

SECURITY BEYOND SURVIVAL

ESSAYS FOR K. SUBRAHMANYAM

EDITOR

P.R. KUMARASWAMY



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A RATHER PERSONAL BIOGRAPHY

SANJAY SUBRAHMANYAM

evva turāivatu ulakam ulakattōTu
avva turāiva tarivu

It is wisdom to live in the world
 As the world lives.

—*Tirukkural*, Chapter 43

When I was 10 years old, the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 broke out in the winter, on 3 December to be precise. I can remember the months leading up to it quite clearly, as I recall the rather absurd trenches that were dug for civil defence in the back gardens of houses in Netaji Nagar (today's Africa Avenue), where we lived in New Delhi. We all boiled up pots of rice glue and stuck brown paper or newspaper on the windowpanes. Sirens would sound and blackout was to be observed. I can remember the 1965 war, but in a much more faint and confused way, and it is possible that the two memories have also become conflated in some way. At any rate, there was much excitement in the air and also a certain sense of jingoism—even in the so-called humorous programmes on the radio, like 'Yeh Radio Jhootistan Hai', making fun of Radio Pakistan. Nevertheless, 1971 was also the year of Dilip Sardesai, Sunil Gavaskar, and B.S. Chandrasekhar, and of the great cricket triumphs in the West Indies and England. As a budding cricket fan, I had made up my own scrapbooks, with profiles of the players on the two sides, extracts from the reports in the papers on each match (brief ones for the county matches, several pages for each test match) complete scorecards, and photographs.

War seemed like a worthwhile object with which to continue this sort of exercise. After all, the scent of an Indian victory was to be had from early on, as town after town in East Pakistan fell under the inexorable march of the Indian Army. I knew my father had much interest in all of this and that he was writing and reflecting about it, as well as appearing periodically on All-India Radio. Some three years before, he had taken over as Director of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), on his return from a year long trip to the UK and the US. I asked him what he thought of my scrapbook plans. As I recall, his face visibly fell. Then he sat me down and gently told me that war was not something one made scrapbooks about. It was a serious matter, a matter of life and death. I have often thought about that moment, when I hear gung-ho armchair specialists, treating war today as a game: if they 'take out' two of our cities, we will 'take out' five of theirs, they say blithely.

I begin with this anecdote because I believe that much of what has been written *ad hominem* about my father K. Subrahmanyam—whether in the pages of the *Hindu*, the *New Yorker*, or the *Illustrated Weekly of India*—is reflective of the smug and superficial prejudices of the writers themselves, rather than a proper knowledge of the man himself, his opinions, and his view of the world. My intention here is not to turn biography into hagiography, but to set the record straight in a number of small matters, and also give the reader a sense of the milieu from which he emerged, those that he has frequented, and those which have influenced him in his adult life. At times my account may appear rather too discreet for readers and I will obviously have to gloss over certain sensitive questions, which I have been privy to by mere chance. Even if I have not signed the Official Secrets Act, family ties do bind! For purposes of economy, I shall refer to him in the pages that follow as KS.

KS is the third of six surviving children of Krishnaswami Iyer and Sitalakshmi and the oldest son. He was born when his father was already in his early forties, in January 1929, in Tiruchirappalli. The father was a rather orthodox Brahmin who nevertheless had a college education and worked in the Education Department in teachers' training. I can recall him still, a small but stern and rather humourless figure, who dominated his physically larger, but gentle wife, an affectionate soul who lost a very large number of children at childbirth or infancy until my oldest aunt was born. From his mother's side of the family, KS developed a set of food habits—a taste for spicy South

Indian vegetarian food—that has never left him. Even now, he will sometimes recall the taste of something that he had as a child—usually some snack made by a widowed aunt that was high in cholesterol and low in nutrition.

