Weapons of mass destruction have a peculiar fascination. They can generate a warm glow of strength and power carefully divorced from the brutality and genocide on which the potency of the weapons depends. The great epics - from Iliad and Ramayana to Kalevala and Nibelungenlied - provide thrilling accounts of the might of special weapons, which not only are powerful in themselves, but also greatly empower their possessors. As India, along with Pakistan, goes down the route of cultivating nuclear weapons, the imagined radiance of perceived power is hard to miss.

The Moral and the Prudential

Perceptions can deceive. It has to be asked whether powerful weapons in general and nuclear armaments in particular can be expected - invariably or even typically - to strengthen and empower their possessor. An important prudential issue is involved here. There is, of course, also the question of ethics, and in particular the rightness or wrongness of a nuclear policy. That important issue can be distinguished from the question of practical benefit or loss of a nation from a particular policy. We have good grounds to be interested in both the questions - the prudential and the ethical - but also reason enough not to see the two issues as disparate and totally delinked from each other. Our behaviour towards each other cannot be divorced from what we make of the ethics of one another's pursuits, and the reasons of morality have, as a result, prudential importance as well. It is in this light that I want to examine the challenges of nuclear policy in the subcontinent in general and in India in particular.

Whether, or to what extent, powerful weapons empower a nation is not a new question. Indeed, well before the age of nuclear armament began, Rabindranath Tagore had expressed a general doubt about the fortifying effects of military strength. If "in his eagerness for power," Tagore had argued in 1917, a nation "multiplies his weapons at the cost of his soul, then it is he who is in much greater danger than his enemies." Tagore was not as uncompromisingly a pacifist as Mahatma Gandhi was, and his warning against the dangers of alleged strength through more and bigger weapons related to the need for ethically scrutinizing the functions of these weapons and the exact uses to which they are to be put as well as the practical importance of the reactions and counteractions of others. The "soul"
to which Tagore referred includes, as he explained, the need for humanity and understanding in international relations.

Tagore was not merely making a moral point, but also one of pragmatic importance, taking into account the responses from others that would be generated by one's pursuit of military might. His immediate concern in the quoted statement was with Japan's move towards extensive nationalism. Tagore was a great admirer of Japan and the Japanese, but felt very disturbed by its shift from economic and social development to aggressive militarization. The heavy sacrifices that were forced on Japan later on, through military defeat and nuclear devastation, Tagore did not live to see (he died in 1941), but they would have only added to Tagore's intense sorrow. But the conundrum that he invoked, about the weakening effects of military power, has remained active in the writings of contemporary Japanese writers, perhaps mostly notably Kenzaburo Oe.

**Science, Politics and Nationalism**

The leading architect of India's ballistic missile programme and a key figure in the development of nuclear weapons is Dr. Abdul Kalam. He comes from a Muslim family, is a scientist of great distinction, and has a very strong commitment to Indian nationalism. Abdul Kalam is also a very amiable person (as I had discovered when I had been closeted with him at an honorary degree ceremony at Jadavpur University in Calcutta in 1990, many years before the blasts). Kalam's philanthropic concerns are strong, and he has a record of helping in welfare-related causes, such as charitable work for mentally impaired children in India.

Kalam recorded his proud reaction as he watched the Indian nuclear explosions in Pokhran, on the edge of the Thar desert in Rajasthan, in May 1998: "I heard the earth thundering below our feet and rising ahead of us in terror. It was a beautiful sight." It is rather remarkable that the admiration for sheer power should be so strong in the reactions of even such a kind-hearted person, but perhaps the force of nationalism played a role here, along with the general fascination that powerful weapons seem to generate. The intensity of Kalam's nationalism may be well concealed by the mildness of his manners, but it was evident enough in his statements after the blasts ("for 2,500 years India has never invaded anybody"), no less than his joy at India's achievement ("a triumph of Indian science and technology").

This was, in fact, the second round of nuclear explosions in the same site, in Pokhran; the first was under Indira Gandhi's Prime Ministership in 1974. But at that time the whole event was kept under a shroud of secrecy, partly in line with the Government's ambiguity about the correctness of the nuclear weaponization of India. While China's nuclearization clearly had a strong influence in the decision of the Gandhi government to develop its own nuclear potential (between 1964 and 1974 China had conducted 15 nuclear explosions), the official government position...
was that the 1974 explosion in Pokhran was strictly for "peaceful purposes," and that India remained committed to doing without nuclear weapons. The first Pokhran tests were, thus, followed by numerous affirmations of India's rejection of the nuclear path, rather than any explicit savouring of the destructive power of nuclear energy.

