



## Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

# INDIAN MILITARY HISTORIES

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## Introduction

The Vice President speaking at the Golden Jubilee Commemoration of India-Pakistan War of 1965 described the event to be a befitting tribute to the valour and sacrifice of our soldiers<sup>1</sup>. The commemoration would involve Wreath Laying Ceremony at Amar Jawan Jyoti, Tri-Services Seminar and Display of Major Battles<sup>2</sup> among others. India-Pakistan war of 1965 is being described as a 'Forgotten War' and the commemorative event would hopefully rekindle the interest of new generation in Military History.

India has been slow in publishing official historical accounts of the wars fought. The archiving of historical records needs much more attention. The failure to archive crucial historical facts could deprive future generations of valuable insight and therefore, accurate and timely compilation of war histories is necessary for critical analysis of wars and to draw right lessons. The histories of India-Pakistan Wars of 1965 and 1971 though compiled in mid 1980s were published much later. Many others are

either yet to be compiled and/ or published. The delay in compilation and publishing of war histories prevents timely drawing of lessons. In addition, some of the key stakeholders may leave Service or not live long enough to tell the story and so the delay also adversely affects the quality of compilation. There is lack of awareness among the young generation about the military histories, contribution of the armed forces personnel and the wars fought by India in post-independence era.

The paper would look into the delays in publishing of military histories, ways in improving archiving and timely publishing and educating future generations.

## Forgotten Histories

**1971 India-Pakistan War:** "The India Pakistan War of 1971- A History" was released by Shri Shekhar Dutt, former Governor of Chhattisgarh at the Vivekananda International Centre, at New Delhi on 21 January 2015. The publication of the official history, 44 year after the India Pakistan War of 1971, though late, is still a welcome step in honouring the war

heroes/ martyrs of the Armed Forces. The history is written in English and authored by two eminent historians and former directors of the History Division of the MoD, Late Shri SN Prasad and Shri UP Thapliyal.

**World War-I:** The World War-I began in 1914 in Europe in which a total of 15,00,000 Indian soldiers had fought as part of the British forces, out of which over 74,000 laid down their lives. A commemoration ceremony was organised thousands of miles away from India at Imperial War Museum North, Manchester in UK, in which their Cultural Secretary, Sajid Javed paid homage to Indian soldiers and highlighted the need '*to tell the story of incredible courage, and commitment of the Indian Troops in the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, France to future generations*'<sup>3</sup>. The British were quick to build India Gate and etch the names of Indian soldiers, who laid down their lives during the war. However, the history of the war has not been compiled to honour and acknowledge the contribution and sacrifices of Indian soldiers.

Some of the other military histories that are yet to be officially compiled and/ or published include histories of India-Pakistan conflict of 1948, Indian Armed Forces contribution in inclusion of Hyderabad, Liberation of Goa, Daman and Diu, India-China War of 1962, Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka, Siachen Operations 1984<sup>4</sup>, Operations Cactus in Maldives, Kargil Conflict and UN Peace Keeping Operations. The war histories are

normally compiled and published at the earliest. The Air Power Survey Summary Report for the Gulf War-1991 was published by the US as early as in 1993<sup>5</sup>.

**Impact:** The delays in compilation could result in loss of valuable inputs due to fading of institutional as well individual's memory. The assessment of the circumstances of the war, shortcomings, strengths and drawing of lessons therefore may not be correctly presented in the history.

Dr Sri Nandan Prasad<sup>6</sup>, the passionate historian, like many other heroes of the war did not live to see publication of history authored by him<sup>7</sup>. The delay in declassification of records is being described as the main reason for delay in publishing of military histories<sup>8</sup>. The accounts of the war available prior to the official war histories are often penned down by individual authors. The researchers and military historians have to depend upon these accounts as they do not have access to official histories due to delays. This adversely impacts the study and analysis of wars resulting in lesser understanding of the circumstances of the wars, diplomatic and international situation, assessment of adversary's motives, military preparedness and constraints faced during the war. As a result, the right lessons may not emerge and valuable inputs from war histories may not be available while formulating future strategy.

Military historians too lose interest in carrying out post facto analysis of the war

histories. The sacrifices and contribution of armed forces personnel, diplomats, leaders and common men who made such victories possible may also not be acknowledged.

### **Improving Archiving and Timely Publishing**

The compilation of the military and war histories is a long drawn and comprehensive process. The compilation must be done timely and as accurately as possible to facilitate in drawing right lessons. The details could be lost and inferences drawn may not be accurate if inordinate delays take place. Therefore, there is a need to lay down timelines and composition of a team to facilitate timely compilation and publishing war histories. Similarly, the declassification policies may be reviewed to address the delays. The success of the declassification process would depend upon the adherence to policy and implementation of the Timelines in letter and spirit.

Indian Armed Forces officers and scholars study Arab Israel Wars, Gulf Wars etc. in greater details than the wars fought by India during their professional training courses. It appears from published war histories of India that there is a need to include military aspects in greater detail while compiling war histories and facilitate deliberations by the scholars and military historians.

### **Educating Future Generations**

#### **Inclusion in Schools/ Colleges**

The Defence Minister during the inauguration of the commemoration of 50 Years of 1965 India Pakistan war recalled his memories of the war and impact of the war stories on him as a 9 year old child. He highlighted the need for including stories of gallantry and sacrifices of our brave soldiers in school curriculum to instil the spirit of patriotism and values in future generations<sup>9</sup>. The inclusion of military and war studies as subject for study in higher courses would create better understanding of the adversaries, challenges and could help improve our responses. Therefore, these histories may be included in the curriculum of the schools and Military History should be included as a subject in the M Phil and PhD courses. Professors may be appointed in colleges/ Universities to do justice to the subject.