The family's intellectual pretensions were as modest as their material means. The one exception was an uncle by marriage, who was professor of physics in Madras. In view of their limited means, a small parcel of land in the Mannargudi area of Tanjavur being all that remained of an older heritage, Krishnaswami Iyer had a modest living and supported his children with some difficulty. Many Tamil Brahmins who took up colonial positions must have come from a similar set of circumstances, where access to formal education was a major asset. His job also meant that he led a peripatetic life and KS was sent to a number of different schools in the small towns in the province of Madras. He even attended, for a while, the same school as M. Karunanidhi, who was somewhat older than him. Here he received a very sound training in mathematics, a strong grounding in Tamil language and literature (which he has unfortunately not put to much use, though he likes to quote the *Tirukkural*), a smattering of Sanskrit, and a broad grasp of the 'facts' of general history. The sort of 'universal' education in Western philosophy and the Russian novelists that bourgeois Calcutta intellectuals of his generation might have received did not come to him as an inheritance; this no doubt makes him less of a recognisable 'intellectual' than them, and it is possibly a source of tension between them.

However, this also meant that KS came to develop a rather uncomplicated relationship with Indian nationalism. I do not believe that his father Krishnaswami Iyer was much of a nationalist. He did not much like the British and was not Westernised unlike my mother's side of the family. But the orthodox Brahmin milieu to which he belonged also probably disapproved of Gandhi, on such questions as entry into temples. Still, KS seems to have been strongly drawn to the nationalist point of view by his teens, by which time he was also apparently a confirmed atheist. World War II was a crucial formative period for him. He followed news of it on a short-wave radio, and this fondness for the radio and news has remained ever since. Many of us recall that at the marriage of my brother in December 1977, those present were startled to suddenly hear that series of 'beeps' that announce an AIR news bulletin: KS's transistor radio was on.

In the 1940s, KS thus followed news of the war on both fronts, and came to the independent conclusion that from a nationalist viewpoint the Allies had to be supported. This was a most unpopular view in his school and it also went against the Quit India view of Gandhi, whom he otherwise much admired. But his arguments were based not so much on a moral view of the Holocaust, or the death camps (which everyone was mostly ignorant of anyway), but on what he took to be a realistic appraisal of the two adversarial parties. The Allies, as he saw it, were more likely to win, and hence supporting them was a more practical and rapid way to achieving independence in India.

By the time the war ended, KS joined Presidency College in the University of Madras, for a degree in Chemistry and lived for a while with an aunt and uncle (the same uncle who was a professor of physics). Here, he formed a number of lasting friendships and also excelled academically. Two qualities about KS have always stood out: his prodigious memory and capacity to retain facts and a certain relentless logic. These obtained excellent results for him and also ensured that he was very successful in the competitive examination for the civil services, where he was placed second overall (and first in the IAS list) in 1951. This was obviously something of a relief for his natal family, where the age gap between father and children meant that a new breadwinner was urgently needed. KS could not join the Indian Foreign Service as a diplomat, in view of his family obligations, even as his earlier brief flirtation with the idea of joining the armed forces had been rejected by his family. (Some years later, his youngest brother did join the Indian Air Force.) He thus opted for the Madras cadre of the IAS, in which he joined a number of friends from Presidency College, including the jovial S. Krishnaswami, with whom he remained in close contact in later years in Delhi.

The next few years were spent in various centres in Madras state, such as Sivakasi, in the lower echelons of the administrative hierarchy. This was also the time when he got married. His wife (and my mother) Sulochana Jayasankar had been brought up largely in north India and came from an extensive family of bureaucrats. In these years, his contact with the world of defence and foreign affairs was rather limited, though my maternal grandfather did serve under the mercurial Krishna Menon and then in Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. I do not believe that KS had much of a taste for provincial administration, or for the politicking that went with it. In this, he differed from his slightly younger contemporary and close friend, S. Guhan, who was keenly

interested in economic development and social change, and who also grew very close politically to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). I think that KS must have accepted the possibility of moving to Delhi with some relief and it also allowed him an opportunity to gain experience of the Ministry of Defence.

