

Interview of Dr. Sudhir Bloeria, former civil servant, with Namay Kapoor, Editor-in-Chief Review.

N.K: What made you decide to join the army?

S.B: My father who was in the army had an orderly called Kamal Singh who had taken active part in the '47-'48war against Pakistan. He used to tell me stories of how the bunkers were made, what a trench is and how they repulsed Pakistani attacks. Though my father was in the army, it was actually Kamal's stories that inspired me the most. I would imagine myself as one of the characters in his description. Though at that time I was just in class IV and V, I made up my mind to join the army.

N.K: Sir, what made you switch from military service to civil service?

S.B: I joined the army as per my wishes but since I was a short service commissioned officer, I had an option after six years to either leave the army or to stay with it. I decided to stay but as a fallback option I appeared for the IAS entrance examination and got through. My seniors in the army and elders at home advised me to join the civil services but both I and my wife were keen to continue in the army. Somehow the switch over just happened.

N.K: You have served in J&K at the height of insurgency. Things are much better now. Does your book 'The Dying Terrorism' deal with the same?

S.B: 'The Dying Terrorism' is primarily an exercise in record keeping. It tells how we organized and conducted the parliamentary and assembly elections in 1996, after a gap of ten years. You know human memory is short. Since I could recall some details and had kept personal notes of important events, I wanted to document the entire sequence of events for the posterity. The book does deal with terrorism and related issues also. It records reasons and events leading to the rise of terrorism and how we can address the problem, but primarily it is a record keeping exercise.

N.K: What according to you can be a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem?

S.B: Unfortunately it is not a problem within the control of India alone. Whether you like it or not Pakistan has become a party in the permanent resolution of this problem. We in India feel, and rightly so, that the entire J&K as it existed on 15th August 1947 is ours whereas Pakistan wants J&K as a part of Pakistani territory. So a practical way out has to be found. As per the newspaper reports, there were occasions in the past, particularly between Rajiv Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto, when outlines of resolution had been worked out but these could not be pushed forward. Then some understanding is said to have been arrived at between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and General Musharraf, but that too didn't fructify. A lasting solution would have to be something that will be acceptable to both the countries. The line of control (LOC) could perhaps be agreed as the area of influence of the respective countries. From that premise we can talk about other things like making the border porous, facilitate trade and

interaction between the two parts etc. But maintaining the sanctity of the line of control at this point of time seems to be a pre-requisite to the lasting solution.

N.K: What do you think is the biggest challenge for our country today?

S.B: The other day I was reading an opinion poll in the Times of India and the question put to the respondents was what is the biggest challenge that India is facing? Is it terrorism or corruption? It was corruption which got 82 % votes. I completely agree with this. Corruption is an issue with which we have to deal with great alacrity followed by population management. Of course, terrorism of all kinds also needs priority attention.

N.K: According to you what is the solution to the problem of corruption?

S.B: It is a natural principle of life and science that things flow from top to bottom. We have given ourselves a democratic system and it is controlled by the political executive, so it will have to start from there. Though corruption exists at all levels but I firmly believe that if the political executive is clean, honest and straightforward then nobody down the line, be it a politician, a civil servant, a middleman or a criminal can go beyond his circle of activities. We now have certain instruments like the Right To Information Act, social activists etc which generate confidence. So if we make suitable systemic changes and something positive starts from the top, it will make a lot of difference.

N.K: You have been a regular visitor to The Scindia School. What is the magnetic charm of the school which draws old boys to it?

S.B: In my case the charm lies not just in the school itself but in the town as well. I studied here from class IV to XII, so the formative years of my life were spent in Gwalior. I like to come back to the school as I feel happy to be on the Fort. At least for that week I feel young again. I feel like sharing with the boys what I have learnt, and the experiences that I have accumulated, over the past five decades.

N.K: Is there any particular teacher whom you still remember?

S.B: Not just one, I remember a number of them with respect and affection. Some teachers were simply outstanding. The then Principal, Mr.K.C.Shukla was already an institution when I joined. There were many accomplished teachers like our Hindi teacher Mr. Devendra Narayan Verma who was a poet of great repute and wrote the School Song. I remember many teachers, particularly those who taught us as well as those who were good sportsmen.

N.K: Are you in touch with your batch mates? How active are you as a SOBA member?

S.B: I am in touch with my batch mates and some other old boys for some professional reasons. I often come across old boys who are in the army. They keep coming in and out of my state J&K. We had organized a SOBA chapter two years ago. We interact fairly regularly but before that we did not have a SOBA chapter in J&K. It is difficult for us to get connected with far away cities. Mr.

Zorawar Singh, a former housemaster and teacher of Scindia School is also one of our members. He is the Principal of a school in Jammu and we meet quite often.

S.B. Dr. Sudhir Bloeria
N.K. Namay Kapoor