
REZENSIONEN

P. V. Narasimha Rao: The Insider

New Delhi: Viking 1998, 767 p.

The former Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao is "The Insider". In this semi-autobiographical novel he disguises facts in the garb of fiction. This literary device enables him to separate the idealist hero, Anand, from the narrator. Anand rises like a pure lotus from the muddy pond of provincial politics. He has an analytical brain and a diplomatic temper. He is given to introspection and the reader is permitted to share his doubts and premonitions. But even when talking to himself, Anand never makes cynical remarks or shows the caustic sense of humour which characterises the narrator. In thus talking with two voices Narasimha Rao unfolds a fascinating panorama of Indian politics in which idealism gets thwarted by opportunism. The hero, however, remains unaffected by corruption and intrigues and slowly rises step by step: Minister, Chief Minister, Prime Minister. He does not crave for power, but when it comes to him, he knows how to wield it. He never succumbs to any temptation. The only chink in his armour is his love affair with attractive and impetuous Aruna, a fellow- MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly). Since both are married, their affair attracts criticism and intrigues, Anand's enemies try hard to use it against him. But somehow they fail in all their attempts. Even with this chink his armour remains intact.

The novel begins with Anand's childhood in a remote village in the state of the Nizam of Hyderabad (called "Afrozabad" in the novel). Cycle and bus are unknown to the villagers. Anand encounters them only at a later stage of his childhood. His father is a small landlord and village officer who sees to it that his bright son gets a proper education. To his dismay his son becomes a terrorist fighting against the Nizam's henchmen in the days before Hyderabad was forcibly merged with the Indian Union. He then joins the Congress party and becomes an MLA at a fairly young age. When there is a sudden transfer of power from one Chief Minister to another, Anand becomes a minister. His Chief Minister, called Chaudhury in the novel, is a consummate politician, a manipulator and opportunist - the very opposite of Anand. The narrator uses him and another minister, Shekhar, an evil genius, as convenient counterfoils. Between them they display all the negative characteristics of Indian politics which the narrator castigates with his caustic humour.

When the reader first gets to know wily Chaudhury he is sleeping with a prostitute who is past her prime. She knows how to compensate her declining charms with a perfect make-up. Talking about this with her, Chaudhury suddenly gets the idea that politics, too, is only a matter of make-up. He does not believe in socialism or any other ideology, but knowing Nehru's socialist preferences he gives a radical socialist speech at a Congress party meeting and attracts Nehru's benevolent attention. From

then on Chaudhury practised the art of political make-up so well that he finally became Chief Minister. In this he was greatly helped by Shekhar, the evil genius, who pretended to be an admirer of Chaudhury's rival Mahendranath for whom he organised a huge birthday party which proved to be his undoing as Chief Minister. Shekhar then became Anand's colleague and inveterate enemy in Chaudhury's cabinet.

Shekhar is a Shakespearean villain to whom the author devotes a great deal of attention. He is bright and efficient, but utterly destructive. He is always involved in character assassinations and other nefarious schemes. He is a convenient tool for Chaudhury. The author has succeeded in making Shekhar an embodiment of the dark side of Indian politics. Shakespearean villains must have some human features and the author shows some compassion for Shekhar who suffered from deep humiliation as a child. In describing this, the author throws light on the terrors of Indian feudal society. Shekhar's mother was a servant in a rich landlord's house and was sexually abused by the landlord and his guests. She was not supposed to have children and had to undergo innumerable abortions. Shekhar survived accidentally and was never permitted to forget his tainted origin. He now hates all landlords for this and would like to exterminate them, but as a political player he knows how to keep his cards close to his chest. He also hates Anand and tries to ruin him. But he calls Aruna "sister" and has some affection for her as he was never permitted to have a sister himself. This is why he refrains from schemes which would hurt her, too. With such human touches the author makes Shekhar come alive and saves him from being a mere negative construct of his imagination.

While describing Chaudhury's and Shekhar's activities the author as narrator has many opportunities to make trenchant remarks on the nature of politics and power. Thus the reader is told that a politician should never show surprise, because no politician can afford to appear to be less than all-knowing. Power, it is said, must be capricious, it is nothing if it does not defy logic and reason. And when describing the method of booth-capturing in Indian elections, the author concludes: "Once everything was deemed 'fair' during elections, the country had nothing but fair elections!" Such insights would shock Anand as the narrator reports, but the narrator himself is obviously less startled by such facts of life.

