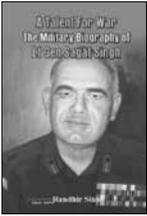


# Book Reviews

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## **A Talent for War: The Military Biography of Lt Gen Sagat Singh**

*Maj Gen KS Randhir Singh (Retd)*

Vij Books, 332 pages, Rs 995

***“Ran Banka Sagat”***

*Soldiers require training, whereas generals require an education.*

*Paraphrased from ‘The Generals’ by Thomas Ricks*

Having risen from the ranks of the State Forces, and, thus, being barely literate, Sagat Singh went on to attain the very high rank of a Lieutenant General in the Indian Army. In the quote cited above, Thomas Ricks, while emphasising on the need for high education, is elaborating on the ability of a person, that develops further by the education he gets, enabling him look at the bigger picture. While Sagat classically did not get educated in that sense, he studied privately a great deal and imbibed it all. He did two Staff College courses. Also, he did not need an education *per se*, to succeed in his Army career. Ask any one – as he possessed an adequate inborn talent for war and his devoted *aide de camp*, Randhir has a talent for high-brow and classy writing.

With the chestful of distinguished Service medals that Randhir retired with and which bear eloquent testimony to his ability as a soldier, in this book, which is a treat on many counts, not the least of which is its literary merit, Randhir has emerged as a narrator par excellence and a scholar warrior if ever there was one. This biography of his former Corps Commander is high-grade sophistication, ground-breaking interpretation and an professional itemisation of the military personality of the most dynamic field commander to emerge post

Independence on the Indian subcontinent. It also provides a thorough (and the only) look into Sagat's entire life

Lt Gen Sagat Singh came out victorious and with all flags flying high from all the operations he happened to be in command of. His crowning glory was in the 1971 War. In a good example of *coup de oiel*, grasping a developing battlefield opportunity: it was his master-stroke in making a bold dash for Dacca, an operation he was not even tasked for, that led to the sudden collapse of the Pakistani defences and the capitulation of the government. All in all, it is the only example for the Indian Army, where a corps campaign was fought successfully to final victory in a fast moving offensive role.

Maj Gen Randhir Singh describes in detail how Sagat conducted offensive advance operations during the liberation of Goa (Operation Vijay, in which he admirably commanded 50 Para Brigade), ably handled the flagrant insurgency in Mizoram and broke the myth of the invincibility of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) by giving it a bloody nose during a bold skirmish in Nathu La, Sikkim . The PLA realised in good measure that the Indian Army was no longer a pushover. It may be worth noting that it was because of Sagat, that we continue to retain Nathu La.

Sagat has the distinction of being the first to have used helicopters in the offensive role. 4/5 GR was the first battalion to be lifted on December 07, 1971 followed by 4 Guards. 'Paunchy' Maj Chandrakanth Singh was in the first helicopter flown by Sqn Ldr CS Sandhu with Gp Capt Chandan Singh and Lt Col (later Lt Gen) Himmeth Singh, Commanding Officer 4 Guards, sitting in the hold. Maj (later Lt Gen) G S Sihota had flown Sagat earlier. Sandhu had also done a recce of the Landing Zone (LZ) so could lead his squadron himself. They formed the vanguard of heliborne operations conducted over the Meghna on December 9, 1971. The rest of 57 Division, that is, two brigades worth, built up on them by helicopters and other river craft. He got the best out of the Indian Air Force (IAF) with Gp Capt Chandan Singh rising to the occasion every time. They even agreed to bomb out of transport aircraft!

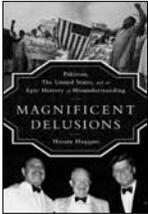
Randhir was there, on the ring side as the enemy Border Out Post (BOP) at Dhalai/ Kamalpur was being tackled in the now so-called "cold start" doctrine. Sagat was at last happy with the spine at long last shown by the attacking battalion and appeared not the least worried by the very heavy casualties. However, he had learnt his lesson: he did not get involved in headlong slogging matches later in the Bangladesh operations thereafter. Except for this account of the Dhalai

battle, I am yet to come across another one, including in the Official History of the 1971 War of the Ministry of Defence (MoD).