It was very different in the summer of 1998 following the events that have come to be called Pokhran-II. By then there was strong support from various quarters. This included, of course, the Bharatiya Janata Party (or the BJP), which had included the development of nuclear weapons in its electoral manifesto, and led the political coalition that came to office after the February elections in 1998. While previous Indian governments had considered following up the 1974 blast by new ones, they had stopped short of doing it, but with the new - more intensely nationalist - government the lid was lifted, and the blasts of Pokhran-II occurred within three months of its coming to power. The BJP, which has built up its base in recent years by capturing and to a great extent fanning Hindu nationalism, received in the elections only a minority of Hindu votes, and a fortiori a minority of total votes in the multireligious country. (India has nearly as many Muslims as Pakistan and many more Muslims than Bangladesh, and also of course Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Parsees, and other communities.) But even with a minority of parliamentary seats (182 out of 545), BJP could head an alliance - a fairly ad hoc alliance - of many different political factions, varying from strictly regional parties (such as AIADMK, PMK and MDMK of Tamil Nadu, Haryana Lok Dal and Haryana Vikas Party of Haryana, Biju Janata Dal of Orissa, West Bengal Trinamool Congress of West Bengal) to specific community-based parties (including the Akali Dal, the party of Sikh nationalism), and some breakaway factions of other parties. As the largest group within the coalition, the BJP was the dominant force in the 1998 Indian government (as it is in the present coalition government since the new elections that had to be called in late 1999), which gives it much more authority than a minority party could otherwise expect to get in Indian politics.

BJP's interest in following up the 1974 blast by further tests and by actually developing nuclear weapons received strong support from an active pro-nuclear lobby, which includes many Indian scientists. The advocacy by scientists and defence experts was quite important in making the idea of a nuclear India at least plausible to many, if not quite fully acceptable yet as a part of a reflective equilibrium of Indian thinking. As Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik put it in their well-researched and well-argued book, "The most ardent advocates of nuclear weapons have constantly sought to invest these weapons with a religious-like authority and importance - to emphasize the awe and wonder rather than the revulsion and horror - to give them an accepted and respectable place in the mass popular culture of our times."

The Thrill of Power
Kalam's excitement at the power of nuclear explosions was not, of course, unusual as a reaction to the might of weapons. The excitement generated by destructive power, dissociated from any hint of potential genocide, has been a well-observed psychological state in the history of the world. Even the normally unruffled J. Robert Oppenheimer, the principal architect of the world's first nuclear explosion, was moved to quote the two-millennia old Bhagavad Gita (Oppenheimer knew Sanskrit well enough to get his Gita right) as he watched the atmospheric explosion of the first atom bomb in a U.S. desert near the village of Oscuro on 16 July 1945: "the radiance of a thousand suns....burst into the sky."

Oppenheimer went on to quote further from Bhagavad Gita: "I am become Death, the shatterer of worlds." That image of death would show its naked and ruthless face next month in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (what Kenzaburo Oe has called "the most terrifying monster lurking in the darkness of Hiroshima"). As the consequences of nuclearization became clearer to Oppenheimer, he went on to campaign against nuclear arms, and with special fervour against the Hydrogen bomb. But in July 1945, in the experimental station in the U.S. desert, "Jornala del Muerto" (translatable as "Death Tract"), there was only sanitized abstractness firmly detached from any actual killing.

The thousand suns have now come home to the subcontinent to roost. The five Indian nuclear explosions in Pokhran on 11 and 13 May 1998 were quickly followed by six Pakistani blasts in the Chagai hills the following month. "The whole mountain turned white," was Pakistan Government's charmed response. The subcontinent was by now caught in an overt nuclear confrontation, masquerading as further empowerment of each country.

These developments have received fairly uniform condemnation abroad, but also considerable favour inside India and Pakistan, though we must be careful not to exaggerate the actual extent of domestic support. Pankaj Mishra did have reason enough to conclude, two weeks after the blasts, that "the nuclear tests have been extremely popular, particularly among the urban middle class." But that was too soon to see the long-run effects on Indian public opinion. Furthermore, the enthusiasm of the celebrators is more easily pictured on the television than the deep doubts of the sceptics. Indeed, the euphoria that the television pictures captured on the Indian streets immediately following the blasts concentrated on the reaction of those who did celebrate and chose to come out and rejoice. It was accompanied by doubts and reproach of a great many people who took no part in the festivities, who did not figure in the early television pictures, and whose doubts and opposition found increasingly vocal expression over time. As Amitav Ghosh, the novelist, noted in his extensive review of Indian public reactions to the bomb for The New Yorker, "the tests have divided the country more deeply than ever."

