



book

India's Cryogenic Programme Suffered Due to Isro Case-book

by Nirendra Dev

EVEN as the Supreme Court has set at rest the infamous Isro spy case and reinstated the accused scientists, the episode dealt the biggest blow to the country's cryogenic programme, says a new book.

The episode was blow out of proportion by intelligence agencies and police least realising the damage they were causing to country's cryogenic programmes, says J Raja Shekharan Nair in 'Spies from Space — the Isro Frame-Up'.

"Worse, by giving a non-existing 'espionage' colour to the issue they have played into the hands of the Americans," claims Nair, a journalist, who got drawn into the espionage case during the course of interviews he had with the accused.

The transfer of cryogenic engine technology to India, which Washington "did not like" was the "crux of the whole issue" in the 'espionage' theory, Nair notes.

"After signing the treaty (space technology) with Russia, India was poised to have its counter opened, with the department of space drafting the master plan to transform Isro into a commercial outfit.

"It is this difference which would

have helped India clinch many deals in the space market causing injury to American and French commercial interests," Nair writes.

"But that did not happen," he says. Tracing the background of Indo-Russian space programme vis-a-vis cryogenic programme, Nair says "way back in 1992, Glavkosmos had smelt that America would force Russia to breach the Isro-Glavkosmos contract".

"To circumvent the American pressure, an idea was mooted to fabricate cryogenic engines for India in Kerala Hi-tech Industries Limited (Keltec), specialising in hi-tech fabrication works," he notes.

"Fabricating cryogenic engine in Keltec needed transfer of technology to Keltec," the author says, noting the scheme of things was that if the technology reaches Isro from Keltec nobody could blame Glavkosmos.

There was another 'specific reason' why Keltec, a novice, was handpicked. The then Isro Chairman U R Rao was scheduled to take the mantle of Keltec after his retirement, shortly.

However, "at the same time there was a strong lobby in Isro favouring the Machine Tools Aid and Reconditioning (MTAR). In the absence of Keltec, MTAR would have been the most favoured",

Nair notes.

Isro also entered into an agreement with Uri aviation for carrying "boxes" from Glavkosmos to Trivandrum as faced with arm-twisting, "they did not want to take the risk of American backlashes."

"The first flight of Uri 224, landed on January 23, 1994 from Karachi, second landed on March 11, 1994 and left on March 13. The third Uri 3791 landed on July 17."

"The fourth did not come, before that the spy scandal had rocked the world. And the I B implicated Uri aviation," says the author, thus — bringing an abrupt end to the country's much ambitious cryogenic programme.

"All these things were updated to the American space marketing lobby because it had planted moles in Isro.... accordingly I B officials wanted to implicate Prof U R Rao they did not succeed," the book says.

In the process, Nair laments those involved in framing and blowing up the case did not realise the structural damage they were bringing to the hitherto non-controversial and reputed academic space research institute like Isro.

"In the process," he says, "the I B also labelled Isro as a defence research cen-

tre — a label America and Pakistan have been trying hard all these years to paste on Isro, now stands engraved on it." Moreover, the "cryogenic missile technology", alleged to have been "leaked" was a total "technical absurdity".

"The technically absurd terminology was aired by the I B with a purpose to divert attention from the commercial angle," says the author.

"The first cryo stage was to reach India in 1996. But it is yet to reach. It was only on December 17, 1996, full 26 months after the spy scandal broke out, that Isro tested a subscale cryo engine."

Yet the scientists were accused of transferring the details of the technology to Pakistan.

The suspects named were — S Nambi Narayanan, project director, Cryogenic System, D Sasi Kumaran, dy deputy project director, Aleksey V Vasin, expert Glavkosmos in charge of cryogenic technology and K Chandrasekhar, liaison man of Glavkosmos.

"All connected to the cryogenic programme," Nair remarks.

Referring to I B implicating Russian vasin, the author says "the wise men of I B then went for the unkindest cut of all and even questioned him."

"This time the technical absurdity

they aired was that Nambi Narayanan had struck a deal with Vasin to sell the drawings of Vikas engine," says the author.

