

Priyanjali Malik, India's Nuclear Debate: Exceptionalism and the Bomb, 2010, Routledge Publication: New Delhi/London

*Sanjeev Kumar Shrivastav**

Priyanjali Malik's book titled '*India's Nuclear Debate: Exceptionalism and the Bomb*', attempts to examine the public debate which took place among the Indian elite as well as the middle class on India's nuclear policy. It explains why international pressure on India to sign Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was viewed by 'attentive India' as not only a security threat but also infringement on India's sovereignty. According to the Dr. Malik, 'attentive India' mainly comprised of upper and middle class Indians who keenly participated in the nuclear debate. India's nuclear tests in May 1998 were regarded by attentive India as political weapon which helped it safeguarding its sovereignty.

Dr. Malik's work contains six chapters other than an introduction and conclusion. In the first chapter, history of nuclear debate in India, starting from Nehruvian era

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till 1990, has been explained which demonstrate that attentive India was not much concerned about the nuclear debate during that period. Even after the Chinese nuclear tests during 1964 and 1966, India remained ambivalent towards its nuclear policy which may be assessed while looking at the public debates during that period. According to Dr. Malik, even India's decision to reject NPT was not aimed at its quest for a nuclear bomb, rather it was more to ensure India's freedom of maneuverability in the nuclear policy making. In chapter two, the author has carried out a survey of broad positions of select strategic analysts and media commentators till the beginning of 1990s, who participated in the debate on India's nuclear policy. Dr. Malik points out that most commentators were in favor of a muscular nuclear policy and only

few advocated nuclear disarmament. The author notes that in a nation which prides itself for carrying the Gandhian legacy, absence of opposition of nuclear weapons is a remarkable development. However, in chapter three, the author

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points out that though India's attentive public was not much concerned about nation's nuclear policy even till the beginning of 1990s. But since major powers including United States and Russia began advocating for nonproliferation cause, India realised its difficulty in maintaining its stand on non proliferation. Public debates around that time noticed India's difficulty and advocated for a need to adopt more pliable position on nuclear issues.

In the fourth chapter, Dr. Malik explains that by the time the debate over CTBT began taking place, efforts of India's strategic community to define and defend India's position had reached its decisive culmination and audience for muscular nuclear policy in India grew considerably. The indefinite extension of NPT and the 'Entry- into- Force' clause of CTBT provided opportunity to hawkish strategic analysts and commentators to highlight the discriminatory nuclear order and also to strongly advocate and justify India's rejection of these treaties on the grounds of defending India's sovereign right to decide which treaty it wanted to accede to. By this time, debate over nuclear issues had taken the center stage amongst the Indian intelligentsia, and the government too joined it since the issue was repeatedly raised and discussed in the parliament.

In chapter five, the author points out that against this backdrop of public debate, Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power and conducted the tests in May 1998. According to the author, BJP's fate accompli generated the first meaningful debate over India's nuclear policy in decades. This debate indicated that attentive India was ready to face negative repercussions of tests in order to secure its independence of making foreign and security policy choices. In the sixth chapter, the author

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analyses what 'nuclear India' meant for the attentive public within the country. However, attentive India did not treat Kargil conflict as a potential nuclear flash point; rather it was perceived as conventional engagement. This fact supports the contention that for attentive India, nuclear weapons were purely political weapons.

In conclusion, Dr. Malik points out that during 1990s, attentive India went through dramatic changes with regards to its foreign and defence policies as Nehruvian ideas were shed or revised which had earlier formed the bedrock of India's policies and practices since independence. According to Dr. Malik, as the process of defining and defending the

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This book provides an exquisite and insightful analysis of the debate on India's nuclear option thus makes a valuable contribution to the studies on India's nuclear history. 