

PROFILE REVIEWS

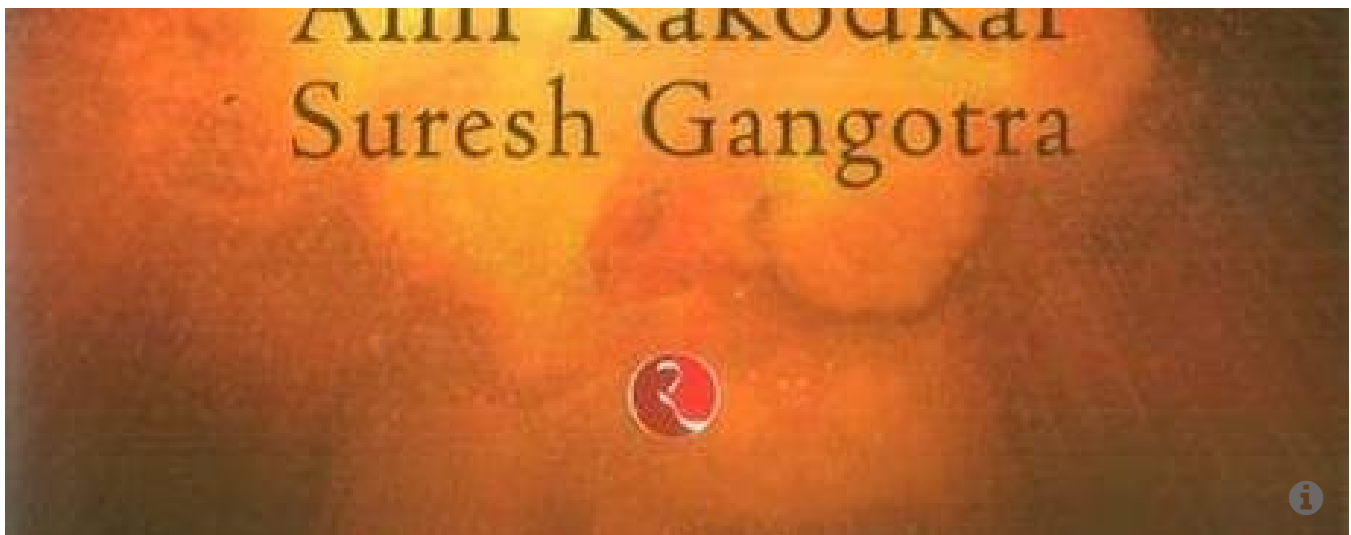
Book review of *Fire and Fury: Transforming India's Strategic Identity* by Anil Kakodkar, Suresh Gangotra

FOREWORD BY DR MANMOHAN SINGH

FIRE AND FURY

TRANSFORMING
INDIA'S
STRATEGIC IDENTITY

Anil Kakodkar



Kandaswami Subramanian

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Anil Kakodkar recollects the watershed moments as he steered the country's atomic energy programme

Nuclear energy, as a source of power, has remained elusive. Generations of scientists and administrators have looked upon it as a clean source. Unfortunately, proliferation of nuclear weapons and global rivalry to acquire them as strategic deterrents led to concerted attempts by major powers, especially the U.S., to contain them through unequal arrangements like the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Horrors of 'dual use' continued to haunt. As Anil Kakodkar, former chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, reveals in an anecdote, it was not possible to get even steel tubes made by Indian companies with U.S. collaboration!

After the peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE) of 1974, India became an outcast and could not get nuclear technology or components and was driven to rely solely on indigenous sources. It could not get uranium to run ongoing plants and companies in the U.S. and Canada reneged on contractual obligations. These thwarted efforts to develop nuclear energy even for peaceful use.

The Department of Atomic Energy (AEC) and its agencies spared no efforts to promote self-reliance and indigenisation. Kakodkar recalls how he was able to conceptualise, design and fabricate nuclear power projects at various locations in the country. When he joined the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in 1964 he felt that he had 'found his true calling.' He says atomic energy 'transformed' his life. Indeed, this

is not an exaggeration if one studies the contribution made by him in AEC projects, especially in designing and fabricating the equipment required for the PNE and later for Pokhran-II in 1998. He records with meticulous care innumerable interactions between various scientists, engineers, etc. It is rare to find this atmosphere in other organisations. This was in great part due to Kakodkar's style of functioning. In one of the last chapters, his wife Suyasha describes his "qualities of being self-reliant, modest, determined, dedicated, objective and scientific." Incidentally, his wife did not know that he was the man behind the PNE until the news broke. She writes without regrets how leaves usually lapsed.



U.S. machinations

Kakodkar felt that after Pokhran, India had become a strategic power. A large part of the book is devoted to negotiations with the U.S. on the civil nuclear deal. It offers valuable information on the nature and intensity of negotiations and the issues which came up. It was evident that the Bush administration had changed its geopolitical strategy which could involve India into U.S. efforts to contain China, break the NPT and seek India's support on Iran sanctions. There was also the objective of creating a market for U.S. exports of nuclear machinery. India, on its part, was keen to get rid of sanctions to be able to acquire equipment and technology. Kakodkar says his sole aim was to retain strategic autonomy. At one meeting, Kakodkar felt he was on one side, and other senior members were against him; it was only after Dr. Manmohan Singh agreed with him that the final agreement was signed. He narrates this episode without bitterness.

This book is essential reading for those who wish to understand the development of nuclear power and negotiations on the signing of the nuclear deal with the U.S.

Fire and Fury: Transforming India's Strategic Identity; Anil Kakodkar, Suresh Gangotra; Rupa; ₹500.

The author writes on economic and strategic issues.

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