It is also clear that the main political party that chose to escalate India's nuclear adventure, namely BJP, did not get any substantial electoral benefit from the
Pokhran blasts. In fact quite the contrary, as the analyses of local voting since the 1998 blasts tend to show. By the time India went to polls again, in September 1999, the BJP had learned the lesson sufficiently to barely mention the nuclear tests in their campaign with the voters. And yet, as N. Ram (the political commentator and the Editor of *Frontline*) has cogently argued in his anti-nuclear book *Riding the Nuclear Tiger*, we "must not make the mistake of assuming that since the Hindu Right has done badly out of Pokhran-II, the issue has been decisively won."

Indian attitudes towards nuclear weaponization are characterized not only by ambiguity and moral doubts, but also by some uncertainty as to what is involved in making gainful use of these weapons. It may be the case, as several opinion polls have indicated, that public opinion in India has a much smaller inclination, compared with Pakistani public opinion, to assume that nuclear weapons will ever be actually used in a subcontinental war. But since the effectiveness of these weapons depends ultimately on the willingness to use them in some situations, there is an issue of coherence of thought that has to be addressed here. Implicitly or explicitly an eventuality of actual use has to be among the possible scenarios that must be contemplated, if some benefit is to be obtained from the possession and deployment of nuclear weapons. To hold the belief that nuclear weapons are useful but must never be used lacks cogency and can indeed be seen to be a result of the odd phenomenon that Arundhati Roy (the author of the wonderful novel *The God of Small Things*) has called "the end of imagination."

As Roy has also brought out with much clarity, the nature and results of an actual all-out nuclear war are almost impossible to imagine in a really informed way. Arundhati Roy describes a likely scenario thus:

> Our cities and forests, our fields and villages will burn for days. Rivers will turn to poison. The air will become fire. The wind will spread the flames. When everything there is to burn has burned and the fires die, smoke will rise and shut out the sun.

It is hard to think that the possibility of such an eventuality can be a part of a wise policy of national self-defence.

**Established Nuclear Powers and Subcontinental Grumbles**

One of the problems in getting things right arises from a perceived sense of inadequacy, prevalent in India, of any alternative policy that would be entirely satisfactory and would thus help to firm up a rejection of nuclear weapons through the transparent virtues of a resolutely non-nuclear path (as opposed to the horrors of the nuclear route). This is perhaps where the gap in perceptions is strongest between the discontent and disgust with which the subcontinental nuclear adventures are viewed in the West and the ambiguity that exists on this subject.
within India (not to mention the support of the nuclear route that comes from the Government, the BJP, and India's pro-nuclear lobby). It is difficult to understand what is going on in the subcontinent without placing it solidly in a global context.

Nuclear strategists in South Asia tend to resent deeply the international condemnation of Indian and Pakistani policies and decisions that does not take note of the nuclear situation in the world as a whole. They are surely justified in this resentment, and also right to question the censoriousness of Western critics of subcontinental nuclear adventures without adequately examining the ethics of their own nuclear policies, including preservation of an established and deeply unequal nuclear hegemony, with very little attempt to achieve global denuclearization. The Defence Minister of India, George Fernandes, told Amitav Ghosh: "Why should the five nations that have nuclear weapons tell us how to behave and what weapons we should have?" This was matched by the remark of Qazi Hussain Ahmed, the leader of Jamaat-e-Islami (Pakistan's principal religious party), to Ghosh: "...we don't accept that five nations should have nuclear weapons and others shouldn't. We say, 'Let the five also disarm.'"

The inquiry into the global context is indeed justified, but what we have to examine is whether the placing of the subcontinental substory within a general frame of a bigger global story really changes the assessment that we can reasonably make of what is going on in India and Pakistan. In particular, to argue that their nuclear policies are deeply mistaken does not require us to dismiss the widespread resentment in the subcontinent of the smugness of the dominant global order. These complaints, even if entirely justified and extremely momentous, do not establish the sagacity of a nuclear policy that dramatically increases uncertainties within the subcontinent without achieving anything to make each country more secure. Indeed, Bangladesh is probably now the safest country to live in, in the subcontinent.

