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BOOK REVIEW

Lakhan Mehrotra, ***My Days in Sri Lanka*** (New Delhi: Har-Anand, 2011), Pages: 254, Price: Rs.595.00.

"It is history that has never been told before", the claim that the book makes in its blurb is fully sustained by the description of the tumultuous events provided by the author in the pages of the book.

When the author reached Colombo to take up his diplomatic assignment, India-Sri Lanka relations had touched their nadir and the India-Sri Lanka Agreement under which the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) operated was "in tatters". President Jayewardene, who had belatedly realized the importance of taking India on board in finding a solution to the Tamil problem and negotiated the agreement, had already demitted office. His successor, the redoubtable Premadasa, had as Prime Minister vehemently opposed the accord. He had contested the Presidential election on the platform of packing off the IPKF sooner than later.

The agreement lacked the minimum consensus necessary for its success. None of the Tamil groups – moderate or militant – was taken into confidence in negotiating it and when they demurred, they were told to fall in line. Prabhakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), made his opposition to it clear. His half-hearted support for it while in Delhi was more of a ruse to get out of the Indian capital, where he was in five-star captivity. Sri Lankan support too was qualified, as the assault on Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at the ceremonial parade and the public protests subsequently would testify. The Cabinet was divided on the issue. The Prime Minister, on return from his foreign tour, opposed it publicly. President Jayewardene, having committed himself, could not go back, but had several reservations on certain vital issues, giving the impression of duress.

As far as India was concerned, the basic premise of the agreement was not to create a client state but to ensure its sovereignty and territorial integrity while taking care of the aspirations of the Tamils. Neither was the IPKF an expeditionary force. It was mandated to perform multiple roles. It was part of its brief to ensure transition of the newly formed Province of North East to both peace and democracy. Unfortunately, as the author notes: "Quite contrary to its purpose and intent, the Agreement had unleashed forces in Sri Lanka that were quite hostile to India."

The problem in Sri Lanka had in the meantime been further complicated by the emergence of a coalition of forces that were at the opposite ends of the spectrum. The fighting between the LTTE and the IPKF soon after the latter's induction was a new situation which no one had bargained for. Since the LTTE was fighting for the exit of the IPKF and President Premadasa was equally anxious to achieve that end, the two arch enemies joined forces against the IPKF. Premadasa by involving the LTTE in the consultative process created an illusion for himself that the ethnic problem was capable of a domestic solution without outside (i.e. Indian) interference. As the author notes, "the future, however, belied the President's pious hopes. Henceforth all the shots were called by the LTTE and eventually his collusion with them proved his undoing. They won against him both in the battle of wits and in the killing war on the ground."

In the career of any diplomat, otherwise basking in the placid climate of diplomacy, there are but a few occasions when his skills are put to the acid test. This was that occasion for the author. India had been caught in a cliff-hanger situation. That the IPKF had to go was clear to all. The challenge was: should it go in honour or in disgrace. President Premadasa was bent upon packing off the IPKF in disgrace, which India would not allow. The President issued many ultimatums and fixed many dates for the IPKF withdrawal. He was aware, as the author notes, that "the national sentiment … was generally with him on this point including the militant voice of the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) comprising the Sinhala ultras" and the LTTE. Given the foreign character of the IPKF, its presence was irksome to the Sri Lankans generally, yet there were doubts about the scenario that would emerge thereafter. On 7 June 1989, during a parliamentary debate, the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party while endorsing the call of its President for IPKF withdrawal, expressed serious doubts whether the Sri Lanka security forces were equipped enough to handle the emerging situation. But the President was adamant. New Delhi's efforts to convince him of the need to work out an agreed schedule for de-induction drew a blank.

There was a prolonged and acrimonious correspondence between President Premadasa and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on this issue: it was a dialogue of the deaf. Things were not going well for New Delhi otherwise too. An IPS officer, D.R. Kaarthikeyan, deputed to study the ground situation, reported in favour of talking to the LTTE and withdrawal of the IPKF. The LTTE was popular with the people; the IPKF was not. The IPKF's morale was low. The Tamils disliked the IPKF-supported Chief Minister of the North East Province, Varadaraja Perumal, Kaarthikeyan reported. A desperate and

exasperated New Delhi then left the task to the High Commissioner to make the best of a bad bargain. There were several stormy encounters between the President and the High Commissioner.

