

Changing India — Straight from the Heart*

Lieutenant General ML Tuli, PVSM (Retd)**

No autobiography/biography can portray a man as he actually is / was. The best that can be hoped is an approximation from which all that is not true has been removed; in which most of what is true has been set forth, whether by statement or by implication or lively anecdotes. All the same in this engaging memoir, 'Changing India' which appears to be an abridged version of General Sinha's earlier book 'A Soldier Recalls' written in 1991, the author strings together his personal experiences with interesting anecdotes as also incidents that shaped his life from childhood and later in and out of uniform. He is one of the foremost military writers, forceful orator, gifted with mental power of endurance and sober temperament.

As a teenager he was an ambitious young man, unfailingly competitive, driven by an urge to excel in whatever he undertook. He had the added advantage of family icons for guidance, support and inspiration. As he writes, "I had got into college at the age of 13, whereas the average age of the boys was about 18. I found it difficult to compete in sports with my colleagues..... I tried to compensate for that through extra-curricular activities like participation in debates, college elections besides maintaining my academic record".

He was commissioned in the Army in 1944 and got the opportunity to serve overseas in Southeast Asia and work intimately with senior British and Indian officers during the eventful period - last stages of World War II, partition of the Sub-Continent and Indian Army's involvement in Jammu and Kashmir. Almost virtuouse in his world view with sense of history and mass commonsense, his services as staff officer were sought by Krishna Menon, the then Defence Minister for a foreign assignment and later by Lieutenant General BM Kaul, the then Quarter Master General in the new set up 'Q' Operations. Kaul wielded considerable influence and used his higher connections to reach top echelons of the Army. As a reward for his excellent performance, the author was selected to attend the Joint Services Staff College in UK, "this was a very coveted course for which India got only one vacancy every year..... Normally officers

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****Lieutenant General ML Tuli, PVSM (Retd)** is a former Vice Chief of the Army Staff. *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, Vol. CXXXVII, No. 569, July-September 2007.

in the rank of colonels and brigadiers or their equivalents used to go for the course. For the first time, a major had been selected to undergo the course. "I owed my selection entirely to Kaul", the author recounts. After completion of the Course in 1962, he was posted on promotion (Lieutenant Colonel) as an instructor at the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington. General Manekshaw who was Commandant of the College protested against this posting because the author had by then not commanded a battalion. Manekshaw was overruled by Kaul who by then had become Chief of the General Staff. From then on, "I was regarded by everybody as a Kaul man and for next 10 years I had a tough time in the Army". A classic case showing clashes of personality, rival ambitions and barren recriminations, *rather unfortunate for any organisation* (emphasis added).

On successful completion of Command tenure of battalion and brigade he was inducted as Chairman Inter Service Group to project a united stand before the Third Pay Commission. In Adjutant Generals Branch at Army Headquarters his pioneering role as harbinger of three P's - Pay, Prospects and Prestige both for the serving and exservicemen has left an imprint of his determined dedication for overall welfare of the Army. Even to this day his achievements, such as cadre review, Group Insurance, Housing Organisation, Education Society, Pension Paying Camp at Pokhara in Nepal are remembered as fine examples of willingness to assume responsibility and an unfailing sense of commitment.

The author progressed in his Army career in command of field formations gaining vital experience in counter insurgency, high altitude and desert warfare before landing as Vice Chief of Army Staff in early part of 1983. As luck would have it, he missed to gain combat experience in all the three wars of 1962, 1965 and 1971, where overall military abilities are put to test thereby; winning gratitude and affection of the Nation. All the same, he was firmly persuaded in his mind to take over as Chief of Army Staff from General Krishna Rao because of his career profile and the gracious attitude of Mrs Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister at the dinner hosted by the Chief at the Army House, "that night I could not have had the faintest idea of the decision she had taken about me".

Obviously, the Army Chief had no role to play in the matter of supersession. The author accepted the unexpected decision with grace and dignity. However, his unsavoury remarks about Krishna Rao need Course Correction. I, as a Corps Commander in Western Desert served for nearly two years under him when he was Western Army Commander. General Krishna Rao was a bold, inexhaustible and robust Commander

who knew the 'Front' well, whose military instincts were enhanced by the wealth of combat experience and was capable of inspiring devotion in his staff and the men he commanded. He fits the example of soldier's remark when Wellington rode up during a crisis in one of the Peninsular battles, "here comes the long nosed b..... who beat the French".

After hanging the uniform in 1983, the author joined an NGO called Hindustani Andolan, fought and lost election from Patna constituency to Lok Sabha, all with the aim of reforming politics, as the moral crisis was writ large on the entire political scene. Working with this organisation he came in contact with many eminent people in public life - Vajpayee, Advani, VP Singh, Gujral and others. Because of his personal endearing traits, his services in National interest were sought first by VP Singh and later by Gujral as India's ambassador to Nepal and as Governor of Assam. With his wide ranging interest in people and measured judgement, the author acquitted himself with credit as a diplomat and an administrator. His achievements are vividly covered in the book.

An interesting and well written book which gives a balanced account of momentous events of the past sixty years and more. The book should be useful not only to Defence Services but also to general public. Research scholars will have to wait for his next book 'Recalled to Colours : Diary of a Pro Active Governor'.