Moral Resentment and Prudential Blunder

There are, I think, two distinct issues, which need to be carefully separated. First, the world nuclear order is extremely unbalanced and there are excellent reasons to complain about the military policies of the major powers, particularly the five that have a monopoly over official nuclear status as well as over permanent membership in the Security Council of the United Nations. The second issue concerns the choices that other countries - other than the big five - face, and this has to be properly scrutinized, rather than being hijacked by resentment of the oligopoly of the power to terrorize. The fact that other countries, including India and Pakistan, have ground enough for grumbling about the nature of the world order, sponsored and supported by the established nuclear powers without any serious commitment to denuclearization, does not give them any reason to pursue a nuclear policy that worsens their own security and adds to the possibility of a dreadful holocaust. Moral resentment cannot justify a prudential blunder.
I have so far not commented on the economic and social costs of nuclearization and the general problem of allocation of resources. That issue is, of course, important, even though it is hard to find out exactly what the costs of the nuclear programmes are. The expenses on this are carefully hidden in both the countries. Even though it is perhaps easier to estimate the necessary information in India (given a greater need for disclosure in the Indian polity), the estimates are bound to be quite rough.

Recently, C. Rammanohar Reddy, a distinguished journalist at the major daily called The Hindu, has estimated that the cost of nuclearization is something around half a percentage of the gross domestic product per year. This might not sound like much, but it is large enough if we consider the alternative uses of these resources. For example, it has been estimated that the additional costs of providing elementary education for every child with neighbourhood schools at every location in the country would cost roughly the same amount of money. The proportion of illiteracy in Indian adult population is still about 40 per cent, and it is about 55 per cent in Pakistan. Furthermore, there are other costs and losses as well, such as the deflection of India's scientific talents to military-related research away from more productive lines of research and also from actual economic production. The prevalence of secretive military activities also restrains open discussions in the parliament and tends to subvert traditions of democracy and free speech.

However, ultimately the argument against nuclearization is not primarily an economic one. It is rather the increased insecurity of human lives that constitutes the biggest penalty of the subcontinental nuclear adventures. That issue needs further scrutiny.

**Does Nuclear Deterrence Work?**

What of the argument that nuclear deterrence makes war between India and Pakistan less likely? Why would not the allegedly proven ability of nuclear balance, which is supposed to have kept peace in the world, be effective also in the subcontinent? I believe that this question can be answered from four different perspectives.

First, even if it were the case that the nuclearization of India and Pakistan reduces the probability of war between the two, there would be a trade off here between a lower chance of conventional war against some chance of a nuclear holocaust. No sensible decision making can concentrate only on the probability of war without taking note of the size of the penalties of war should it occur. Indeed, any significant probability of the scenario captured by Arundhati Roy's description of "the end of imagination" can hardly fail to outweigh the greater probability, if any, of the comparatively milder penalties of conventional war.
Second, there is nothing to indicate that the likelihood of conventional war is, in fact, reduced by the nuclearization of India and Pakistan. Indeed, hot on the heels of the nuclear blasts, the two countries did undergo a major military confrontation in the Kargil district in Kashmir. The Kargil conflict, which occurred within a year of the nuclear blasts of India and Pakistan, was in fact the first military conflict between the two in nearly thirty years. Many Indian commentators have argued that the confrontation, which was provoked by separatist guerrillas coming across the line of control from Pakistan (in their view, joined by army regulars), was helped by Pakistan's understanding that India would not be able to use its massive superiority in conventional forces to launch a bigger war in retaliation, precisely because it would fear a nuclear holocaust. Whether or not this analysis is right, there is clearly substance in the general reasoning that the enemy's fear of nuclear annihilation can be an argument in favour of military adventurism without expectation of a fuller retaliation from the enemy. Be that as it may, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and no matter what the explanation, nuclearization evidently has not prevented non-nuclear conflicts between India and Pakistan.

Third, the danger of accidental nuclear war is much greater in the subcontinent than it was in the cold war itself. This is not only because the checks and controls are much looser, but also because the distances involved are so small between India and Pakistan that there is little time for any conversation when a crisis might occur and a first strike were feared. Also, the much discussed hold of fundamentalist jehadists within the Pakistan military and the absence of democratic control add to the fear of a sudden flash point.