However, they were to be proved wrong for once.

"The absurdity lies in the fact that Vikas engine is the inhouse system developed from Viking engine made by France and transferred to India in 1977.

Russia has its own liquid propulsion system and Vasin, if he desires, can spy the drawings of Russian liquid technology. Why should he work as a middle-man between two enemy countries?" argues Nair.

"I B which never bothered to check the veracity of its espionage theory at any stage took up the matter with Russian government.

"The economics crime department of the federal counter intelligence service questioned Vasin about the deal which made A I Dunaev remark, "those who are initiating such enquiries did not obviously have any technical expertise, let alone any idea of the rich legacy of Indo-Russian space cooperation".

But the author rues, "Dunaev is wrong. The master brain for whom the officials of I B were working have full knowledge of the cooperation. They just did not want it to grow further".

The I B, at one stage, even tried to rope in Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) officials but the controversy was put at rest following DRDO chief A P J Abdul Kalam's intervention.

As for Mariam Rasheeda and Fauziya Hassan, the two Maldivian women caught in the Web, Nair says they were cast long before the plot was set to satisfy the male ego of one inspector.

Raman Srivastava, IGP, Kerala, had to be cast because one local paper 'Kerala Kaumudi' had already labelled him as the kingpin," says Nair.

Bangalore contractor S K Sharma was a "miscast", he says, noting, "nothing made the Isro case such a farce as the arraignment of this contractor who did not even know what the acronym meant."

Unethical surveillance and cops perhaps cost India some crucial years in terms of cryogenic development as it still yearns to launch its satellite in the geo-synchronous orbit with its own vehicle.

About the book: "Spies from Space — the Isro Frame-up" — J Rajashekharan Nair. Published by Konark Publishers. Pp-203, Price — Rs 250

— PTI

interview

A Poet of Infinite Light and Shadow

by AZM Haide

FAZAL Shahabuddin is one of the triumvirs of the world of poetry in this country. Two other members of this triumvirate are Shamsur Rahman and Shahid Kadri. It is a pity, Shahid Kadri is now lost in the mist of oblivion.

Fazal's date with poetry goes back to early fifties and from that time onward he has been ceaselessly and untiringly writing poetry. In fact, poetry is his sole pre-occupation.

Fazal is one of those outstanding poetic geniuses who are considered trend-setter in poetry of this country. Like Shamsur Rahman, Fazal Shahabuddin set in poetry of Bangladesh the trend of modernity as conceived in the west. An urban-based, sophisticated elitist poet, Fazal has in his bones and blood the rich tradition of Baudelaire, Rilke, WB Yeats and TS Eliot.

Although he is deeply influenced by the western poets stated above as well as by poets of the thirties in Bengali literature Jibananda Das, Buddh Dev Basu, Vishnu Dey, Shudhindranath Datta etc, he never digressed from his national milieu. He followed their style and technique of presentation, but retained his innate originality which bears the stamp of his personality.

Fazal is indisputably one of the major poets of the fifties in this country who is still contributing to the enrichment of poetry. There should be no hesitation in saying that Shamsur Rahman and Fazal Shahabuddin's contribution to the enrichment of Bengali poetry is much more than those of their contemporaries in West Bengal.

Fazal is now on the threshold of his mid-sixties. Having detoured diverse courses, he has finally climbed the peak of his poetic career from where he visualises celestial glow serving as the bridge between our mortal life on this evanescent world and the life hereafter. He is not despaired by the darkness of death closing in upon him because it marks the beginning of man merger with eternity.

The noticeable aspect about Fazal's rise to maturity as a poet is that there is an essential unity in the diversity of his courses. That unity is represented by love which, according to the poet, permeates through all objects, living and lifeless, in this cosmic system. It is love which is reflected in the interplay of infinite light and shadow.

The poet gleaned varied experiences as he passed through different phases, starting from that of love and eroticism. Interestingly enough, Fazal's love poems are different from those of his predecessors and contemporaries. He perceives love in every animate and inanimate objects of nature and he sublimates it into a transcendental force which overspreads the whole universe.