In perhaps the stormiest fifty-minute confrontation with Premadasa on 28 July 1989, the High Commissioner convinced the President of the sincerity of India's desire to withdraw but under a negotiated and agreed schedule. Premadasa could detect a veiled threat behind the soft words of the High Commissioner and decided to be a little more discreet. The upshot was the famous Joint Communiqué of 28 July 1989, in which the two countries finally announced the agreement for the withdrawal of the IPKF beginning the next day. The ruling SLFP welcomed the agreement and felt "relieved that a major confrontation with India had been averted at the last moment". Further negotiations led to another agreement on 18 September 1989, for setting up Peace Committees "to afford an opportunity to all political and ethnic groups in the Northeast province to come together to settle their differences through a process of consultation, compromise and consensus and to bring all groups into the democratic process, thereby ending violence and improving conditions for the physical safety and security of all communities". But the turn of events soon thereafter led to further acrimony between Colombo and New Delhi, which did not add to the latter's stature. It was not until March 1990 that the IPKF finally left Sri Lanka to end the most sordid chapter in India-Sri Lanka relations.

The IPKF left, but Sri Lanka did not return to peace. Since the Sri Lankan security forces were in the barracks during the entire period of the IPKF, the vacuum left by its withdrawal was occupied by the LTTE, which operated in the field. In the graphic words of the author:

> Thereafter LTTE kept Sri Lanka government after government, meandering between war and peace in dealing with its menace but it took the latter nearly two more decades and loss of several thousand more lives on both sides of the ethnic divide before taking care of the hard core of LTTE.

The ruling party in Tamil Nadu, the DMK under M.K. Karunanidhi too did not play fair either and appeared to be holding a brief for the LTTE. It did not have a kind word for the IPKF and its sacrifices and was more interested in its withdrawal, leaving the field free for the LTTE. It too played dirty in the end, by refusing to give a graceful and dignified reception to the IPKF when it would return to India if it landed in Tamil Nadu.

The book makes interesting reading not only for the events of those days but because it offers much more. The background to the ethnic problem,

which had a long history starting much before the author landed in Colombo, makes it easy for the uninitiated readers to understand the tumultuous events described by him. The graphic description of the India House building, with its sketch on the jacket, makes fascinating reading. The text meticulously fights shy of jargon and makes easy reading.

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★★★

Robert S. Anderson, ***Nucleus and Nation: Scientists, International Networks, and Power in India*** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), Pages: xxvi+683, Price: $60.00.

The relation between state and science is intricate and interesting. On one hand, the practitioners of science, though highly respected, are not widely understood – as they seem to live in a mysterious world in which incomprehensible language is spoken. On the other hand, when the state or the political leaders look to them to provide more efficient instruments for benefit of the state and the people, the scientists tend to utilise the space to propagate and defend the sanctity of their own dreams. Rightly, therefore, *science has a particular presence around the notion of state* which is the subject matter of the book under review.

The *Nucleus and Nation* by Robert S. Anderson is a coherent and comprehensive account of the institutional and individual origins of the development of science and technology in general, and atomic energy in particular, in India. Its focus, as the author asserts, is "less on the first Indian bomb itself than on the nucleus of people who made it possible … and on their relation to the nation and its political leadership, right up to prime ministers" (p. 6). It explores the untold stories about key scientists behind the Indian nuclear programme, from its roots in the formation of an Indian scientific community in the 1920s to "competitive individualism": between "the war over self reliance in science and technology" for exploration of the peaceful

uses of nuclear energy in the late 1940s to that which culminated in the crucial decisions of the 1960s and '70s.

While relying on archival materials and ethnographic research, the author seeks methodological explanations. The "actor network theory" has guided his approach (p. 6) where a clear depiction of how the actors mobilized their resources and allies through their networks is explained. However, his claim to have seen all "these developments through Indian lenses" (p. 7) may be questionable; his bias towards the Western opinion of the origins of the1971 war is easily noticed: for example, that "India's attack on East Pakistan was planned and imminent" (p. 429).

Even so, Robert Anderson is probably the first scholar to study systematically the rise of nuclear science in India. Tracing the long institutional and individual preparations for India's first nuclear test and its consequences, he begins with the careers of Meghnad Saha, Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar, Homi J. Bhabha, and their patron Jawaharlal Nehru, and the next generation of scientists like Vikram Sarabhai and Satish Dhawan, and their equation with Indira Gandhi. Contextualizing the Indian debates over nuclear power within the larger context of modernization and industrialization, he hones in on the tricky issue of the integration of science into the ideals of self-reliance in Indian nationalism. In this way, the volume is more than an institutional history of India's nuclear science and engineering; it is a comprehensive perspective on the history of the Indian nationhood as well as its scientific community.