Fourth, there is a need also to assess whether the peace that the world enjoyed with nuclear deterrence during the global cold war was, in fact, predictable and causally robust. The argument for the balance of terror has been clear enough for a long time, and was most eloquently put by Winston Churchill in his last speech to the House of Commons on the 1st of March 1955. His ringing words on this ("safety will be the sturdy child of terror, and survival the twin brother of annihilation") has a mesmerizing effect, but Churchill himself did make exceptions to his rule, when he said that the logic of deterrence "does not cover the case of lunatics or dictators in the mood of Hitler when he found himself in his final dug-out."

Dictators are not unknown in the world (even in the subcontinent), and at least part-lunatics can be found with some frequency in both the countries, judging by what some eloquent commentators seem to be able to write on the nuclear issue itself. But perhaps more importantly, we have reason to note that risks have been taken also by people with impeccable credentials on sanity and lucidity. To give just one example (a rather prominent one), in choosing the path of confrontation in what has come to be called the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy evidently took some significant risks of annihilation on behalf of humanity. Indeed, Theodore C. Sorensen, Special Counsel to President Kennedy, put the facts thus (in a generally admiring passage):
John Kennedy never lost sight of what either war or surrender would
do to the whole human race. His UN Mission was preparing for a
negotiated peace and his Joint Chiefs of Staff were preparing for war,
and he intended to keep both on rein....He could not afford to be hasty
or hesitant, reckless or afraid. The odds that the Soviets would go all
the way to war, he later said, seemed to him then "somewhere
between one out of three and even."

Well, a chance of annihilation between one-third and one-half is not an easy
decision to be taken on behalf of the human race.

I think we have to recognize that the peace of nuclear confrontation in the cold war
partly resulted from luck, and may not have been preordained. To take post hoc to
be propter hoc is a luxury that can be quite costly for charting out future policies in
nuclear - or indeed any other - field. We have to take account not only of the fact
that circumstances are rather different in the subcontinent compared with what
obtained during the nuclear confrontation in the global cold war, but also the world
was actually rather fortunate to escape annihilation even in the cold war itself. And
the dangers of extermination did not come only from lunatics or dictators.

So, to conclude this section, the nuclearization of the subcontinental confrontations
need not reduce the risk of war (either in theory or in practice), and it escalates the
penalty of war in a dramatic way. The unjust nature of world military balance does
not change this crucial prudential recognition.

**Were the Indian Government's Goals Well Served?**

I come now to a question of rather limited interest, but which is asked often
enough, addressed particularly to India. Even if it is accepted that the subcontinent
is less secure as a result of the tit-for-tat nuclear tests, it could be the case that
India's own self-interest has been well served by the BJP-led government's nuclear
policy. India has reason to grumble, it is argued, for not being taken as seriously as
one of the largest countries in the world should be. There is unhappiness also in the
attempt by some countries, certainly the United States in the past, to achieve some
kind of a "balance" between India and Pakistan, whereas India is nearly seven
times as large as Pakistan and must not be taken to be at par with it. Rather the
comparison should be with China, and for this - along with other causes such as
getting India a permanent seat in the Security Council - India's nuclear might could
be expected to make a contribution. The subcontinent may be less secure as a result
of the nuclear developments, but, it is argued, India did get some benefit. How
sound is this line of argument?

I have some difficulty in pursuing this exercise. Even though I am citizen of India,
I don't really think I can legitimately inquire only into the advantages that India
alone may have received from a certain policy, excluding the interests of others
whose interests were also affected. However, it is possible to scrutinize the effects of a certain policy in terms of the given goals of the Indian government (including strategic advantages over Pakistan as well as enhancement of India's international standing), and ask the rather coldly "scientific" question whether those goals have been well served by India's recent nuclear policy. We do not have to endorse these goals to examine whether they have actually been better promoted.

There are good reasons to doubt that these goals have indeed been better served by the sequence of events at Pokhran and Chagai. First, India had - and has - massive superiority over Pakistan in conventional military strength. That strategic advantage has become far less significant as a result of the new nuclear balance. Indeed, since Pakistan has explicitly refused to accept a "no first use" agreement, India's ability to count on conventional superiority is now, to a great extent, less effective (along with increasing the level of insecurity in both countries). In the Kargil confrontation, India could not even make use of its ability to cross into the Pakistani administered Kashmir to attack the intruders from the rear, which military tacticians seem to think would have made much more sense than trying to encounter the intruders by climbing steeply up a high mountain from the Indian side to battle the occupants at the top. This not only made the Indian response less effective and rapid, it also led to more loss of Indian soldiers (1300 lives according to Government of India's estimate and 1750 according to Pakistan's estimate) and added greatly to the expenses of the war conducted from an unfavoured position ($2.5 billion in direct expenses). With the danger of a nuclear outburst, the Indian Government's decision not to countercross the line of control in retaliation was clearly right, but it had no real option in this respect, given the strategic bind which it had itself helped to create.