The first few years in Delhi were spent in a number of different positions, including charge of the Sainik Schools programme. But gradually, as deputy secretary in the ministry and—as I recall—for a time in the Planning Commission, KS came to find a niche particularly suited to him. These were the years between the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965. Jawaharlal Nehru, whom KS greatly admired, was in obvious decline and finally died in 1964. Several crucial arms purchases had to be negotiated and this allowed KS to participate in a delegation to the Soviet Union. This was also a time when he felt a growing conviction that there was little sense in seeking an alliance with the US, support from which would not be forthcoming in the event of a conflict. This was not based on a knee-jerk anti-American sentiment, but rather on his cool appraisal of the international political situation. The natural ally of the US at that point was Pakistan and this meant that one way or the other the Indian position would have to gravitate towards the Soviet Union, without ever entering the Soviet camp however. This also had clear implications for arms purchases. As against this, the upper echelons of the Indian armed forces were at that time really quite pro-Western and notoriously reluctant to accept that Soviet weapon systems could be of a good quality. There was thus a potential for a serious tussle here. KS was helped in this by his allies in the ministry, from contemporaries like S. Krishnaswami (mentioned earlier), to senior bureaucrats like Sunder Rajan and H.K. Sarin.

It seems likely that it was in the 1960s that KS began to move in the direction of the view that India had to exercise the nuclear option. The Chinese nuclear test of 1964 must have played its role in this as did the war of 1962. I would suspect several other far more influential figures, including Homi J. Bhabha, were independently of the same view. But it was difficult to articulate such a position. No real 'think tank' on strategic questions existed, even if some notional institutions did exist largely as a sinecure for retired servicemen. The role of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) in Sapru House was not seen as this and the School of International Studies (the earlier incarnation of Jawaharlal Nehru University, JNU), also largely eschewed

strategic studies. The year 1967 was crucial for this purpose in KS's career. He was able to take extended study leave and go abroad, first to the London School of Economics and then to the US Naval Academy in Monterey, to orient himself more academically. He had scarcely written a paper till then; whatever reports he had drafted were within the government. Also, family circumstances made the timing of the visit hard: four children between the ages of 14 and six had to be given over to the charge of others and a seriously ailing father had to be left behind with his brother in Bangalore. But since an earlier opportunity had been missed in 1965, on account of the war, it must have seemed that this time the occasion had to be seized.

By his own account, the year in the UK and US (from which he returned only in early 1968) was something of an eye-opener. Freed from his bureaucratic responsibilities, he seems to have read very widely that year, from Sartre and Camus, to Edgar Snow, Erskine Caldwell, and Nelson Algren, as the extensive library he brought back testified. But none of these writers had a deep influence on him, nor is he ever given to quoting them; they did provide his children with reading material though. Besides, while in the UK, KS entered into an argument with development economists like Paul Streeten and Michael Lipton (his essay on the subject appears in a book edited by them entitled *The Crisis of Indian Planning*),¹ over the 'defence-versus-development' question, in the context of a conference held in Brighton on Indian planning. This has been a recurring debate in which he has engaged, where his own position has been crucially influenced by the experience of the 1960s, and the view that a lack of defence preparedness can be far more costly in the medium term than direct defence expenditure. In other words, rather than the classic 'guns-versus-butter' one-time trade-off, it is a question of an inter-temporal trade-off between more butter now and an uncertain future, as opposed to a secure long-term stream of butter. I believe that if KS had attempted to formalise some of his propositions, whether on these questions or on other strategic questions, it might have helped make his arguments more convincing to an informed readership. However, it would probably have meant losing a larger audience of people who want things explained in plain language.

The overseas experience also gave him a good deal of self-confidence; it endowed him with the capacity to marshal his own arguments and outwit others, academics in particular. This ambiguous relationship with the world of academics has remained ever since,

exacerbated perhaps by his refusal to do a Ph.D. (he does have an honorary doctorate now, received from the Sri Venkateswara University in Tirupati in the 1990s), and by a somewhat combative style of oral presentation. In 1968, then, on his return to India, he was offered the Directorship of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, then a small and sleepy operation, staffed by ex-military men and a handful of others. There was obviously some unhappiness in this milieu at seeing a bureaucrat, an IAS man, being handed this position. The tenure was also not clear, though the fact that KS had powerful acquaintances in the Ministry of Defence, including the minister Y.B. Chavan, could only have helped him.

