

**Harsh V. Pant, Yogesh Joshi.** *Indian Nuclear Policy (Oxford India Short Introductions)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. xi + 193 pp. \$16.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-19-948902-2.

**Reviewed by** Ivan Ware

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**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air University)

In 1945, the nuclear bombs that targeted Hiroshima and Nagasaki shook not only Japan but the entire world. India was no exception. On the heels of India declaring independence in 1947, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and leading scientist Homi Bhabha laid the foundations for the Indian atomic program in 1948. Nehru foresaw power in the atom as a symbol of modernity and technological progress as a key to being a major power, “but its destructive potential imbued in him a moral aversion to nuclear weapons” (p. 21). This aversion would allow India, particularly Nehru, to be recognized as the moral policeman of the world. India would publicly debate the decision to pursue the nuclear weapons path for nearly five decades. The authors point out, “India took ten years to respond to the first Chinese nuclear test in October 1964; and when India first tested a nuclear device in 1974, it called it a peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE) and followed a policy of ‘nuclear refrain’” (p. 3). Another twenty-four years would pass before India conducted its own nuclear weapons test. Since the test in 1998, India has made rapid technological advancements in its nuclear capability. The authors note, “Its national security has overpowered its past moralistic approach to the problems accompanying nuclear weapons” (p. 164). Those nuclear weapons have

now become status symbols, although they remain shunned as a point of moral principle.

*Indian Nuclear Policy* is an interesting historical presentation of India’s debut on the world stage in the atomic age. Harsh V. Pant and Yogesh Joshi explore India’s foray into atomic energy and show its unique and reluctant path to becoming a nuclear weapons state. By using a mostly chronological order, Pant and Joshi take the reader on an Indian history lesson in global and local politics that surround the atomic program. The method chosen by the authors uses the time line as a framework to describe Indian nuclear policy development. Major portions of the book detail how all past prime ministers struggled with moral challenges and politics as major players vied for Indian influence. Pant and Joshi provide a glimpse into the thoughts of the pioneers of Indian nuclear policy: Nehru and Bhabha. India had no fissionable material, but did have thorium-rich monzonite sands. The authors even provide fascinating details about Bhabha’s three-stage plan to overcome India’s fissionable material deficiency with minimal outsourcing. India would use externally sourced natural uranium to fuel reactors in the first stage. Reprocessing the spent fuel alongside natural uranium and India’s thorium in breeder reactors in the second stage would pro-

duce a fissionable material to ultimately power reactors in the third stage.

The Indian prime ministers and the leading scientists continued to play major roles through the decades of development. Pant and Joshi clearly point out that throughout the nuclear program India was actively involved with the development of multiple nuclear-related treaties. India would fight hard for favorable clauses in those treaties and agreements, but then frequently fail to sign because the final agreement put too many fetters on the country's independence. Even with India's status as a non-nuclear power, Indian leaders' words carried more weight primarily due to the Indian moral abhorrence of nuclear weapons. As the decades slipped by, this stance was shaken, but seldom moved, by the actions of its neighbors.

The authors point out that by 1964 India had become the lodestar of atomic research in Asia, until China detonated a nuclear device in October of that year. That detonation from its neighbor still was not the expected catalyst for weapons development. The catalyst would come later. Instead, India went on the offensive by championing the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Pant and Joshi explain the diplomatic challenges inherent in resolving national security concerns while retaining the nuclear option. Those diplomatic paths often proved long and unsatisfying. By 1970 India was feeling coercive pressure from the United States and the results of the Bangladesh Liberation War. Debate continues to the present day as to the reason for India's decision to move forward with the nuclear test. The authors write, "In 1974, the nuclear option was finally exercised by New Delhi. However, India labelled it as a peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE). Its nuclear option remained non-weaponized" (p. 78). The world's response to the PNE proved devastating to India's nuclear program, as advanced nuclear states imposed sanctions. As a result of policy and definitely not those sanctions, "India is the only country in the history of nuclear proliferation that did not immediately

produce nuclear weapons after conducting a nuclear test" (p. 103).

The authors identify three factors that drove India to become a nuclear weapon state. First, the threat of Pakistan's nuclear weapons grew larger, with evident Chinese collusion. Second, the Soviet Union was lost as India's most trusted security partner as the United States rose in dominance after the Cold War. Third, the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party brought open celebration of the power and prestige associated with nuclear weapons. Those weapons were tested on May 11, 1998, with Pakistan following with its own test within a few weeks. Pant and Joshi list four broad principles that India was quick to adopt. First, nuclear weapons were to be instruments of politics. Second, India would follow a no-first-use policy. Third, India would bow out of the arms race. Fourth, India would adopt a pure retaliatory stance.

The authors claim, "India is the only nuclear weapon state in the entire world which is surrounded by two hostile nuclear powers" (p. 138). In this serious tone, the book describes the India-Pakistan conflict in the summer of 1999. Pakistan provoked India by occupying the strategic heights of Jammu and Kashmir under Indian control. Pakistan's leadership doubted India would pursue a conventional war that might risk escalation to a nuclear conflict. India's limited conventional war that followed showed great restraint by both nuclear powers. The authors reveal, "Restraint shown by New Delhi also earned it the label of a responsible nuclear power" (p. 133). The tone of the chapter continues with descriptions of India's conflicts with Pakistani and China.

The end of the book finally reveals current Indian policy. From the title *India's Nuclear Policy*, one would assume the book covers current Indian nuclear policy. However, the current nuclear doctrine of "massive retaliation" (p. 150) gets little print. This is not criticism, it is praise. The book as a whole maintains a steady pace to prepare the

reader for the justification that India wanted and has achieved world acknowledgment as a responsible nuclear power. The book does what it set out to accomplish. Through a historical narrative it describes the status, security, domestic policy, and role of individuals that guided the country toward its current nuclear policy. India's policy of non-alignment is fascinating. However, the book does leave the reader wanting more background for that policy decision. One could argue that India's insistence on self-reliance led frequently to the detriment of the nuclear development program.

Scholars may find this book wanting due to its brevity. I see this as a strength considering its inclusion in the Oxford India Short Introductions series. As a primer for understanding the history that pertains directly to Indian nuclear policy development, it is very well written.

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