Second, the fact that India can make nuclear weapons was well established before the present tit-for-tat nuclear tests were conducted. Pokhran-I in 1974 had already established the point, even though the Indian official statements tried to play down the military uses of that blast a quarter of a century ago. After the recent set of tests, India's and Pakistan's positions seem to be much more even, at least in international public perception. As it happens, Pakistan was quite modest in its response. I remember thinking in the middle of May 1998, following the Indian tests, that surely Pakistan would now blast a larger number of bombs than India's five. I was agreeably impressed by Pakistan's moderation in blasting only six, which is the smallest whole number larger than five. The Government of India may deeply dislike any perception of parity with Pakistan, but did its best, in effect, to alter a situation of acknowledged asymmetry into one of perceived parity.

Third, aside from perceptions, in terms of the scientific requirement for testing, Pakistan clearly had a greater case for testing, never having conducted a nuclear test before 1998. This contrasted with India's experience of Pokhran-I in 1974. Also, with a much smaller community of nuclear scientists and a less extensive development of the possibilities of computerized simulation, the scientific need for
an actual test may be much greater in Pakistan than in India. While Pakistan was concerned about the condemnation of the world community by testing on its own, the Indian blasts in May 1998 created a situation in which Pakistan could go in that direction without being blamed for starting any nuclear adventure. Eric Arnett puts the issue thus:

In contrast to its Indian counterparts, Pakistan's political elite is less abashed about the need for nuclear deterrence. Military fears that the Pakistani nuclear capability was not taken seriously in India combined with a feeling of growing military inferiority after being abandoned by the USA after the cold war create an imperative to test that was resisted before May 1998 only because of the threat of sanctions. The Indian tests created a situation in which the Pakistani leadership saw an even greater need to test and a possible opening to justify the test as a response that was both politically and strategically understandable.

The thesis, often articulated by India's pro-nuclear lobby, that India was in a greater danger of a first strike from Pakistan before the summer of 1998 lacks scientific as well as political credibility.

Fourth, nor was there much success in getting recognition for India as being in the same league as China, or for its grumble that inadequate attention is internationally paid to the dangers India is supposed to face from China. Spokesmen of the Indian government were vocal on these issues. A week before the Pokhran tests in 1998, Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes said in a much quoted television interview, "China is potential threat number one....The potential threat from China is greater than that from Pakistan." In between the tests on May 11 and May 13, the Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee wrote to President Clinton to point to China as being related to the motivation for the tests. This letter, which was published in The New York Times (after being leaked) on May 13, did not name China, but referred to it in very explicit terms:

We have an overt nuclear weapon state on our borders, a state which committed armed aggression against India in 1962. Although our relations with that country have improved in the last decade or so, an atmosphere of distrust persists mainly due to the unresolved border problem. To add to the distrust that country has materially helped another neighbour of ours to become a covert nuclear weapons state.

However, as a result of the tit-for-tat nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, China could stand well above India's little grumbles, gently admonishing it for its criticism of China, and placing itself in the position of being a subcontinental peace-maker. When President Clinton visited China in June 1998, China and the United States released a joint statement declaring that the two countries would cooperate in non-proliferation efforts in the subcontinent.
Mark Frazier's assessment of the gap between Government of India's attempts and its achievement in this field captures the essence of this policy failure.

Had it been India's intention to alert the world to its security concerns about China as a dangerous rising power, the tests managed to do just the opposite - they gave the Chinese officials the opportunity to present China as a cooperative member of the international community seeking to curb nuclear weapons proliferation. Far from looking like a revisionist state, China played the role of a status quo power, and a rather assertive one at that.

