Shakti Series and India's Nuclear Weapons Identity

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In May of this year, India commemorated the silver jubilee of its nuclear weapon identity. The identity came with an assertion through the 1998 nuclear tests, which signalled to the world that India is ready to be called a nuclear weapon country with the full knowledge of the cost and benefits associated with it.The abandonment of its long-observed ambiguity presented a new set of challenges. Indian diplomacy very dexterously managed those challenges. Slowly, the international community reconciled with nuclear India and adjusted many of the regimes to find a place for India. The initial resistance in the Western capitals and their intelligentsia has almost disappeared.Notwithstanding India's ambiguous nuclear stance, the leading global countries were frequently initiating sanctions and curbs against the Indian nuclear and space programmes. However, sanctions and curbs forced India to develop its nuclear weapons indigenously. Quite interestingly, a delivery vehicle like the nuclear-capable aircraft was not so much under the controlling radar, but other nuclear delivery vehicles such as cruise and ballistic missiles were very much under it. India indigenized its ballistic missile development, too. The Agni series of ballistic missiles is a wonderful case of Indian scientists making the nation proud.Today the film, Oppenheimer, is creating a new wave. It has triggered discussions on science and ethics. The quoting of the Bhagwat Gita in the Trinity Test—the test before the use of nuclear weapons always generated interest in Oppenheimer, if not in the American bomb. Unfortunately, Oppenheimer's ethics and thinking isolated him from the American establishment and the American state.India had a greater nuclear learning experience. What scared Oppenheimer, that the world may end if science is not controlled, is innate in the Indian knowledge tradition. The nuclear bomb cannot be left uncontrolled to acquire the status of God deciding about the kaal. India's ethos got reflected in its nuclear doctrine, though several nomenclatures such as No First Use and deterrence were borrowed from the modern nuclear lexicon. These terms were basically borrowed to communicate the non-aggressive nature of Indian nuclear policy and doctrine.The Indian war tradition has ideas for when and how to use a weapon that have devastating consequences. The Indian knowledge tradition recommends that a weapon like Brahmastra is to be used prudently. It is not a normal war weapon. Nuclear weapons, which are capable of having cataclysmic corollaries, cannot be allowed to end humanity and the world. Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee had made it very clear that he does not intend to rely on warfighting doctrine and policy. Since then, deterrence has been the policy, and breaking down the deterrent arrangement may lead to massive retaliation.Other than doctrinal restraints, India did not abort its nuclear disarmament policy. It envisions a world without nuclear weapons. However, that does not mean that it will abandon it unilaterally. Doing so would place it at the mercy of those nuclear weapons countries that are hostile to India and have hegemonic tendencies in global affairs.The 1998 tests were named Shakti. The Indian idea of Shakti ought not to be translated into power. It is far more comprehensive. It has several manifestations, including Jayanti (ever victorious), Mangala (the bestower of auspiciousness), Kali (beyond Kal or time), Bhdrakali (controller of life and death),

Shiva (ever-auspicious), and Dhatri (supporter of all beings). Certainly, it is more than the contemporary concept of comprehensive power, which focuses basically on the source. The Indian idea conveys both the means and the ends.

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