Sagat was not without his foibles and failings though, and juicy ‘stories’ of his escapades are legion. He, famously, was not on the best of terms with his immediate superior, Gen Aurora or even with Sam Bahadur, his Chief. The author has most meticulously put together incidents and anecdotes from the life story of Padma Bhushan Lt Gen Sagat Singh, PVSM. He has done so on the basis of extensive research and wide-ranging interaction. The excellent and very impressive bibliography and acknowledgements are testimony to this. Seven maps/sketches lend to clarity in comprehension. An index eases reference. Many photos add to the nostalgia. This book is highly recommended to students of military history and those of outstanding military commanders.

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Review by Lt Col Ashutosh Sharma (Retd) 3 GR.



**Magnificent Delusions: Pakistan, the United States  
and an Epic History of Misunderstanding**

*Husain Haqqani*

Thomson Press, 415 pages, \$28.99

*Magnificent Delusions*, written by Husain Haqqani, ably documents the double-dealing of the Pakistani leadership while courting a relationship with the USA since its independence. Being criticised as a pro-American within his country, Haqqani has made more enemies in Pakistan with this book. An active player in Pakistani politics since 1989, he was the trusted advisor to the late Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto since 1993. He was forced into exile during Gen Pervez Musharraf’s military dictatorship. On Pakistan’s return to the fold of democracy, he was appointed Pakistan’s Ambassador to the USA in 2008. In 2011, the ‘Memogate’ scandal cost him his job as Ambassador as he was accused of seeking the USA’s help in subduing the Pakistani military. Later, a commission appointed by the Pakistan Supreme Court termed him a traitor, making it dangerous for him to return to Pakistan. These days, he lives in Boston, USA, and

is a Professor at Boston University and Director for South and Central Asia at the Hudson Institute.

*Magnificent Delusions* is a candid account of the troubled relationship that has existed between Pakistan and the US over 65 years. The political retribution may have coloured the narrative, nonetheless, it provides an insight into the thinking and dealings of the Pakistani establishment and the blind pursuit of national interests by the USA. The book is a fusion of history, political analysis and social critique on the Pakistani state.

The author has captured the shifting strands in the relationship between Pakistan and the US through the prism of time, based on in-depth research and his being “witness to some critical events in US-Pakistan relations”. The seven chapters of the book have been well structured and aptly titled. In Chapter One titled “False Start”, the author has succinctly outlined the Pakistani establishment’s dilemma of providing direction and identity to the newborn nation based on religious ideology, tracing its roots to 712 AD and the arrival of the first Muslim conqueror. The developments during the first two years of Pakistan’s existence overshadowed the future path Pakistan took in subsequent decades. Its strategy of survival hinged on being a “Western ally” for economic and military assistance to counter the Indian and Afghanistan threats, and “anti-Western Islamist vocabulary” to unite the country, contrary to the East Pakistani sentiments, led to disharmony. The demise of Jinnah in 1948 and the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951 left a leadership void in Pakistan. The splintering of the Muslim League and frequent changes of government ministers, with a clamouring for Islamic *Sharia* law, led to increased reliance on the military to provide stability, and gave rise to the emergence of “fractious feudal politics” by Generals and civil servants.

In Chapters Two and Three, titled “Aid, Arms and Bases” and “A Split and a Tilt”, Haqqani puts into perspective the Pakistani *raison d’être* of seeking military assistance and the US policy based on their “impressions of the people that ran the country instead of analysing the policies of the country”. It goes on to show the ambivalent US attitude in chiding Ayub or Yahya Khan regarding Pakistan’s state of affairs, especially concerning the genocide being perpetrated in East Pakistan. For Kissinger and Nixon, the newly crafted covert Sino-US relationship initiated through Yahya held precedence. The “Blood Telegram” despatch by the Americans posted at Dhaka showed the US government’s lack of “morals”, and points to the US’ “national interest narrowly defined”. Haqqani’s assertion that Nixon and Kissinger did not know the “propensity of the Pakistani General’s self-

deception” shows his pro-American bias. The US ‘tilt’ failed to prevent Pakistan’s ‘split’ and laid the foundation of mistrust. While Pakistan still sought economic and military aid, its leaders decided to “neither to depend on the US nor to trust it”.