The two generations of scientists, forming a "nucleus", with the total understanding and support of successive prime ministers, were instrumental in fashioning the path of India's high-tech future. Foreign-educated, they returned to India with a vision of their own. Initially they experienced years of competitive individualism owing to their distinctive discipline and in the search of local solutions to their problems. To compound the problem, no scientific institution existed to back them. Nevertheless, their initiatives in the establishment of a chain of laboratories and institutes in various fields, some with the support of private and philanthropic sources, though competitive, were held loosely together by a common "nationalist" discipline and mutual recognition of the others' achievements (p. 523).

The book also brings out some hitherto probably unknown and interesting facets of the relationship between some of the scientists and the political leadership. For instance, Nehru had a tepid relationship with Saha, even though he admired him. With Bhatnagar he had a comfortable relationship. With

Bhabha, he had a close and warm relationship: to override Bhabha's discomfort with governmental procedures, Nehru allowed him to establish his own autonomy, which has paid rich dividends in faster results (p. 531).

Developments under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, including the decisions for the 1974 peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE), are given adequate space (Chapters 21 and 22). As against the oft-heard assertion that Sarabhai was against the weapon option, the author states that "Sarabhai was not *simply* against building and testing nuclear bombs; he was against developing and testing one or two, at least while India had no security apparatus or delivery infrastructure" and was "careful" as "he knew the consequences" (p. 437).

The author rightly delineates the evolution of India's scientific innovation trajectory: the 1950s and '60s may be viewed as an infrastructure-building phase; followed by a reorientation in the late 1960s and '70s toward protecting the legal, technical and knowledge environment for "indigenization"; followed by a period in the 1980s of confidence in and promotion of Indian technologies. But "the seeds of that confidence were sown much earlier" (p. 553) – a thesis explored in the book. Perceptibly, India's course of innovation and entrepreneurial chain has neither been straight nor smooth. There always is an "abiding tension" between viewing science as a movement and as an institution. Above all, there thrives an "open space for the combination of intense personal politics and structural change, resistance and adaptation" (p. 569). The inevitable conclusion, however, is that science and technology is essential to India in almost any conceivable political framework as "a form of assurance against the future" (p. 568).

The volume – a must read for the scientific community, the leadership as well as the academia – traces the evolution of India's scientific revolution by exploring every strand of institution building, individual temperament and attitude and leadership. It emphasises how India's early scientific community perceived and adhered to the principle that science was a movement than an institution, which, in fact, led them to rise above personal views and for the national interest at large.

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B.M. Kutty, ***Sixty Years in Self Exile: No Regrets – A Political Autobiography*** (Karachi: Pakistan Studies Centre & Pakistan Labour Trust, 2011), Pages: 562, Price: Pk Rs 600.00.

As a student of Pakistan, one was often intrigued by B.M. Kutty, a left-leaning political activist who has been part of various opposition coalitions at different times in Pakistan's history. Known for his skills in drafting, he was often assigned the task of drafting manifestos and constitutions of various political parties and their alliances. One often wondered how a leftist Malayali landed up in Pakistan. What were his compulsions for migrating from tranquil Kerala, which was then a bastion of left-wing politics, to the turbulent waters of Pakistan? These very questions were posed to him by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, arguably Pakistan's shrewdest politician, when he met Kutty for the first time. Kutty migrated to Karachi in 1949, not as a *Muhajir* fleeing from communal violence in the turbulent post-partition years, but as a "voluntary fugitive" from Madras (Chennai), where he was studying. He does not give a valid reason for his move, but it was probably driven by a sense of opportunity in Pakistan due to the scarcity there of educated youth well versed in English.

Kutty's autobiography, which covers his self-exile from 1949, is a virtual history of Pakistan, where he kept moving from one job to another, often shuttling between cities. The migration of Hindus and Sikhs did create a void, and consequently, it was not difficult for him to find employment in various multinational companies, where his knowledge of English stood him in good stead. He has been fortunate to have survived the rough and tumble of Pakistan; many of his fellow migrants from Kerala like Harris Mayin and Sattar Saith, the pre-independence Muslim League MP from Kerala, died utterly dejected. He has described the turbulence in the society as well as in the government in the early years of Pakistan quite well. In keeping with his leftist political orientation, he has been critical of the Pakistan government's dalliance with the United States and the West. His analysis of events and personalities has also been coloured by his political views, but within the framework of his ideals, he has been very honest and forthright. To praise DPRK (North Korea) in a book published in 2011 shows the courage of his convictions.