A socially conscious poet, Fazal could never remain aloof in the world of his dream. As and when his country and compatriots face crises, he invariably stirs out of the ivory tower of his seclusion to express solidarity with them. His poems on the Language Movement and liberation war in 1971 will amply corroborate this assertion.

The excerpts of the questions posed to the poets and answers given by him

In the fifties and sixties I was passing through spring-time of my life when my heart used to chase butterfly on the wings of romance. Hence the predominant theme of my poetry during those days was love. Love and eroticism are inextricably linked with each other to make a wholesome experience which one has to undergo at one stage or other of one's life. I too have passed through that experience which has found a spontaneous outflow into my poetry.

form part of the dialogue between this columnist and the poet on the eve of the latter's 63rd birth anniversary.

Q: Mr Fazal, you are a poet by passion and a journalist by profession. How and when did you feel ferment of that passion within you. To be clearer, were you conscious of the cloud looming on your mind and struggling for an outburst in the shape of copious rains of poetry before you started writing it?

A: I was seventeen when I made my debut in the domain of poetry. As early as that I wrote a poem on the historic '52-language Movement. That poem marked a turning point in my career. Soon after I wrote another poem entitled "Ebong Tumi" (and you). Incidentally, this is the first poem of my first book of verses entitled "Trishnar Agnite Eka" (alone in the fire of thirst).

To be candid, I was a restless, romping young man playing soccer, cricket and badminton during my school and college days. At that time nobody thought I was cut out for poetry. I cannot figure out how have I written that poem on that tragic killing. All I can recall is that I was physically present at the theatre of police firing that led to the tragic killings of Barkat, Salam and other youths. I watched the enactment of that painful drama which stirred me to the depth of my being. Bewildered and benumbed I walked back to my college (Jagannath College) under a spell as it were. The editor of the College magazine, who was with me during the incident requested me to write a poem on the tragedy. And indeed I did write a poem on the tragedy in the backdrop of the '52-Language Movement. How I wrote that poem was still a mystery to me. I am not a revolutionary iconoclast, nor a fiery idealist. But perhaps there was fire within me about which I was not quite aware. Stung to quick, the volcano within me erupted oozing out lava in the shape of endless stream of poetry. That poem formed a landmark in my life for it initiated me in the wonderland of poetry. After I wrote that poem, it was poetry and nothing but poetry in my life. I renounced all my extra-curricular activities and opted solely for poetry. From that time onward poetry became my sole pre-occupation. Except journalism which I adopted to eke out my existence, I did nothing.

Q: You are often accused of being too deeply engrossed in love and eroticism to come out of its spell to become a socially conscious poet. Your comment please.

A: In the fifties and sixties I was passing through spring-time of my life when my heart used to chase butterfly on the wings of romance. Hence the predominant theme of my poetry during those days was love. Love and eroticism are inextricably linked with each other to make a wholesome experience which one has to undergo at one stage or other of one's life. I too have passed through that experience which has found a spontaneous outflow into my poetry.



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One has to meander through different alleys and avenues to reach one's ultimate destination. I have detoured diverse phases and different stages to attain the present state of my poetic career. Love and eroticism only form a phase of my life. It will, however, be unfair to say I am too deeply immersed in it to come out. It is true, like all poets I am a captive of my world of remorseless solitude wherein I have no companion, comrade or close kin. I am a lonely man and I do not share pang of that loneliness with anyone, not even with my lady-love. But at times when my country and compatriots are confronted with crises, I stir out of my solitude to discharge my social duties. Have I not come out of my loneliness or of the world of amorous passion during the language movement or liberation war to express my solidarity with the rest of my countrymen and thereby performed my social responsibility.