Fifth, nor did the blasts advance the cause of India's putative elevation to a permanent membership of the Security Council. If a country could blast its way into the Security Council, this would give an incentive to other countries to do the same. Furthermore, the new parity established between India and Pakistan after Pokhran-II and Chagai Hills also militates against the plausibility of that route to permanency in the Security Council, and this too could have been well predicted. I personally don't see why it is so important for India to be permanently on the Security Council (it may be in the interest of others for this to happen, given India's size and growing economic strength, but that is a different issue altogether). However, for the Government of India which clearly attaches importance to this possibility, it would surely have been wiser to emphasize its restraint in not developing nuclear weapons despite its proven ability to do so since 1974, and also use the pre-1998 asymmetry with Pakistan, in contrast with the symmetry that developed - following Indian Government's own initiative - after Pokhran-II and Chagai.

One of the interesting side lights that emerge from a scrutiny of Indian official perceptions is the extent to which the Government underestimates India's importance as a major country, a democratic polity, a rich multireligious civilization, with a well-established tradition in science and technology (including the cutting edge of information technology), and with a fast-growing economy that could grow, with a little effort, even faster. The overestimation of the persuasive power of the bomb goes with an underestimation of the political, cultural, scientific and economic strengths of the country. There may be pleasure in the official circles at the success of President Clinton's visit to India and the asymmetrically favoured treatment it got in that visit vis-a-vis Pakistan, but the tendency to attribute that asymmetry to Indian nuclear adventure, rather than to India's large size, democratic politics, and its growing economy and technology is difficult to understand.

On Separating the Issues

To conclude, it is extremely important to distinguish the two distinct problems, both of which have a bearing on subcontinental nuclear policies. First, the world order on weapons needs a change and in particular requires an effective and rapid
disarmament, particularly in nuclear arsenals. Second, the nuclear adventures of India and Pakistan cannot be justified on the ground of the unjustness of the world order, since the people whose lives are made insecure as a result of these adventures are primarily the residents of the subcontinent themselves. Resenting the obtuseness of others is not a good ground for shooting oneself in the foot.

This does not, of course, imply that India or Pakistan has reason to feel happy about the international balance of power that the world establishment seems keen on maintaining, with or without further developments, such as an attempted "nuclear shield" for the United States. Indeed, it must also be said that there is an inadequate appreciation in the West of the extent to which the role of the big five arouses suspicion and resentment in the third world, including the subcontinent. This applies not only to the monopoly over nuclear armament, but also, on the other side, to the "pushing" of conventional, non-nuclear armaments in the world market for weapons.

For example, as the *Human Development Report 1994*, prepared under the leadership of that visionary Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq, pointed out, not only were the top five arms-exporting countries in the world precisely the five permanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations, but also they were, together, responsible for 86 per cent of all the conventional weapons exported during 1988-92. Not surprisingly the Security Council has not been able to take any serious initiative that would really restrain the merchants of death. It is not hard to understand the scepticism in India and Pakistan - and elsewhere - about the responsibility and leadership of the established nuclear powers.

As far as India is concerned, the two policies - of nuclear abstinence and demanding a change of world order - can be pursued simultaneously. Nuclear restraint strengthens rather than weakens India's voice. To demand that the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty be redefined to include a dated programme of denuclearization may well be among the discussable alternatives. But making nuclear bombs, not to mention deploying them, and spending scarce resource on missiles and what is euphemistically called "delivery," can hardly be seen as sensible policy. The claim that subcontinental nuclearization would somehow help to bring about world nuclear disarmament is a wild dream that can only precede a nightmare. The moral folly in these policies are substantial, but what is also clear and decisive is the prudential mistake that has been committed. The moral and the prudential are, in fact, rather close in a world of interrelated interactions, for reasons that Rabindranath Tagore had discussed nearly a hundred years ago.

Finally, on a more specific point, no country has as much stake as India in having a prosperous and civilian democracy in Pakistan. Even though the Nawaz Sharif government was clearly corrupt in many ways, India's interests are not well served by the undermining of civilian rule in Pakistan, to be replaced by activist military
leaders. Also, the encouragement of across-border terrorism, which India accuses Pakistan of, is likely to be dampened rather than encouraged by Pakistan's economic prosperity and civilian politics. It is particularly important in this context to point to the dangerousness of the argument, often heard in India, that the burden of public expenditure would be more unbearable for Pakistan, given its smaller size and relatively stagnant economy, than it is for India. This may well be the case, but the penalty that can visit India from an impoverished and desperate Pakistan, in the present situation of massive insecurity, can be quite catastrophic. Strengthening of Pakistan's stability and enhancement of its well-being have prudential importance for India, in addition to their obvious ethical significance. That central connection - between the moral and the prudential - must be urgently grasped.