### **Improving Accessibility and Reach**

The histories so far were published only in English, thus limiting the access to a select few, who are well versed with English. There is a need to publish/ translate them into Hindi and other regional languages for wider distribution and readership. The war histories were published only in hard copied. They may be digitised for internet as well as mobile users. The digitisation also helps in prolonging the life of old documents. However, digitisation of hard copies is a time consuming process, therefore, it would be prudent to henceforth archive records in digital formats to facilitate easy access to

scholars and military historians in future as well as in making compilation easier.

There is a need to improve visibility and accessibility of historical records of the Indian Armed Forces to scholars and military historians. There should be a separate section for unclassified military records away from defence security zones, which would be easy to access by scholars and military historian.

The British had built India Gate at Kingsway (Now Rajpath, New Delhi) <sup>10</sup> to commemorate the contribution of Indian soldiers in World War-I. However, there is no memorial to acknowledge the contribution of the Armed Forces personnel in the World War-II and other wars of the post-Independence period. There is a need to build a war memorial that would provide a fitting tribute to the valour and sacrifice of the Armed Forces personnel.

### Conclusion

Shri K Shankar Bajpai<sup>11</sup>, a diplomat who was in service during the India-Pakistan War of 1965, has aptly summed up that the key lesson from the war as “What to expect from Pakistan”. The War History should not only be a narration of facts and events but it should help us understand what to expect from our adversary and how to prepare for future contingencies and protect our interests. Mr Bajpai has highlighted that both the lessons of the war as well as our refusal to learn are obvious.

Timely compilation and publication of military histories is essential to ensure that the histories are studied, analysed and lessons drawn to help the nation improve its preparedness, prevent misadventures by the adversary and take him on should the deterrence fail. The behaviour and actions of our adversaries need much closer study and analysis. The digital age and social/ new media could be exploited to facilitate in educating future generations and stake holders of national security about the military histories.

The tactical and operational lessons from the military histories may change with the passage of time, changes in tactics and technology but strategic lessons remain more or less same. A closer look at the history of past conflicts would indicate similarity in adversaries’ behaviour and actions. The recent threat of use of Nuclear Weapons by the Pakistan Army Chief General Raheel Sharif during the commemoration of 1965 war brings out the continuity of Pakistan’s actions since independence and reinforces the need for learning from past wars<sup>12</sup>. There is therefore, a need to ensure that lessons from the past wars are studied with seriousness to prevent their recurrence in future and protect our national interests.

*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])*

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>1965 war was costly misadventure of Pakistan: Vice President Hamid Ansari, September 01, 2015 <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/1965-war-was-costly-misadventure-of-pakistan-vice-president-hamid-ansari/articleshow/48757737.cms>, accessed on September 10, 2015

<sup>2</sup> <http://indianarmy.nic.in/IndoPakWar/Index1965.aspx>, accessed on September 10, 2015

<sup>3</sup> "Indian Troops contribution to First World War honoured". March 10, 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/indian-troops-contribution-to-first-world-war-honoured>, Accessed on March 13, 2015

<sup>4</sup>Pradip R Sagar, *Shoot to Thrill: Government to Glorify Indian Wars*, July 26, 2015, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/thesundaystandard/Shoot-to-Thrill-Government-to-Glorify-Indian-Wars/2015/07/26/article2940321.ece>, accessed on September 10, 2015

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.afhso.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-100927-061.pdf>, accessed on September 11, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.rediff.com/news/slide-show/slide-show-1-sn-prasad-a-doyen-among-military-historians/20110920.htm>, 20 September 2011, accessed on 28 January 2015.

<sup>7</sup>Late Dr SN Prasad had done his post-doctoral research on military history at Princeton University. He headed History Division MoD from 1964-69 and National Archives of India from 1969 to 1979. He became Vice President of the Executive Committee of International Council on Archives (ICA), Paris, from 1972 to 1980.

<sup>8</sup> Satish Nambiar, *The Need for Declassification of War Histories and other Documents*, July 6, 2011, [http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/TheNeedforDeclassificationofWarHistoriesandotherDocuments\\_snambiar\\_060711.html](http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/TheNeedforDeclassificationofWarHistoriesandotherDocuments_snambiar_060711.html), accessed on September 10, 2015

<sup>9</sup>Stories on 1965 War should be included in School, September 01, 2015, Manohar Parrikar, <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/stories-on-1965-war-should-be-included-in-school-curriculum-manohar-parrikar/>, accessed on September 09, 2015

<sup>10</sup>Naomi Canton, Lord Parekh: The contribution of India to World War One was colossal, June 04, 2014, <http://asiahouse.org/lord-parekh-contribution-india-world-war-one-colossal/>, accessed on September 11, 2015.

<sup>11</sup>K Shankar Bajpai, 1965, the forgetting, September 09, 2015, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/1965-the-forgetting/>, accessed on September 09, 2015

<sup>12</sup> Pakistan Army Chief Raheel Sharif Warns India of 'Unbearable Cost' of War, September 07, 2015, <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/pakistan-army-chief-raheel-sharif-warns-india-of-unbearable-cost-of-war-1214940>, accessed on September 08, 2015