The entire early period of Anand's political career is dominated by Indira Gandhi and therefore she figures very prominently in this book. Anand admires her, because he thinks she is genuinely interested in doing something for the people though in his introspective moments he sometimes wonders about her real motives. He does not meet her as he is after all only a junior minister in state politics and even when he becomes Chief Minister nominated by her, his contacts with her are very limited. He is very much aware of being a "nominated Chief Minister" as the high command in New Delhi even dictates to him whom he should include in his cabinet. He wanted to keep Shekhar in the cabinet, perhaps realising that it would be better to have him inside rather than outside the cabinet. Chaudhury, the outgoing Chief Minister, tells him that the inclusion of Shekhar would be the litmus test of his autonomy as Chief Minister. But he cannot pass that test and has to obey the order from New Delhi. He is willing to go along with all this, because he is convinced that Indira Gandhi would

back him in his attempt to do something for the people, but in this he had to face his greatest disappointment.

Anand's main aim is to implement a true land reform in his state. This endeavour is described at great length in this book and it deserves that attention.

Anand is first confronted with the land reform problem when Chaudhury ingeniously entrusts the respective portfolio to him. After all Anand is a landlord himself, though a small one, and as such he is an "insider". The measure to be introduced - an integral part of the Congress programme - is the imposition of a land ceiling and the redistribution of surplus land to the landless. This programme had so far remained a piece of innocuous propaganda as the record of rights in land was faulty and could be easily manipulated by the village officers who were either landlords themselves or were under their influence. Anand knew all this because he had himself learned to master the land records in his father's office. As long as he was only a minister for land reforms he could not do much about it as he did not control the executive machinery which was under the revenue minister.

As soon as Anand becomes Chief Minister he takes charge of both the land reforms and the revenue portfolios and starts his mission in right earnest. He instructs the revenue department to submit a report on the time required for the implementation of the reforms and they come up with an estimate of more than three years and a huge amount of extra expenditure. But it just so happens that the unions of village officers visit Anand in order to announce their annual strike for higher emoluments. He treats them kindly and uses his knowledge as an "insider", telling them of his work in his father's office and that if his fate had not willed it otherwise he would have been one of them now. He then asks them how long it would take them to identify all holdings in their villages with more than thirty acres of double-cropped land. They tell him that there are only a small number of such holdings and that they can finish the job in a few hours if there is no interference from the revenue officers.

When the landlords notice that Anand is dead set on accomplishing his reform there arises a spate of fake divorces for the purpose of dividing estates so that they would be below the ceiling stipulated by the impending act. Anand counters this by introducing an ordinance which stipulates that all fraudulent transactions within a period of six months before the passing of the act would be null and void. This sends shock waves through the rural society of the state. Here is a Chief Minister who really means business and does not hide behind the formidable screen of executive obstacles. The report of the revenue department would have provided him with a convenient alibi. Why does he precipitate matters? His adversaries rush to New Delhi and see to it that he is eased out of his office as Chief Minister.

Anand had thought that Indira Gandhi would support the Chief Minister nominated by her and he had also assumed that she meant what had been stated in her programme. This proved to be his undoing.

While these "insider" accounts of state politics have a ring of authenticity there are also a few passages in the book which should have been omitted as they awkwardly interrupt the flow of the narrative and do not contribute anything new to received wisdom. These are the passages referring to the border war between India and

China in 1962 (pp.371-398) and the war with Pakistan in 1965 (pp. 453-468). Since Narasimha Rao later on was in charge of foreign policy when he assumed office at the national level he must have felt obliged to deal with these fateful events in this book. His hero Anand was not involved in these events except like any other Indian citizen who had lived through this period. It would have been a different matter, if Narasimha Rao had used his privileged access to information in his years in New Delhi to throw new light on these episodes of recent Indian history. But he relies on secondary literature and even his interpretation of these events provides no new insights. In some instances the reader is baffled by the insufficient assessment of certain events by one of India's most experienced practitioners in the field of foreign policy. He states that he is still puzzled by the motives for the Chinese offensive of 1962 and guesses that these motives must have been purely political, i.e. to destabilise the Indian political system. He then asserts that if this had been their objective they obviously failed in achieving it. There is no assessment of Chinese strategic aims which were reached swiftly and efficiently. The Chinese picked a very convenient moment for launching their attack. The superpowers were locked in the Cuba missile crisis. In pushing a whole division through the passes of the Eastern Himalaya which then reached the Indian plains the Chinese made an impressive diversionary move. At the same time they directed their main thrust in the Western Himalaya at the Karakorum Pass which they needed in order to complete their ring-road from Tibet to Sinkiang bypassing the terrible desert Taklamakan. They retreated in the East where they had no strategic objectives except for the diversionary move, but they retained their position in the West. In this context Narasimha Rao refers to a "long slice of about twenty kilometres in width.. in Ladakh (which) was not worth the price of completely alienating India.." This assessment of Chinese aims will be of relevance in the context of the second volume of "The Insider" in which Narasimha Rao will have to deal with his own policy with regard to China.

