

**Happymon Jacob, *The Line of Control: Travelling with the Indian and Pakistani Armies*, [Penguin Viking, 2018], 288.**

*The Line of Control: Travelling with the Indian and Pakistani Armies* is a travelogue by Happymon Jacob, an academic from India. The author is an associate professor of disarmament studies at JNU, New Delhi. He also publishes a column in daily newspaper The Hindu, hosts a weekly TV show and has been a prominent participant in Track-II dialogues between India and Pakistan. He has written several books on foreign policy, defense studies and Kashmir.

The book under review is divided into seven chapters; each chapter encompasses the experiences the author had, on both sides of the LOC and India and Pakistan. Happymon presents an insightful and distressing account of the lives of the common people living on both sides of the LoC, and the soldiers who are guarding one of the most perilous and crisis prone boundaries of the world.

The author describes his visit to the soldiers deployed on both sides of the LoC. He is all praise for the courage and resilience of the civilians and military personnel facing constant danger. During his visits, the author finds extraordinary similarities between the two sides and the difficulties and hardships the army personnel face during their tour of duty in border areas. Besides describing his experience during his visit to Pakistan and Indian-held Kashmir, and discussions with senior retired and serving military officers and academics, the author provides an insight into the strategic thinking in both states.

In the first chapter, the author explores the causes and consequences of CFVs (Cease Fire Violations) on the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir. Thousands of incidents of CFVs have been recorded by both countries since the cease fire came into effect. He writes that he had interviewed some Indian and Pakistani military personnel about CFVs during his visit to the LOC, in order to get their perspective on this important issue. The explanations given by them are the most

interesting bits in the book. The author describes it as the perfect symmetry of firing.

Two reasons which frequently trigger CFVs are tactical and political, the author explains. Tactical factors include the personality traits of local commanders posted in a particular sector. The commanders often test the resolve of the newly deployed unit on the other side. Political factor is underpinned, according to the author, by the Pakistan government's policy to keep the Kashmir issue alive. Kashmir is a core political dispute between India and Pakistan, it is not just a border dispute and both countries are trying to promote their interests in Kashmir. He also points to another reason, the difficult terrain of the area; civilians belonging to AJK who live very close to the LoC, often lose their way and cross the line which triggers fire from the Indian side. He points out the absence of standard operating procedures in dealing with violations.

In the second and third chapters, Jacob writes about the difficulty he faced in getting permission to visit the Pakistani side of LoC and meet some serving and retired senior military officers in Pakistan despite having visited Pakistan several times earlier to attend conferences and seminars. Jacob's tales of his travels inside Pakistan and India are filled with the usual elements, for instance, the ever-present minders following him wherever he went etc. But his description of such incidents in a lighter tone makes it an interesting reading. He narrates an incident about the prolonged argument between the minders following the author and soldiers guarding the entry to Lahore Cantonment. According to the travel documents, the author had no permission to visit army areas. In spite of intervention by a recently retired general's house staff, the retired general had to obtain special permission for him to enter the cantonment area.

In the fourth chapter, he writes about his experience of meeting the victims of CFV by Indian army at the LoC. Happymon states that when he was in the Dharmasal village in Azad Kashmir; he met several CFV

survivors including one young boy who was injured in the neck during a standoff earlier that year. The boy was describing in detail how he got shot, his teen aged friends started making fun of him for making ‘a big deal’ for getting shot, which was not very uncommon in that village. Jacob describes the experience the worst moment of his journey in view of trivializing of the boy’s experience by his friends and associates.

In the fifth chapter, he recalls his visit to the General Head Quarters of Pakistan and having a discussion with Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen Bilal Akbar, which was specially arranged for him on a Sunday, a weekly holiday. Jacob happens to be the first Indian to have visited GHQ. Perhaps, the level of access accorded to an Indian scholar by Pakistan would never be given to a Pakistani scholar by India.

In the sixth and seventh chapters, the author argues that foreign policy in India and Pakistan is heavily influenced by TV channels. Media incites the nationalist feelings which are sustained on hate and antipathy for the other, thus restricting the space for the governments to find a way out of the dilemma. He blames the ultra-nationalistic mindset behind their hostile relations.

The author’s objective conclusion is that after witnessing the problems of the people living near the LOC, the underlying tragedy surrounding the miseries of the Kashmiris living near the Line of Control cannot be overstated. These people are the victims of hyper-nationalism in India and Pakistan, which represents a failure of the political classes in both the countries. The author however does not mention the violation of human rights in Indian-held Kashmir by their security forces. Kashmiris suffer more from human rights violation by India than CFV incidents.

Writing about the Kashmir issue, the author blames Pakistan for sponsoring militancy in Indian-held Kashmir. It is important to highlight that the Kashmir freedom struggle has wrongly been termed

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as an insurgency and India has denied the Kashmiri people their right of self-determination as enshrined in the United Nations resolutions.

Happymon Jacob's book is the first book where an author was able to visit both sides of erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, observe the security posts on both sides of LOC and get perspectives of Indian and Pakistani military officers. Written in an easy to read style and interspersed with interesting anecdotes, Traveling with the Indian and Pakistani Armies would make interesting reading for an evening when one is not inclined to read a voluminous book on India Pakistan relation and human rights situation in Indian Held Kashmir.

***Reviewed By Maryyum Masood, Assistant Research Program Coordinator, Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS), Islamabad.***