Q: What is your concept of love. In

nite Being. I notice interplay of love in nature, in sailing clouds, in murmuring melancholy of falling leaves, in chirping birds, in melody of gliding brooks. In short, I notice love permeating all animate and inanimate objects of nature. In short, love, to me, is the dynamics of life. As a matter of fact, where there is no love, there is no life. The following lines adequately sum up my concept of love

Suddenly leaves become tender
The flowers bloomed
Suddenly the rivers swelled
The wind turned restless
Suddenly birds flew inside my blood
And dreams started to form
With green leaves
With restless wind on the river
Suddenly you came with all your glory
The spring at the door
I shivered, I trembled
I became frightened
Because I knew you are the total end of all my dream

(translated by Kamal Abdullah)

My contemporaries, Shamsur Rahman, Shahid Kadri and others in early years of their life poured forth their lyrical outpourings in their love poems. The exquisite candances of their love poetry are contrived to convey their amorous emotion to their women. The love poems of Nazrul Islam and Jibananda Das belong to the same genre of poetry. But my love poems are different from those of my precursors as well as contemporaries in the sense that love as visualized by me surmounts eroticism without however denying it and assumes kinetic force that regulates and governs the whole universe.

As I have stepped into twilight years of my life, my love poems have a started assuming metaphysical character. The rapturous emotion which used to thrill my heart and tings my poetic vision with romantic love gradually sobered down to mysticism. The dream girl I used to apostrophize in sheer ecstasy in my early poetry was gradually transformed into an ethereal being inhabiting an unsubstantial dreamland of my own.

The following lines epitomize my concept of love and woman

The light and shadow playing into poets soul
The sea roaring perpetually in poets blood
The eternal river flowing in poets desire
The woman returns there over and over again
She is an eternal woman and a woman only
She blooms, bubbles, undulates, darts and overwhelms
An inconceivable, all-devouring passion

(translated by A Z M Haider)

In the concluding stanza of this verse entitled "poet" my woman has been portrayed more clearly
If that woman dies
I, Fazal Shahabuddin, will die

I am a captive of ceaseless flame of youth
I am wrapped with endless strings of youth
I shall die, dissolve, I shall fade away
That woman lingers from eternity in the inherent
murmur of light and shadow playing in poets soul

That woman is a woman who keeps alive the poet
Keeps alive nature, cosmic system present, past and future.

(translated by A Z M Haider)

Ridings on the viewless wings of poesy the bard in me soars higher still and higher from the dusty world of passion and desire and finally enters the mystic land of his own which he invests with celestial halo. The bard installs in that world his woman or, to be precise, his lady-love of poesy who is neither an Aphrodite nor a venus. She is a woman the poet has been longing for a long time. She has descended upon his life with all her transcendental glory and lifted him to a sublime height where darkness dissolves into divine lustre. Having glimpse of his woman or lady-love the poet lapses into an exquisite rhapsody

Q: Will you please explain your Concept of nature.

I have viewed nature as an integral part of life which pervades the whole universe. It includes all animate and inanimate objects that exist in the cosmic system regulated and controlled by an invisible hand. I think sailing clouds, flowing rivers, murmuring melancholy of falling leaves, flying larks, shady trees, splendours of rainbow, variegated hues of spring blossoms, snow-capped mountains, etc are inextricably linked in a cosmic system which I am inclined to call nature. All these and numerous other objects are inseparably linked with the cosmic system by a golden thread of love-love which is the manifestation of the Infinite Being. This, I think, should serve to make my concept of nature explicit.

Q: Ever since you have entered the twilight years of your life, one can notice interplay of mysterious light and shadow in your poetry. Will you please explain what they stand for.

A: Ever since I have entered the twilight years of my life, my mind has started dallying with darkness as it often luxuriates with light of life. To me, death is not the cessation of life. We are frightened of the impending death because we think it marks the finale of our mortal existence. To me, as we die, we shuffle off our mortal coil and pass into eternity. After death we attain infinite body form which is ageless, timeless and deathless. Death marks the beginning of a new life which is a life of eternal bliss. That is a life of eternal darkness radiated by a glow emanating from the Supreme Being. That is why I am in love with the life of darkness of death.

Notice

The third installment of 'Kazi Ghiyasuddin: A Musician in Painting' could not be published today for unavoidable reasons. However, the 3rd and the last part of the piece will appear next week. The inconvenience caused to the readers is regretted.

— Page Editor