

Book Reviews



Liberation Bangladesh – 1971: First Hand Untold Action Stories From The War Zone

Maj Gen Dhruv C Katoch and

Lt Col Quazi Sajjad Ali Zahir

Bloomsbury India, 287 pages, Rs 499

Liberation Bangladesh - 1971, is a collection of personal accounts narrated in the form of short stories by the individuals who participated in the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971, both as part of Indian armed forces, as also members of the Mukti Bahini. The historical account of the 1971 War has been covered in a number of books written by various authors from time to time, however, the perspectives of the individuals who actually took part in this campaign have hardly found a mention anywhere. The compilation of stories in this book affords this unique opportunity and comprises candid personal accounts of novice writers, who have been able to narrate their emotions, pain and bravery in pursuit of the cause they so strongly believed in. This collection of 41 short stories is the first such endeavour to document the first-hand accounts of the brave hearts of 1971 War that brought an end to the tyranny and genocide of the Pakistan Army, thus, resulting in the birth of Bangladesh. The stories have been narrated with disarming candour and honesty, making them a compelling read, especially for the present-day generation of both India and Bangladesh.

The narrations in *Liberation Bangladesh – 1971* bring out the saga of raw courage, guts and frontline leadership of the Indian armed forces as also captures the spirit of the resistance movement of the people of Bangladesh. The book is laid out in five sections. Section 1 comprises 12 stories that cover the birth and strengthening of the Resistance Movement (Mukti Bahini) of the people of Bangladesh. These are innocent accounts of lesser known individuals,

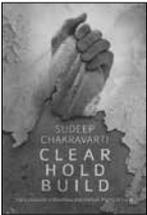
who in their limited capacities contributed to the overall cause of liberation of their motherland and but for this publication, their sacrifices may have gone unnoticed. Section 2 comprises 11 stories after the commencement of the war on December 03, 1971 and has been named "*Stories from the 13-Day War*". These are professional accounts from the soldiers of the Indian Army; however, these accounts are free of military jargon and have been narrated in an easily comprehensible manner to enable an interesting read by an audience sans military knowledge also. The rare photographs, maps and hand-written notes provided at the end of the sections add up to make this book interesting and informative reading.

Section 3 of the book comprises 5 stories giving the accounts of the airborne operation carried out by the Indian Army at Tangail and has been aptly named as "*The Paratroopers*". These stories bring out the advantages that are accrued by using the third dimension and the effect that these para-drops had on the psyche of the Pakistani troops and, thus, brought an end to the will of the Pakistan Army to offer resistance. Section 4 comprises 6 stories covering the "*Air and Naval Operations*". These stories bring out the necessity of coordination in the operations of the three Services. The air supremacy established by the Indian Air Force and the naval blockade established by the Indian Navy were indeed instrumental in isolating the Pakistan Army in Bangladesh and the same has been adequately narrated in these stories. Section 5, the final part of the book comprises 7 stories and has been named as "*Surrender and After*". This section is a befitting conclusion to the book, especially the all encompassing narrations by Lt Gen JFR Jacob and Lt Gen Sagat Singh. The most important facet this section brings out is the honourable conduct of the Indian Army, which in the highest traditions of professionalism, ensured honourable treatment to the surrendered Pakistan Army personnel in line with the provisions of the Geneva Convention. In the final 13 pages of the book, a short profile of the authors who have contributed their stories is given, which offers us some familiarisation with the respective authors.

Overall, the untouched and candid narrations by an array of authors are the actual attraction of this book. These individual narrations make interesting reading and need to be preserved for posterity to provide a humane touch to the historical facet of the campaign for liberation of Bangladesh. The campaign that led to the liberation of Bangladesh was an unparalleled military achievement of the Indian armed forces with the assistance of the Mukti Bahini. This book is indeed a unique collection of personal accounts of the individuals who actually

contributed to the birth of Bangladesh. It gives an opportunity to the reader to get a feel of this historical and most successful military campaign as experienced by the brave hearts who formed part of this campaign.

Review by Col Anuraag Chhibber, Senior Fellow at CLAWS.



Clear-Hold-Build

Sudeep Chakravarti

HarperCollins 278 pp; Rs 599

Clear- Hold- Build: Hard Lessons of Business and Human Rights in India by Sudeep Chakravarti offers an unprecedented, must-do checklist for human rights, and for responsible, and sensible, business-planning and policy-making, with the hypothesis of materialisation of these projects. In addition, it is a tremendous information bank for someone who is involved with conflict related matters concerning the Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected regions, that overlap the spaces dotted with intended big currency projects.

The author blends historical research and analysis of current developments with extensive interviews and on-field research. He speaks to senior executives, policy-makers, activists, lawyers and local communities across the conflict zones of India to present a ringside view of the present and future of business and human rights. His interactions and travels in these areas often make the book appear like a travelogue, though an informative and analytical one.

