

India and the Cold War

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On page one of *India and the Cold War*, the collection's editor, Professor Manu Bhagavan, claims that thoughts about the Cold War changed after the publication of Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War* (2005). Fifteen years after its initial printing, Westad's opus still looms large for Cold War scholars. As someone who undertook seminars and exams in the years following its release, the book was *and* remains required reading for scholars seeking to break free from the Cold War binary of US and USSR superpower competition and truly see the global scope of the conflict that defined the latter half of the 20th century.⁽¹⁾

To me, Bhagavan's invocation of Westad's classic was not meant to invite comparison. Instead I read it as Bhagavan claiming his collection aimed to build upon of *The Global Cold War's* foundational argument that countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America were not on the periphery of the conflict. Those nations were critical Cold War actors too, with their own complex domestic agendas and foreign policies.⁽²⁾ In the same way Westad encouraged Cold War scholars to broaden their thinking and conception of the conflict, Bhagavan, too, demands that readers wield a larger analytical lens on a country traditionally seen as having had a minimal impact on the Cold War: India. Bhagavan's *India and the Cold War* examines independent India and its Cold War history on economic, political, diplomatic, and cultural fronts. What Bhagavan assembles here, like Westad's *The Global Cold War*, is itself required reading for a better understanding of the history of modern India as well as a challenge to scholars to reconceive their images of Cold War India.

India and the Cold War arrives at a momentous time for scholars of modern India and of Indian foreign relations. In the past few years, several new works have arrived to challenge existing thought, offer more nuanced arguments, and spread the word about previously unknown sources. In 2018 alone, students of Indian history benefitted from works on Indian economic thinking (David Engerman's *The Price of Aid*); on Nehru's evolving thoughts on internationalism and the global world order (Michelle Louro's *Comrades Against Imperialism*); and on food as a symbol of citizenship in independent India (Benjamin Siegel's *Hungry Nation*).⁽³⁾ More recent works, like Zorawar Daulet Singh's *Power and Diplomacy* and Pallavi Raghavan's (a contributor to this collection) *Animosity at Bay* continue the trend of challenging the established scholarly dogma about India's role in global affairs during the Cold War.⁽⁴⁾ *India and the Cold War* is just the latest work to join such a lively discussion but, unlike the others, it is a wide-ranging collection and not a monograph. Because of its design, Bhagavan's collection discusses different periods,

places, and people without confusing the reader. It succeeds in its scope and gives a Westadian lens to Cold War India.

To cover its wide scope, Bhagavan has arranged the ten chapters that make up *India and the Cold War* into four parts. They are mostly chronological, with some overlap, starting in the late 1940s with Indian independence and ending in the early 1990s with the Cold War's conclusion. Each part profiles a different interval of time (10, 20, 30, or 40 years) and investigates issues of economic, political, and cultural importance to India during the Cold War. The image of India as a Cold War actor in its own right is a consistent thread throughout all these chapters and their varied subjects. How the country managed domestic squabbles (economic or political fights) or handled internal issues (border or insurgency campaigns) could not be separated from its foreign policy and outlook toward the larger world. Furthermore, India's nonaligned foreign policy—independent of both the United States and the Soviet Union—as well as its support for sweeping decolonization of the developing world, made it a uniquely honest broker for thorny issues like disarmament, peacekeeping, and promotion of international collaboration.

India and the Cold War begins by chronicling the first decade of Indian independence, which also coincided with first decade of the Cold War. In these opening chapters, readers mostly learn how the new Indian state engaged with the world's two superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. The first two chapters offer a view from New Delhi, instead of Washington and Moscow, and push back on narratives that characterize India's relations with the two superpowers as fraught with misunderstandings. This change of perspective is a relief. As impressive as the book's first three chapters are, I found the standout of part one to be Pallavi Raghavan's opening chapter on the state visits to the United States by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, respectively held in October 1949 and May 1950. Raghavan reveals that, while Nehru and Ali Khan ran two very different states—one a secular democracy and the other with an official state religion—the two statesmen were eager for US assistance and warned that failure to aid them would mean an opportunity for Soviet influence to spread across South Asia. (5) She skillfully argues that the Cold War came to South Asia earlier than 1954—when Pakistan signed a mutual defense treaty with the US—and that Cold War thinking and posturing was evident in both countries at their births. The chapter represents the best of what the book offers: complicating accepted thinking about India and Pakistan during the Cold War and providing more nuanced and complex discussions of their Cold War foreign policies.(6)

