

Peace is Everybody's Business by Arjun Ray,
New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2012, pp. 233, INR 495

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The state of Jammu and Kashmir has been ravaged by terror for over two decades. The scourge of terror, which was largely limited to the Kashmir valley and Jammu region, cast a shadow on Ladakh, the largest district of the state. In 1999, Ladakh, and in particular the area of Kargil, earned fame for the bloody battle that was fought between India and Pakistan. The inhabitants of Ladakh, largely Muslims of the Shia faith and Buddhists, were alienated, victims of apathy and neglect, living in abject poverty and denied governance. They were a potentially vulnerable society, ripe to be drawn into the vortex of terror. Or so the author wants the reader to believe. This book is an account of the author, a retired Lieutenant General and former Corps Commander of the Ladakh region, and his single-minded commitment to transform an indifferent, alienated, deprived, and traditional people from shunning the lure of the gun and embracing the national mainstream of Indian society. The main discourse is on the use of conflict prevention; proactive action, pre-emption, and initiative coupled with humane and people-friendly strategies to integrate underprivileged societies.

The author has used Operation Sadbhavna, a socio-political campaign launched by the Indian Army, as the platform to achieve his aim. Identifying poverty, globalization, culture, and political apathy as

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the reasons for the alienation of the people in Ladakh, Arjun Ray believes the situation in Ladakh was precarious when he assumed command of the region. Digressing from the main argument, the author devotes two chapters to highlight the phenomenon of Muslim alienation worldwide lamenting that poor education, social taboos, and the absence of political democracy had thrust such a situation on them. He calls for soul searching and introspection amongst the Muslim elite, dismissing the belief that 'power and property cannot come from the barrel of a gun' (p. 48).

The author bemoans the absence of a 'sense of history' and the lack of 'strategic culture' in Indian society which has often seen Indian responses being 'reactive' resulting in the failure of conflict prevention. The state of local governance in Ladakh was 'dysfunctional' and the local administration 'interventionist rather than participative' (p. 62). Bureaucratic insensitivity, lack of basic amenities, schools, healthcare, and high mortality rates needed urgent attention. The people were 'voiceless' unable to approach the administration. The neglect of human security impacted national security, particularly in the border regions—'if the people are safe, then territory they occupy will be safe'. The author believes in a short span of 15 months, Operation Sadbhavna turned it around in Ladakh. The Army demonstrated 'will and sincerity of purpose'. He admits that the civil government accused the Army of running a 'parallel government' but justifies the actions of the Army as a necessity in the larger interest of national security. He says he found a 'nexus between politicians and civil servants in perpetuating poverty' in Ladakh, even blaming the government of the day for the lack of a 'political doctrine', confessing that as the commander of entire Ladakh he was unaware of 'whether India had a comprehensive China policy' (p. 86). The failure of conflict resolution strategies in Jammu and Kashmir, the north-eastern states and the Naxal affected areas are attributed to the governments flawed policy of eliminating the 'insurgent' and not 'insurgency'. Quoting freely from Rousseau and Nietzsche, often irrelevant to the context, Arjun Ray is emphatic in his assertion that 'empowerment of the citizenry must be a goal for development and therefore happiness'—a strategy that is absent in Indian thought.

The achievements of Operation Sadbhavna are covered in great detail and inform the reader of the massive mobilization of effort and resources undertaken by the Army to implement the strategy. Two major

impediments to the implementation were the civil bureaucracy and, surprisingly, his own commanding officers. The military was reluctant to place resources at the disposal of the people and hesitant to part with their assets. Lieutenant General Arjun Ray candidly admits he overruled them, convinced that all of it was part of the effort to achieve his aim. Re-education of the Army has been devoted an entire chapter. A soldier is a 'citizen first, soldier second' and the Army is a natural facilitator of governance. He advocates the need to change the role of the military from the primary role of conflict resolution to conflict prevention. The Clausewitzian 'blood and guts' theory, in his view stands rejected. Conflict prevention could result in huge savings in life and limb besides monies that could be diverted for improving the lot of impoverished and neglected societies.

The author reserves some scathing comments for the media, terming it 'profit oriented' and questions its public interest role catering to what he calls the 'credit card generation'—the burgeoning middle class of this country. The 'journalism of assertion', of sensationalizing without verification has been aptly criticized. Placing the media on notice the author believes the media needs to serve the public interest better.

The book leaves the reader with some nagging questions. Firstly, is the Army mandated to usurp the role of the local administration and governance in a state where a democratically elected government is in power? The author has not mentioned if he was explicitly tasked to take-over local governance in the district of Ladakh, leaving the reader to believe it was a patriotic unilateral decision. Secondly, such a large mobilization of resources requires infusion of funds. In a situation where the local government is uncooperative and not forthcoming, the impression is that the funds were placed at the disposal by the military or the Defence Ministry. Herein lies the catch—should the Army divert its resources and funds for projects which are within the purview of states? The author makes no reference to these but the sense is that unless these projects have adequate and continuous funding, they cannot be sustainable. Thirdly, there is little evidence, facts or figures to suggest that the situation in Ladakh, particularly militancy, or levels of violence and infiltration post-Kargil War was such that the population of Kargil was at the brink of embracing the gun. That would have lent credence to the author's argument.

A candid and lucid book, it is a must read for those in the business of conflict and conflict resolution. It is also a must read for those who are committed in projects in aiding underprivileged, war ravaged, and brutalized communities in search of a way of hope and salvation. This book provides one such way.