

BOOK REVIEW

***A Mirror to Power: Notes on Fractured Decade.* M. J. Akbar. Uttar Pradesh: Harper Collins Publishers, India, 2015. Pp. 307.**

A Mirror to Power: Notes on Fractured Decade by M. J. Akbar is an in-depth and razor-edged criticism on the history of corruption, state terrorism, justice delayed and justice abused. The rights denied and governance betrayed during the period of the last three decades by United Progressive Alliance (UPA) is unveiled in his lucid, but concise writing. He has exposed the world, outside politics, and the facade of economic excellence in India mercilessly.

Akbar has challenged the Indian claim of its “Rise” by commencing his narrative that “Poverty is only one of the lines dividing Indians.” He, like Khushwant Singh, Arundhati Roy, and Amartya Sen, insists that India’s claims on power, whether as an economic, political or religious, are extraneous, as long as half of its population sleeps with half full stomach. He maintains that wealth is far easier to recognize as compared to poverty, since it lies outside the origins of government, and the interests of individuals who ‘fuel the engines of modern life.’

The distinct prose style writing of Akbar in succinct paragraphs captures the reader’s inspiration. The diversity of the issues discussed with forensic details and pertinence, such as subjects like cricket, cinema stars, the lost art of reading and the joys of trash, he speaks of his sensitivity to human needs. However, he leaves many questions unanswered in the mind of the reader in the absence of explanations and sometimes biased lean.

Although, the author has taken pride in the writings of India’s poets and the history explained through the trial of Bahadur Shah Zafar, to relate to the richness of Indian history, and that it sets the promise in the glory of indispensable Indian century. Yet, the unerring surgery of underlying causes and potential consequences of long drawn mismanagement and poverty accredits Akbar’s writing for an honest and candid intellectual discourse. His writing leaves remorse in the history of recent past, and has

agreed with Pranab Mukherjee for calling Indian democracy ‘too noisy.’ It has become a synonym of majoritarianism.

Akbar joined Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in March, 2014, and was appointed as its National Spokesman. His focus on the three decades of coalition governments, particularly under ex-Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister in-waiting Rahul Gandhi is therefore understandable. He has censured the leadership of the Congress, its malpractices, and has unleashed the mass scam of corruption during the two consecutive terms of Manmohan Singh (2004-2014). Starting from the quote of St. Augustine, “give me chastity and continence but not yet,” Akbar reprimands the cabinet members of UPA government for their embezzlement of \$37 billion of coal mines project. Akbar is of the view that Manmohan Singh claims that his life is an open book, but headed the most corrupt government in India since 1947.

Similarly, in Chapter *A Vote for Jobs*, Akbar has stretched unfairly pleading for an action against Manmohan Singh, and other two senior officials of the Indian Government, since they had agreed on Pakistan’s demand to hold an enquiry against the Indian involvement in Balochistan uprising, and their support to Baloch insurgents. The author says that Singh gave an unwarranted concession given to Pakistan over an alleged Indian role in Balochistan insurrection during the 2009 Sharmul Sheikh Summit. Though, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi publicly censured the PM, she did nothing actually to change the PM’s soft policy towards Pakistan.

Akbar’s myopic observations on India’s foreign policy, particularly towards Pakistan, have made this book more of a popular reflection rather than a well researched academic contribution to the subject. The portrayal is largely of an inimical Pakistan in the Chapter *A Chance that Came, and Went to Outbreak of Peace*. The story line, regrettably, misguides the reader by implicitly calling Pakistan a terrorist state for giving Hafiz Saeed state protocol; whereas, in reality, Hafiz Saeed is facing cases in Pakistani courts, and he is on bail from Lahore High Court on the basis of insufficient evidence of involvement in the Mumbai case.

The author seems to be unaware of the intricacies of court decisions, since he has wrongly mentioned that Modi was absolved of the Gujrat Massacre of 2002, as UPA government failed to establish Modi's guilt in the court of law. Modi was never absolved by the court of law. In fact, the Supreme Court of India could not continue with the prosecution, because there was no evidence to support its indictments. It actually means that Modi did not leave any evidence of his involvement in Gujrat Massacre of 2002.

Following the Indian state policies, he has once again unfairly denied the *Indian Independence Act of 1947* and accused Pakistan Army for continuing with their claims on Kashmir. He opines that Pakistan's foreign policy is being run by the Pakistan Army, mainly to keep the Kashmir issue alive. Akbar suggests that Pakistan Army should accept its failure, as he argues that "nor do the generals (of Pakistan) believe that they were defeated in Kargil, where we had to conquer to win and they had to survive to declare victory."

The author advocates uphold of Gandhi's teachings of non-violence and *Ahimsa* (peace). He has condemned aggression and violation of the Constitution by viewing such acts as counterproductive. His parameters of freedom are defined by respect for human sentiments and freedom. For example, while talking about the cartoon controversy, he pleads that *Section 140* of the Danish Penal Code renders punishment for publicly insulting the doctrine or worship of any religious community, who are legally allowed to live in Denmark. Hence, any support given to the editor of the Danish newspaper for publishing cartoons of the Prophet of Islam to show the increase in the number of Muslim terrorists, violate constitutional provisions. He argues that "If you want to condemn a racist Christian, you don't use an image of Jesus Christ, do you?" (P.107).

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