His discussion of the Pakistan war of 1965 also contains some insufficient assessments. Thus he rightly mentions the skirmish in the Rann of Kutch as a prelude to Ayub Khan's subsequent "Operation Grand Slam" in Kashmir. He refers to the fact that "Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri hinted at suitable measures elsewhere to neutralize the Pakistan occupation (of an area at the Rann of Kutch), and the British Prime Minister promptly intervened and suggested a ceasefire." This is a shorthand version of what had happened and does not account for the fact that Ayub Khan derived what he thought to be a useful lesson from his experiment: Attack India at a place of your choice; India will not retaliate elsewhere and accept international mediation. In the meantime you have reached your aim and can negotiate from a position of strength. It was Ayub Khan's bad luck that his Kashmir operation did not work that way. In dealing with the Kashmir operation Narasimha Rao then quotes several pages from a book by Russel Brines. This is indirect evidence of the fact that he really did not care to analyse these events himself and only felt obliged to deal with them as they had happened in the period covered by his book.

The reader will now look forward to the second volume of "The Insider" and hope for an interesting narrative of the type which Narasimha Rao has been able to sustain in this first book - which the exception of the passages mentioned above. Since

"Anand" must assume higher positions at the national level in that second volume and operate in a much more complex environment, the narrator has to face a more difficult task. But as the present volume leads us to believe, he will rise to the occasion.

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Werner Draguhn (Hrsg.): Indien 1998. Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft

Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1998, 339 S.

Nachdem zunächst China, daneben dann noch Südostasien und seit Anfang der 90er Jahre Japan im Mittelpunkt der Arbeiten des Instituts für Asienkunde standen, haben die z.T. dramatischen politischen und wirtschaftlichen Entwicklungen in Indien, insbesondere seit dem Beginn der Liberalisierungspolitik und der damit verbundenen stärkeren Integration des Subkontinents in die Weltpolitik und Weltwirtschaft, dazu geführt, daß künftig auch Indien einen Schwerpunkt der Institutsarbeit bilden wird. 1998 ist nun das erste *Indien-Jahrbuch* erschienen, womit zugleich "ein Forum für Wissenschaftler wie Praktiker zu Gegenwartsfragen Indiens" geschaffen werden soll (Vorwort).

"Ziel des Jahrbuchs ist es, über die aktuelle Entwicklung in Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft laufend zu berichten und dieses durch detaillierte Analysen zu besonders wichtigen Entwicklungen des Subkontinents zu ergänzen. Dabei ist der Berichtszeitraum grundsätzlich das abgelaufene Kalenderjahr" (S. 18). Die Autoren der 15 Einzelbeiträge sind - mit Ausnahme einer Inderin - deutsche Wissenschaftler, die sich durch eigene Forschungsarbeiten, z.T. Beratertätigkeiten, Gastdozenturen oder Erfahrungen in der deutschen Botschaft in New Delhi, spezielle Kenntnisse - "Indienkompetenz" - erworben haben.

Der erste Teil des Jahrbuchs ist politischen Fragen gewidmet: einem Rückblick auf 50 Jahre unabhängiges Indien, Indiens Innen- und Außenpolitik im Berichtsjahr, dem indischen Parteiensystem und Indiens Rolle in den Kooperationsgemeinschaften im asiatisch-pazifischen Raum. Im zweiten Teil geht es um die binnen- und außenwirtschaftliche Entwicklung Indiens, um den wirtschaftlichen Reformprozeß seit 1991, den indischen Mittelstand, Armut und soziale Sicherung sowie um Umweltprobleme und -politik in Indien. Es folgen chronologische Überblicke über die indische Innen- und Außenpolitik 1997, eine umfangreiche, systematisch geordnete Auswahlbibliographie für die Jahre 1996-1998 und ein wirtschaftsstatistischer Anhang, der alle relevanten Daten im Mehrjahresvergleich enthält. Kurzbiographien der Autorinnen/Autoren bilden den Schluß.

Jeder Beitrag vermittelt neben wichtigen Informationen kritische Rück- und Ausblicke, die den Leser zum Mit- und Nachdenken anregen. Besonders hervorzuheben ist der Artikel von Clemens Jürgenmeyer "Die indische Union als Hindunation? Der Hindunationalismus als Faktor indischer Politik" (S. 60-90), der mit folgenden Sätzen schließt: "Indien ist voller Widersprüchlichkeiten, die es oft schwer machen, eine Linie zu erkennen. Es scheint, als gebe es nur das Prinzip des Chaos, allerdings ein produktives, das immer wieder neue Energien freisetzt und neue, unverhoffte