

## Review Article 2

# A Life in Diplomacy\*

Shri Sudarshan Bhutani, IFS (Retd)<sup>®</sup>

**T**hirty-one years after retirement, Mr Rasgotra has chosen to share his memories of nearly thirty-six years in the Indian Foreign Service. The text is beautifully crafted in language and content, as would be expected from a poet in Hindi, who taught English literature to undergraduates before joining Indian Foreign Service in 1949.

The Embassy in Nepal was his first diplomatic assignment. He travelled extensively, made durable friendships, especially with Crown Prince Mahendra, which proved useful when he went back to Nepal as ambassador in mid-nineteen seventies. Mahendra, King by then, was intent on reducing Nepal's dependence on India. During his visit to China in 1961, he agreed to building of a road from Tibet-Nepal border to Kathmandu. Later, he sought to diversify his source of arms, away from India but from the UK-USA. The latter would agree to an arrangement only if it included India. India took these ventures in its stride – neither geography nor history and culture allow the two countries to drift away – allowance has to be made for personal vanities: all political leaders of Nepal seek to lessen dependence on India but cannot agree on which section of the populace would bear the burden of transition.

Other than Nepal and Morocco-Tunisia, Mr. Rasgotra served in the United States and Europe – Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom. Mr Rasgotra had three assignments in the USA – two in the Embassy in Washington and the third at the United Nations in New York. At the United Nations, in the Fourth Committee assigned to him, he was single-minded in pressing for the rapid decolonisation of Africa: the European colonial powers were willing to grant nominal independence as long as they were able to control and exploit the rich mineral resources of the colonies. This led to armed conflicts; especially in Congo, which the UN had

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<sup>®</sup>**Shri Sudarshan Bhutani, IFS (Retd)** joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1955 and retired in Jan 1991 as High Commissioner to Australia. After retirement, he continues to take active interest in current national security issues.

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to cope with. 1960 saw many crises in the world and a summit of world leaders convened in New York to stabilise the situation. Mr Rasgotra writes about the meeting between Khrushchev and Nehru who took Rasgotra along. His account is better read than summarised here.

In Washington, his second stint coincided with the crisis in Pakistan leading to independence of Bangladesh. The US had conflicting motives – it was not opposed to independence, but wanted it to happen under its own auspices, and without antagonising Pakistan – utterly impossible proposition. The Indian Embassy took upon itself to mobilise the US opinion in favour of Bangladesh' struggle for independence; the wide publicity given to the killings and to the flight of millions of refugees to India, embarrassed the administration of President Nixon. The President and Henry Kissinger, the national security adviser, were engaged in opening of dialogue with China, which Pakistan had facilitated, and therefore, chose to ignore the suffering of the Bangladeshis.

As Foreign Secretary in his final years in the Ministry of External Affairs, Mr Rasgotra had two major crises to handle: the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and rights of Tamil minority in Sri Lanka. The first impinged on Indo-Pakistan relations: as neighbour, Pakistan was alarmed at Soviet presence next door. Mr Rasgotra travelled to Pakistan and met General Zia-ul-Haq, then President. India tried to assure Pakistan that India would not take advantage of its difficulties. To no avail – Pakistanis were suspicious of alleged Indo-Soviet designs. The internal convulsions in Afghanistan worsened the crisis, which, despite conclaves and conferences remains unresolved: to the mix of national feelings inflamed by external interventions, has been added religious fanaticism, giving rise to violent jihadism symbolised by the *Taliban* and *al-Qaeda*.

Post retirement, he was assigned a second time as High Commissioner in the UK. It provided a happy finale to a distinguished career. As a valedictory, in the last chapter of his memoir, Mr Rasgotra writes on *Foreign Policy: Past and Future*. Looking at the Asian Scene, he visualises a "*Kautilyan Mandala* with China at its centre", Russia and the Central Asians to the northwest, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the south-west, India in the South, and Japan, South Korea, ASEAN, Australia along with the USA to the northeast and southeast of China. He accepts that

antagonism characterises some of the bilateral relations in this “*Kautaliyan Mandala*”. He concedes that the United States is the “power of global reach, with political, economic and security interests and solid military presence.”

Nearer home, he believes “China is likely to remain a problem for Indian foreign policy, because of its close political and military alliance with Pakistan. Nor is a solution to the Sino-Indian border problem in sight in the near future...So, “suitable US-India strategic arrangements should be devised to deter any misadventure threatening peace.”

### **Research Projects**

Members interested in undertaking research projects may submit research proposals to USI (CS3 / CAFHR). At present, six chairs have been instituted in CS3; namely, Field Marshal KM Cariappa Chair, Admiral RD Katari Chair, Air Marshal Subroto Mukherjee Chair, Prof DS Kothari DRDO Chair, Ministry of External Affairs Chair, Flying Officer Amandeep Singh Gill Chair and two Chairs in CAFHR namely; Maharana Pratap Chair and Chhatrapati Shivaji Chair. Copies of the Rules for Award of Fellowship Grants and Conduct of Research are available on the USI Website.