In the troubled Maoist infested region of our country, that is predominantly inhabited by the Adivasis, there has been major opposition to various projects that are corporate driven and government supported, for so-called development of the area. In context of the Maoist strongholds that overlap with the region under reference, there has been a conflict which the author terms, “*MoUism v/s Maoism*”. Public anger has led to delays and disruption of these business projects, and the threat of human rights violations by giving these projects a shape, is a

very real one. With the globalisation of communication, activism of the media, judiciary and civil rights organisations, company boardroom decisions have a new reality to account for: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that becomes synonymous with corporate accountability, being a mandatory legal binding.

Some of the burning and controversial human rights cases like those of Vedanta, Tata Steel, Posco, Kudankulam, etc have been lucidly dealt with by the author. The issue has been hotly and widely debated in recent times in the wake of Singur and Nandigram, and in various hot spots in Odisha and Chhattisgarh, involving almost all big business houses in the country – Niyamgiri, Kalinga Nagar and POSCO, to name a few. As mentioned, this is a matter of great interest to a wide spectrum of readership including security analysts, human rights activists, development planners and economists, among others.

The book is a resounding and reasonable rebuttal to the rosy and dangerously apathetic tales that are told about big businesses and their commitment to CSR and thereby contributing to the development of society by enhancing the much coveted growth rates. The author rips apart the narratives that surround the actual reality regarding flashpoints such as Vedanta, Tata Steel, Posco and Kudankulam, punctuated with strong analytical inputs. The manner in which Kalinga Nagar and Niyamgiri Hills have become the metaphor of our distressingly myopic times, violating the human rights of the project affected populations, has been effectively brought out in this book.

It is also about how local communities and stakeholders are being exploited in the name of development, which can be illustrated by one fact: almost exactly a year ago, on the same day that the last of 12 villages voted Vedanta out of Niyamgiri for good, the multinational announced a huge CSR and Public Relations (PR) campaign called “Our Girls, Our Pride.” The farcical nature of this sham campaign is there for all to see, in spite of Vedanta roping in cine-stars to be the brand ambassadors of the project, which has NDTV as its partner. The inhabitant Dongria Kondhs are totally unmoved and unruffled, in their singular determination to save their traditional rights and faith. To the extent that they are willing to make their children sit at home rather than go to a Vedanta sponsored school, saying, “It has taken the Vedanta project and resistance to the same by us for the government to come to our needs”.

The author has also underscored his concern over state sponsored efforts to scuttle their rights. Towards this, he mentions, “The village councils may have had their say, but the truth of the matter is that with the Odisha government displaying a remorseless strategy to use every aspect of government, from local

administration to local police, as an expression of corporate will, the tribals have been struggling because here, as also at the other flashpoints, there is an alarming degree of bonhomie between the government and the corporates in the conflict zones”.

The book offers a close critique of how disaffection and resistance were inevitable given the consolidation of vested interests, thwarting local communities in the name of development. From land acquisition to resettlement and rehabilitation, the project-affected communities have been disillusioned, all through, with the result that the prospect of growth has nosedived and the cost of businesses has increased because too many opportunities have been lost and delays and liabilities have mounted – all due to the perceived smart moves by business houses to deceive the people without any stakes in terms of consultations and participative decision-making. And, this quagmire has resulted eventually in the Maoists coming into the fray, exploiting the disillusionment of the tribals for their ulterior motives.

One chapter, talks of how “a few farmers meet the face of a corporation” in Charkudih and how distrust and resentment grew in the region where “the language of land acquisition has spawned a free market vocabulary”. The reasoning is precise and the arguments have a sharp cutting edge, which make nonsense of the tall claims made by the likes of Adi Godrej. The manner in which the acknowledged captain of industry roots for land acquisition shows how the rights of those who were dispossessed were neatly sidestepped, and all this happened in the name of ensuring livelihoods for those ousted.

As per the author, another theatre of conflict between vested interests, chiefly the state itself, and determined locals is Kudankulam, where the residents show a broken statue of Mary at a local church to symbolically highlight how the Idinthakarai skyline has changed forever. No agency, including the central government, has ever consulted the affected community, which has inflamed passions over several sensitive issues, other than the safety concerns with respect to the plant. In the course of protests and active local participation in them, people of small means have suddenly been outlawed and blacklisted, with police cases slapped on them. The protests, however, continue to grow, since the people probably have nothing to lose. Accusations of foreign Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) funding the agitation against the nuclear plant gained currency in a “largely uncritical and uncaring media”. Amid all this, claims and counter-claims about safety have continued. In the context of the recent attempted breakthroughs with the US on nuclear cooperation, such issues do

put a big question mark on the future course and feasibility, given the rising awareness and poor standards of safeguards in the existing plants.

The people affected by the projects have, thus, effectively blocked them from all ends, and the role of the state comes in for criticism. In the current times, given the government's decision to invite investments and its attempts to revise laws to make them investor friendly, the path ahead is not going to be hurdle free. The state as well as the business houses can no longer afford to look the other way or play sham CSR. In this context, the book is extremely relevant, not only from the point of view of humanitarian aspects but also from the security perspective, as this net assessment gives a very clear understanding of the roots of the conflict so as to analyse measures, to allay disillusionment and deny a fertile soil for anti-national elements like the Maoists.

Review by Col **Shashank Ranjan**, Senior Fellow at CLAWS.