After a strong opening segment, things only get better in part two, which I believe is the collection's strongest section. Like part one, it is comprised of three chapters but the timeline increases, focusing on events from 1950-1969. It's no law, just a good standard to live by, that no work on India during the Cold War is complete without a contribution by the reigning *doyen* of Indian Cold War history, Srinath Raghavan. Raghavan, who excels at comprehensive, far-reaching histories (see his excellent publication, another 2018 gem, *The Most Dangerous Place: A History of the United States in South Asia*) instead offers a close inspection, and drills down on a particular moment: the 1960 summit between Nehru and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai to resolve their border dispute, the last serious diplomatic attempt before the two countries' 1962 war.(7)

The book's second part also includes a fascinating chapter by Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu about how India, eager to play a larger role in international affairs, managed to become a recurring and sought-after member of United Nations peacekeeping missions.(8) This part concludes with an excellent chapter, by Rohan Mukherjee, documenting India's participation in the U.N.'s Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament. This took place while the country kept its nuclear options open, never permanently abandoning the quest for a nuclear device, which culminated with 1974's "peaceful nuclear explosion" or PNE.(9) For selfish reasons, as I am working on a dissertation about the history of India's atomic energy and weapons programs, I found this chapter to be the most engaging. But even if you are not on working on a dissertation about this topic (pity you) it is, nonetheless, a smart and concise overview of India's 1960s-era nuclear ambiguity, as nearly the entire world rallied around the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). For years, India had demanded disarmament and called for a nuclear-weapons free world. But once the superpowers, and many other

nations, moved toward a greater inspections regime and fewer weapons, this development came at an inconvenient time for India, who worried they would forever be locked out of the nuclear club, just as their foe, the People's Republic of China, had snuck in under the wire.

Parts three and four change course, as the sections feature two chapters instead of three, and take on longer periods for discussion. With part three, the focus is more on India's economy and how economic thinking affected the nation's foreign policy. Anton Harder's chapter uses the lens of development to examine India-Sino relations during the 1950s and early 1960s. Here, India sought to present itself as a middle ground of economic planning and progress between the poles of US-style capitalism and the People's Republic of China's centrally-planned economy. Priya Chacko's outstanding chapter, on Indian economic policies, investigates the role US economic aid had in India during the first two decades of the Cold War and how this aid buttressed a focus on industrial-led growth, in predominantly urban areas, that ultimately crashed, with domestic and international consequences.⁽¹⁰⁾ Chacko's chapter impressively charts India's early experiments with Fabian socialism, and its moves toward economic openness as a result of the strings attached to international aid, setting the stage for its post-Cold War embrace of more open markets, deregulation, and the privatization of previously state-owned enterprises.

India and the Cold War's final section, which carries events into the 1990s, features two chapters, one on the use of Indian film to spread a pro-disarmament message and another on the rise of the Hindu nationalism movement during the Cold War. The book's final chapter, on the foreign policy thinking of the political Hindu right, by Rahul Sagar is, in my opinion, the strongest essay in the collection. Sagar profiles the foreign policies of the non-Congress parties and movements—the Hindu Mahasabha, the Jan Sangh, and the earlier iteration of the current ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—during the Cold War. The chapter argues that these organizations, often described as focused only on domestic issues, thought long and hard about foreign affairs and India's role in the world. While these groups did have hardliners in them, it would be foolish to characterize entire enterprises by their loudest voices. Even as these organizations expressed a distaste for communism and advocated for closer ties to Western democracies, they also warned about the dangers of materialism, economic exploitation by foreign countries, and Westernization gobbling up the developing world. Saving the best for last, Sagar's persuasive contribution to the collection demonstrates that the non-Congress parties, because they were out of power during the Cold War, never had to reconcile the differences between their interests and values. Those nuances have, however, come to be front and center, especially now, during the era of BJP governance, and will probably remain so as long as the BJP is the dominant political force in India. In the way that the Congress Party defined the first four decades of Indian political life, observers of Indian politics should prepare for a similar BJP-dominated era. A chapter like this helps in such a task.

As impressive as *India and the Cold War* is, it does not escape free of critiques. Four matters stood out, two of them minor complaints and the other two more substantive. First, there are two impressive chapters on the arts in India during the Cold War. One profiles Urdu poetry while the other discusses political messaging in a 1960s Bollywood film. As a cultural historian, I am in favour of the book opening up a wider and more substantial cultural front of analysis, but the chapters felt shoehorned into their respective sections. Their uneasy inclusions made me wish the four parts were arranged more thematically instead of being largely chronological. If the book contained more cultural-turn analysis, I would have welcomed additional chapters on Indian arts; perhaps on music or dance or the wider Indian film industry. My overall complaint is not that these chapters were there; it's that I wanted more.

