

Panchsheel: Born in Sin

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Recently, I wrote an op-ed article pointing out the poor geographical knowledge of the Indian media. Unfortunately, this ignorance is not limited to geography and the media; it often extends to history and Government officials. During his visit to China, External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh announced: *"India and China will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Panchsheel, the five principles of peaceful co-existence, in a befitting manner through jointly agreed activities, including the release of a commemorative stamp."* In Beijing, the Indian Ambassador to China will organise a function with the Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing as the chief guest. The communiqué adds that the five principles were jointly initiated by India, China and Myanmar in 1954. Mr Natwar Singh had it wrong twice: The "Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between Tibet region of China and India", today remembered as the Panchsheel, was signed by Chang Han-Fu, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China and Nedyam Raghavan, the then Indian Ambassador to China, in the Great Hall of the People on April 29, 1954. The Chinese Government in a letter dated December 3, 1961, made it clear: *"It came into effect on June 3, the same year (1954) upon ratification by both parties."* The same letter states: *"According to Article 6 of the Agreement, the Agreement shall remain in force for eight years, so it is due to expire and cease to be in force on June 3, 1962."*

It was never renewed by Nehru, who, by that time, had learned to India's cost about the treachery of Mao's Government. Today, the Congress is rewriting history by changing the dates of the events. It is

forgetting that Nehru himself refused to extend the validity of the Agreement. The idea that the Panchsheel Agreement was a tripartite Agreement between India, China and Burma is also wrong. Nehru was keen that it should remain a bilateral accord which could be emulated by other countries. During Zhou Enlai's visit to Delhi in June 1954 (two months after the signature of the Agreement), Nehru pointed out: *"Following the example of India and China and then China and Burma, India and Burma could sign a Panchsheel type of declaration and then China and Indonesia and then India and Indonesia and so on"*. How then did Panchsheel become a tripartite agreement? That day Zhou politely told his Indian counterpart: *"What Your Excellency suggests is a very good idea. I shall study Your Excellency's suggestion..."* We should remember that these events occurred at the time of tough negotiations in Geneva: China and the Western powers were trying to find a solution to the Indochina tangle. The US threatened to intervene militarily. For the Machiavellian Chinese Premier, the Five Principles, and specially the *"mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity"*, came at an appropriate time to stop the eventual US involvement in the peninsula. It was his only interest at that time. The South Block bureaucrats have further forgotten that the last days of June 1954 are notorious for the first incursions of the PLA on Indian territory. It was the beginning of an exchange of hundreds of letters between Delhi and Beijing on the boundary issue, which ended in war. The Chinese entered Indian territory at a place called Barahoti, north of Badrinath. However, the Chinese cleverly complained to Nehru: "According to a report received from the Tibet Region of China, over 30 Indian troops armed with rifles crossed the Niti pass on June 29, 1954, and intruded into Wu-Je of the Ali Area of the Tibet Region of China. (Wu-Je or Barahoti is about one day's journey south from the Niti-la, the border pass). The above happening is not in conformity with the principles of non-aggression and friendly co-existence

between China and India, and the spirit of the Joint Communiqué issued recently by the prime ministers of China and India. It was not an Indian intrusion; in a typically Maoist manoeuvre, Chinese troops trespassed into Indian soil, claimed some Indian territory and then accused India of violation. This was the beginning of the Great Helmsman's "protracted warfare" against India. Of course, Delhi denied the reports, but this did not stop Beijing's intrusions and claims. But there is more to the infamous Panchsheel. Indeed, it had nothing to do with Five Great Principles. It was merely India's obituary for Tibet which ceased to exist as an independent nation. Its clauses cancelled the Shimla Convention of 1914 that had defined the relations between India, Tibet and China. In 1958, Acharya Kripalani put the agreement in perspective when he told the Lok Sabha: *"This great doctrine was born in sin, because it was enunciated to put the seal of our approval upon the destruction of an ancient nation which was associated with us spiritually and culturally. It was a nation which wanted to live its own life and it ought to have been allowed to live it..."*

The Indian Prime Minister's answer was a poor joke: "Born in Sind?" (Kripalani was a Sindhi.) But it took less than four years for Nehru to realise his folly. In the course of my research on Panchsheel and relations between India and Tibet, I met a couple of persons who had encounters with Nehru during the last weeks of his life (May 1964). He had told them: *"I have been betrayed by a friend. I am sorry for Tibet."* Will Nehru's heirs realise this when they celebrate the Five Great Principles? Unfortunately, they are so busy "detoxifying" whatever was done by the previous Government, that they will undoubtedly forget the last words of their mentor.