Nothing could have indicated in 1968 that the IDSA would have undergone a complete facelift by 1972. Yet it did, moving to more spacious quarters in Sapru House, recruiting a number of newcomers, launching a series of publications and newsletters, and becoming the first 'think tank' of its kind on strategic affairs, surely based in part on the model of the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) in London, the functioning of which KS had closely observed in his time there. We in the household, who had seen very little of him already in the Ministry of Defence years, saw even less of him, as he emerged as a full-fledged workaholic. Occasionally, on Sundays, he would spend a part of the day at home, playing chess or cards with us children, or driving us out on hot Sunday evenings to Diplomatic Enclave for an ice-cream treat. But we also gradually saw him come into prominence as a public figure, largely on account of the Bangladesh crisis.

Even at the busiest of times, however, one institution which was rigorously maintained was the family dinner, which was also the moment when we children had an occasion to engage with him intellectually. When we were young, we would often ask him a leading question and he would give us a sort of after-dinner 'lecture' on everything from Pearl Harbour to Five-Year Planning. But as we grew older, these conversations grew into real discussions and exchanges, and I suspect that my brother Jaishankar (today a career diplomat) acquired his taste for international relations from those dining-table conversations. Our ability to construct counter-arguments grew better with time, but the problem was that he was usually so much better informed than we were.

It has often been speculated that KS was close to Indira Gandhi, and that he gave her direct policy advice in these years. It is clear to

me that this is wholly untrue. Not only did he not meet Mrs Gandhi in these years, he also steered clear for the most part of her 'kitchen cabinet' in those times. Though he had twenty years service by then in the IAS, we were still in the same small D-II type flat in Netaji Nagar, a measure of his distance from the corridors of power. But in March–April 1971, after the Pakistan army had crushed all opposition in the east after the Awami League victory, he came into prominence as the single-minded spokesperson for the idea that India had to settle the East Pakistan question by a military intervention. The government had no official position, but probably found his views—expressed as they were from the semi-autonomous IDSA—convenient. Others assumed that he expressed the government's point of view and that he was a sort of unofficial spokesperson. Still others held back, fearing that the Indian armed forces would not be able to achieve a convincing victory. KS found himself vindicated in large measure by the end of the year not only on this issue but also in his analysis of the relative positions of the Soviet Union and the US. In the immediate aftermath of the war, he co-authored his first book, *The Liberation War*, with Mohammed Ayoob (now a professor at the Michigan State University).² Soon afterwards, he also put together a collection of occasional newspaper articles,³ and these two works marked the beginning of quite a prolific publishing career.

KS has odd work habits, at least seen from the point of view of an academic. Initially, like others of his generation in the bureaucracy, I suspect he preferred to dictate to a secretary. One rarely sees him writing at a desk. Rather, he writes in longhand, often sitting upright on a bed, with a pad of paper balanced on his knees, or even lying on his side. He writes very quickly, and very legibly, rarely crossing out a sentence, or returning to correct a point of style. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he had a liking for rather odd-coloured turquoise ink, and would write in bold strokes with a fountain pen, or later a felt pen. He is largely oblivious to noise when he writes, and can shut out all that goes on around him. And what is particularly remarkable is that he rarely gets up from his bed to look at a book, consult a fact, or check a date. Since he does not make much use of quotations, he can work as a true essayist armed with a pad, a pen, his memory and his opinions, and nothing more. Of course, this has become harder over the years, as dates and places do sometimes get confused. But in terms of a capacity to set down a particular quota of words a day with regularity and discipline, he remains an impressive sight.