The book delves into his long political journey commencing 1956, when he formed the Kerala Awami League with the Malayali *beedi* workers of Karachi. His political journey from Awami League to National Awami Party (NAP)

through Pakistan National Party is interesting and gives a rare insight into the political developments in Karachi and Pakistan. His subsequent political journey to National Workers Party from NAP through National Democratic Party and Pakistan National Party is equally eventful, though not covered so well in the book. His political beliefs landed him in jail frequently, both during the military regimes of Ayub Khan and Zia ul Haq as well as under the rule of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. During his various sojourns in different prisons in Pakistan, he met many significant and interesting personalities like G.M. Syed, Raza Kazim and Prince Karim. A full-fledged book could be written on his prison mates: maybe Kutty will take it up next. His long years in public life led him to interact with many interesting political and apolitical personalities, including the father of Aimal Kansi who carried out an attack on CIA Headquarters in 1993.

The highlight of the author's political career has been his close association with Baloch nationalist leader Mir Ghous Bakhsh Bizenjo, who became the Governor of Balochistan, when NAP came to power in both Balochistan and North West Frontier Province. Bizenjo appointed Kutty as his political secretary during his brief stint as Governor from May 1972 to February 1973. Kutty has also edited Bizenjo's autobiography *In Search of Solutions*. This has given him a good insight into the problems of Balochistan, especially during the days of NAP government in 1972-73 and the subsequent insurgency. This also acquainted him with all the other major players of Balochistan – Sardar Ataullah Mengal, Nawab Khain Bakhsh Marri and Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti. He found Bugti to be like Bhutto, an amalgamation of multiple personalities. Unfortunately, both Bhutto and Bugti met with violent deaths, which have impacted Pakistan considerably. The book gives rare insights into the functioning of the NAP government in Balochistan, the reforms introduced and the circumstances that led to its dismissal. The book also brings out the differences within the ranks of NAP, especially between Wali Khan and Bizenjo. The author reveals that Bhutto wanted to reach out to Bizenjo through "the Kerala socialist from Balochistan", but Bizenjo refused to compromise.

The book has numerous interesting incidents from the author's life, some of which are purely personal, like the night he spent in a hotel room with an American woman in Prague. Some others, like the assassination of the Polish Foreign Minister at Karachi airport, of which the author was an eyewitness, had much wider international ramifications. His interactions with Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Benazir and Nawab Bugti are equally interesting. Unfortunately, six decades is a long period, especially if you are a political activist in a tumultuous

country like Pakistan, and 560 pages are far too few to do justice to an eventful life. As a result, the author has been forced to gloss over developments in Pakistan after Bizenjo's death in 1989. Despite being in political life, he has hardly covered Benazir, Nawaz, Musharraf and Zardari regimes. This is striking since Benazir Bhutto is one of the four women to whose memory the book has been dedicated. The book has also been dedicated to Didi Nirmala Deshpande and her struggle for peace in South Asia, but nothing worthwhile has been mentioned either about her or about the India-Pakistan peace movement, of which the author has been an active member. At a time when global interest in Pakistan is increasing, the absence of any discussion on growing Talibanization of society and the current round of insurgency in Balochistan is jarring, especially since the author continues to be active in politics. The absence of the author's comments on current Baloch grievances also stands out, as he had a long association with Baloch leadership. The readers would have been interested in knowing about the causes of insurgency as well as the reasons for fissures within the Baloch leadership, since most of them, if not all, were part of the NAP at one stage. Maybe the author wants to come out with a second part of his autobiography some time later.

The book has been written primarily with the Pakistani readership in mind. As a result, a large number of personalities have been named without adequate background description. As many of these are not well known outside Pakistan, it restricts the readership to those who have been following developments in Pakistan regularly. A casual non-Pakistani reader will find it difficult to understand the significance of G.M. Syed or Prince Karim, leave aside many lesser known figures. The book has been supplemented with numerous photographs, which enhance its value. The book would also have benefited from an index and better copyediting and proofreading.

Despite its ideological biases and some other minor flaws, the book is a treasure trove of information and gives an insider's view of happenings in Pakistan during those tumultuous years. Even though it has glossed over recent developments, it makes an excellent reading and is a must for any student of Pakistani politics and Balochistan.

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