In Chapter 4, “Picking Up the Pieces”, Haqqani has encapsulated the endeavours made by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to resurrect the defeated, demoralised nation with a dismal image. His deft handling of the USA and the Arab world, however, helped him in creating a favourable international environment, but his authoritarian domestic regime, coupled with his two critical decisions—the appointment of Gen Zia-ul-Haq as Army Chief and the parliamentary elections—had grave implications. The rigged election and allegation of the US funding the opposition created a political imbroglio. The demand for an Islamic government grew vociferously, polarising Pakistan completely. The political standoff created conditions for a military takeover by Gen Zia who has been described as “A Most Superb and Patriotic Liar” in Chapter 5 of the book. This chapter covers Zia’s exploits with the US, the Arab world, the Soviet Union and India. The Soviet intervention brought international recognition to Zia who saw an opportunity in allying with the US to engage in bleeding the Soviets through irregular warfare. He also saw an opportunity in diverting the US aid towards creating conditions to foment trouble in Indian Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir states. Zia’s game plan was to obfuscate from US intelligence Pakistan’s nuclear weaponisation programme while securing military aid and weapons to modernise the Pakistan Army, and the operational autonomy to pursue its own agenda. Zia’s dream of creating an Islamic renaissance extending “to the Soviet Muslims” could not be realised due to his death in a mysterious plane crash. Zia’s daughter accused the US of eliminating Zia. Haqqani rightly points out that the US’ support to a military dictator did little in influencing Pakistani policies as “Pakistan’s state ideology and its perceived national interests were simply not congruent with those of the US”.

Chapters Six and Seven have been enlivened with Haqqani’s personal accounts of the political power play between the Zia propped Nawaz Sharif, the US supported Benazir Bhutto and the role played by the Army and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) as an extra-constitutional authority. It also provides a peep into the clandestine operation undertaken by Pakistan for its nuclear programme, its stepped up sponsoring of groups for *jihad* across the world, and its proxy war against India. The post Cold War US leanings towards India and the ISI’s disenchantment with Washington, the Pakistani predicament after the Indian

nuclear tests in May 1998, Gen Pervez Musharraf's explanation of allying with the US on the Global War Against Terrorism (GWOT) and the constant evoking of domestic compulsions as negotiating tactics with the US provide interesting reading. The narration gives credence that Pakistan's leaders were aware of Osama bin Laden's location at Abbotabad. According to Haqqani, terrorism and the military have been Pakistan's greatest problems. Pakistan's worldview has not changed since the times of Ayub Khan and if it does not look into the global realities, its relationship with the US will remain delusional.

*Magnificent Delusions* is a book overly dependent on US sources and it provides cursory details about Pakistani leaders during critical situations. The book may be criticised by some as a ploy by Haqqani to hit back at institutions that he think are against him. While one may desire a greater account of his ambassadorship, the book, however, covers the chosen narrative superbly. It is a good read for those who are in the business of defence and diplomacy. India will remain an important stakeholder in South Asian security and the contours of the future US-Pakistan relationship cannot discount it.

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Review by Col Vivek Verma, Deputy Director at CLAWS.



**Kautilya—On War—The Military Wisdom of  
The *Arthasashstra***

*Brig Chandra B Khanduri (Retd)*

Greenfield Publishers, 338 pages, Rs 595/-

With this interpretation of the ancient *Arthasashatra*, a treatise that was first written in Sanskrit, Chandra B Khanduri, who is essentially a historian and biographer, has indeed emerged as a regular 'thinker' scholar and Kautilya has emerged as good as any contemporary soldier-statesman *par excellence*, right and proper in the mould of Hannibal, Alexander of Macedonia, Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, Oliver Cromwell, Eisenhower, de Gaulle, Marshal, Powell and even, *may be*, Petraus *et al!* Else, his relevance to the modern times could have been questioned, especially in the West and in China. Essentially, a treatise on state craft, the *Arthasashstra* also delves into the art of war.

