam as a religion. The battle of 'perception' is largely being won by the radical Islamist who exploits lack of governance, unemployment, inequality, lopsided growth, malnutrition, neglect and poverty to turn people into extremists and terrorists. The author has traced the seeds of discontent over almost half a century in the Southeast Asian countries where conflicts between states and Talibanised radicals have been a continuum in Muslim majority nations. In Muslim minority nations, religiously indoctrinated parties have become the rallying points for the marginalised; and, in some cases, these 'sizeable' pockets comprise strong vote banks.

The author has correctly identified the origins and strengthening of the Talibanisation because of the US led proxy war against the USSR in Afghanistan. The US legitimised the use of *jihad* in the Islamic religion to rally its Cold War effort against the USSR. This fuelled Islamic fanaticism as an instrument to reverse the Soviet invasion which led to the convergence into Afghanistan of 35,000 Muslim radicals from 43 Islamic countries, including of Southeast Asia. Tens of thousands more attended *madrasa* training, formed to educate and train *jihadis*. This is where the *Wahabi/Salafi* teachings of Hassan-al-Banna, Maulana Maududi, Sayyid Qutb, Abdullah Azam gave a political colour to the struggle, and led to Islamic revivalism, reformation and attempts at installation of the Islamic Caliphate in the world by Al Qaeda. A vast number of Islamists so nurtured in these *madrasas* went back to their countries to savour their taste of victory and exploited the latent causes of discontent and disenchantment to sow the seeds of Talibanisation in these countries.

The major Talibanised terrorist groups identified by the author are Al-Jemaah Al-Islamiyyah (AJAI), GAM in Indonesia, the Abu Sayyaf and Molo Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) groups in the Philippines, the Al-Muanah and KMM in Malaysia, the Gerakan Mujahidin Pattani Islam in Thailand and the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation in Myanmar.

The author has painstakingly outlined the organisational structures, ideologies, strategies, tactics, *modus operandi* and actions of the terrorist groups. He has pointed out the attrition caused to their rank and file but has opined that more killings do not arrest but only accelerate the Talibanisation of the society. Such organisations are able to replace its Abu Bakars, Hambalis, etc with a vast pool of Talibanised members. And that, more than Al Qaeda or Osama and AJAI or Abu Bakar, it is the Al Qaedaism and the AJAISM which is more threatening, which is leading to the Talibanisation of Southeast Asia. This process is irreversible as long as there is no regional and international cooperation to root out this menace, as long as the US and the West are perceived to be pursuing an Islam eradication agenda, all in the name of fighting Islamist terrorism. The author believes that these terrorist organisations will continue to flourish because of their decentralised organisational cells and their ability to throw up leaders because of a vast reservoir of ‘Talibanised’ population smarting from Islamist wrongdoings at home and abroad, including the symbols of modern ‘Gulags’ like Guantanamo, Bagram or Abu Ghraib.

An eminently readable book for its glowing insight into the root causes of Talibanisation of Southeast Asia and the way out.

— Mr Rohit Singh  
Research Assistant, CLAWS