Secondly, while Pallavi Raghavan and Priya Chacko's chapters discuss the United States to some degree, I wish there had been a sole chapter devoted to the history of US-Indian foreign relations. In a book with two chapters on Sino-Indian relations and one on India and the USSR, the lack of a full chapter on US-Indian relations is a missed opportunity. In keeping with the book's encouragement of a wider view, US-India scholarship ought to push beyond traditional historical boundaries, like Nehru's tenure as Prime Minister, or the 1971 war between India and Pakistan, and to carry the history of US-India relations through the 1970s and until the end of the Cold War. With more available archival materials than ever, for both countries,

surely a historian can carry this story through to the Cold War's end and the US's victory.

As for my larger critiques, I wish the collection had focused more on India's leadership in the developing world and in the nonaligned movement. In multiple chapters, there are repeated references to how India stood alone, both in being nonaligned and as a prominent voice for decolonization. The book had the chance to look beyond the usual moments—like the 1955 Bandung conference for nonaligned nations—and instead offer thoughts how the relationship between India and the developing world changed over this period. Examples might include new events, such as the rise of the New International Economic Order (NIEO); the next wave of the human rights movement in the 1970s; or India's confrontation of the Washington Consensus in the 1980s and 1990s, as the Cold War began to wind down. Lastly, even though the book is not arranged by region, the collection might have benefitted from a greater focus on Asia, beyond China. India's relationship to Southeast Asia is under-analyzed and the biggest Cold War event in Asia, the Vietnam War, gets scant coverage. Since India's first three leaders—Nehru, Shastri, and Gandhi—all confronted the reality of this war, it is a shame a chapter does not focus on the war or speak to India's larger relationship to Southeast Asia during the Cold War. I offer these critiques not to dull praise of a strong work or to discuss the work that *I* would have written or edited, but merely as suggestions for how a great book could be even better and cast a wider lenses of study.

Despite these critiques, editor Manu Bhagavan should be immensely proud of *India and the Cold War*. Bhagavan has assembled ten incredible scholars, of different disciplines and writing on varied research topics, to produce a much-needed work on Indian history. This collection would be a welcome addition to an upper-level undergraduate world history course. The chapters are substantive enough without being too lengthy; the writing throughout is crisp and clear for productive classroom discussions. For a global or international history graduate seminar, this book is ideal and sure to generate lively and stimulating conversations. Besides its teaching benefits, I recommend this book for dissertation writers and those working on articles and chapters on Indian foreign relations history. This book is of great use to a variety of different disciplines, such as history, cultural studies, political science, and security studies.

At the start of his collection, Manu Bhagavan claimed our understanding of the Cold War owes a debt to Odd Arne Westad and his modern classic, *The Global Cold War*. Without it, we might not have a work like *India and the Cold War*. One hopes this impressive collection will long inspire and generate debate, in much the way Westad's book continues to, 15 years after its release. Scholars of modern India and Indian foreign relations history should look to Bhagavan and his work for inspiration as they research and write their own accounts of Indian thinking and actions during the Cold War. Manu Bhagavan's *India and the Cold War* shows what is possible when scholars break free from older arguments and established narratives to cast a wider lens on a subject, which merits a fresh set of eyes.

[1] Bhagavan, Manu. "Introduction", *India and the Cold War*, edited by Manu Bhagavan, (Chapel Hill, 2019), p. 1; for further information see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, 2005).

[2] Bhagavan, p. 1.

[3] David C. Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Michelle L. Louro, *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge, 2018); Benjamin R. Siegel, *Hungry Nation: Food, Famine, and the Making of Modern India* (Cambridge, 2018).

[4] For a great recent article, see Nabarun Roy's "In the Shadow of Great Power Politics: Why Nehru Supported PRC's Admission to the Security Council," found in Vol. 40, Issue 2 of *International History Review*.

[5] Pallavi Raghavan. "Journeys of Discovery: The State Visits of Jawaharlal Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan to

the United States,” p. 20.

[6] Raghavan, “Journeys of Discovery,” p. 33.

[7] Srinath Raghavan, “A Missed Opportunity? The Nehru-Zhou Enlai Summit of 1960,” pp. 100-125.

[8] By the end of the Cold War, Indian diplomats, military officers, and troops participated in nine of 16 U.N. peacekeeping missions, including in Korea, Egypt, Cyprus, Lebanon, and the Dominican Republic. Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, “The Accidental Global Peacekeeper,” pp. 79-99.

[9] Rohan Mukherjee, “Nuclear Ambiguity and International Status” pp. 126-150.

[10] Priya Chacko, *Indira Gandhi, the “Long 1970s,” and the Cold War*, p. 179. For more of her work, see her wonderful book, *Indian Foreign Policy: The Politics of Postcolonial Identity from 1947 to 2004*.

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