Also known as Chanakya, or Vishnugupta Kautilya, he was the key advisor of and the genius behind the strategy undertaken by, King Chandra Gupta Maurya (317-293 B.C.) who stemmed the advance of the satraps left behind by the Macedonian Alexander. The author's dexterity with logic is brought out in full measure when one notices the effort at synthesising of the ancient with the modern, when the precepts of first century BC and Kautilya are co-related with those of Sun Tzu, Liddel Hart, and Clausewitz and wars through the millennia. However, there are no references or allusions, except in passing, to net-centric warfare, the 'in thing' now. There is no question of air-land warfare, an inescapable modern-day concept for success. Thus, in a way, in this book, Kautilya's relevance gets overridden by the underlying thread of myth-making, hero-worship and the extolling of the value in ancient myths of the high ideals and the superiority of the Mauryan/ Magadhan thought on war and statesmanship. Be that as it may, it is one thing to acclaim ancient and hackneyed thought and quite another to justify it as sacrosanct and 'all-time relevant', just like many of the scriptures worldwide. It may be noted that amongst the ancient Indian contributions to warfare, perhaps, the war-elephant ranks prime, the Bangalore torpedo came much later. Sadly, the war-elephant got outdated in its very first engagement in foreign combat, in 326 BC, in the battle of the Hydapses (Jhelum).

That being so, therefore, does the very aim of this very tireless and painstaking effort get somewhat negated? Some food for thought here for the critic, one will agree. Whatever, *Kautilaya –On War* highlights the military wisdom of Kautilya's thought, on war *per se*, indeed. And the *Arthashastra* remains a repository of ideas (essentially of the bygone times) on war-fighting and governance and undoubtedly so—period. The *Arthashastra* is divided into 15 books, 150 chapters, 180 sections and 6,000 *slokas*. Kautilya has covered the subject in depth and offers insights into various spheres of statecraft, war and diplomacy. 'Artha' of *Arthashastra* stands for wealth, but it has a much wider significance. As enunciated by Kautilya, the wealth of a nation is both the territory of the state and the inhabitants of the state. Thus, economics is at the heart of *Arthashastra*. A healthy balance between the state and subjects was essential and was to be achieved by maintaining law and order and adequate administrative machinery. Thus, the *Arthashastra* also contains the enforcement of laws (*Dandaniti*) and the details of the organisation of the civil service and the duties of state officials.

Fast forwarding it to the modern times, the *Arthashastra* comes out as a mixture of both what we applaud today and what we consider to be reprehensible. This is because, when Kautilya wrote his book, about 2,300 years ago, extreme forms of governance were commonplace and the primary task of the ruling monarch was primacy of his state and a policy of expansionism. No one had heard of human rights, freedom of the press and the now growing abhorrence to a war involving bloodletting. No one could even imagine cyber-warfare.

On the plus side, it needs to be reiterated that Chanakya's thought and pronouncements on all round governance of the state and war have been discussed principle-wise by Khanduri. These are well laid out with brief summations, in point form, as curtain raisers in each chapter. This lends to ease of comprehension. There is a part in which India's post-independence wars have been incisively analysed in the light of the *Arthasashtra*. This will find ready takers amongst the intellectuals in the Indian military fraternity. Whether they agree with Khanduri, or not, is indeed, a moot point.

To some, a cogent and dispassionate analysis of the *Arthashastra* reveals stark similarities between the problems faced by Kautilya's ideal state and the modern one, facing the scourge of terrorism and insurgencies, especially in Southeast Asia. Present-day conventional, and Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) adhere to ancient patterns, and some think that we need to believe that they can be overcome by age-old techniques. A study of Kautilya's military strategy will throw some light on the in-depth knowledge of land warfare in ancient India, and will, if nothing else, enhance the understanding of, and pride in, our ancient civilisation, its abundantly rich heritage and the thinkers of the times. It must, however, be noted, that the *Arthasashtra per se* does not set down dogma, but rather delves into a range of flexible options. A relevant book for the serious-minded research scholar seeking background information on warfare .

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Review by Lt Col Ashutosh Sharma (Retd) 3 GR.