The first half of the 1970s was also a period of extensive international travel for KS. His contacts with a number of international organisations such as the UN, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), and Pugwash increased, and we grew accustomed to his periodic absences with his frequent trips to Japan, Sweden, or Geneva. His circle of academic acquaintances grew as well, from Berkeley and the University of Chicago, to Jaipur and Jadavpur. At the same time, I gather that he came to be better known in the intellectual circles of Delhi, whether through the India International Centre and its 'Saturday Club', or other fora. Since I have never been to the exclusive 'Saturday Club', my knowledge of it comes purely from hearsay. But I do know that its members have run from I.K. Gujral to the late Dharma Kumar, to Ashis Nandy, a rather varied political spectrum whose links to one another can be traced back (I speculate) genealogically in one or the other way to Romesh and Raj Thapar. People of my generation in Delhi have steered clear for the most part of such 'clubs', but in the generation to which Nandy and KS belong, such a forum with its policy orientation came far more naturally.

In any event, as a consequence of meeting Delhi's intellectuals there, and elsewhere, in the ICWA or the relatively new Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), I can remember KS's long telephonic arguments of those years with 'leftist' intellectuals—in particular those of a Maoist bent—defending his notion of the Indian 'national interest' in relation to their imagined revolutionary 'idealism'. A certain brand of idealists never much attracted KS, who has seen himself from his teens as a 'realist'. As a consequence, he has tended to reinterpret others whom he likes and admires—including Mahatma Gandhi—principally as political realists. On the other hand, in view of his fixed commitment to the idea of 'national interest', others have seen him as politically uninformed, or at least unwilling to make an explicit political avowal of the sort that certain other intellectuals of his generation were all-too-willing to make. Close friends of the time included Sisir Gupta, who died prematurely and also a number of others from the world of journalism such as Inder Malhotra. But of professional politicians, only one could be called a friend—and this was Krishan Kant, who ended his career as Vice-President of India.

But, at the same time, he remained committed to his own principles, including what he understands to be a sort of unwritten 'code of conduct' for bureaucrats, who in his view, should in general maintain a

certain independence from the political class. In other words, the career bureaucrat should maintain an ideal of service to the state, but as an abstraction. Political connections should not be used to further a bureaucratic career, in his view. The Emergency in 1975 thus posed a problem for him, even though his position in the IDSA meant that initially he had little to do with its implementation. Still, a number of his friends opposed it openly, including the Congressman Krishan Kant, with whom he had a lifelong friendship. KS for his part had no great admiration for Jayaprakash Narayan, whom he considered to be confused and a less-than-impressive individual from the viewpoint of personal ethics (the two had met on at least one occasion), but he understood the Emergency to be deeply problematic.

Perhaps word of this got out, and Delhi at that time was rife with rumours and the settling of scores in the coterie around Sanjay Gandhi. At any rate, for reasons that remain unclear, he was summarily removed from the IDSA and sent back to Tamil Nadu in 1975 to serve there in the Board of Revenue. At the point of departure from Delhi, a set of farewell parties were organised at our flat in Netaji Nagar. Suddenly, we realised what a huge circle of friends and acquaintances he had accumulated in his years in Delhi, ranging from the polo-playing General 'Monty' Palit, to a crop of JNU professors. But at the same time, it seemed that his career as a defence analyst had come to an abrupt end. It was at this point that one of his IDSA colleagues offered him a rather devastating left-handed compliment in a farewell card in which he was compared to a jackfruit—prickly on the outside, sweet on the inside.

Still, the next two years proved remarkably interesting. The Emergency, it is generally agreed, was a quite significant watershed in the history of the post-1947 Indian state. Amongst its many effects was the fact that it significantly weakened the bureaucracy, and I believe that ever since, the careers of most IAS officers have become dependent to a large extent on explicit clientship relations with politicians. In 1976, KS found himself in Tamil Nadu in a particularly odd situation. The DMK government of Karunanidhi had been dissolved and a good part of the political leadership thrown into prison. President's Rule had been imposed, but one of those sent as special adviser to the governor was a career bureaucrat, P.K. Dave. Dave appears to have had rather serious doubts about the Emergency and hence chose to surround himself with other like-minded people. He hence asked KS to take on the crucial post of home secretary of Tamil Nadu, which

meant overseeing matters of 'internal security' amongst a number of other responsibilities.

During his tenure as Home Secretary, KS did not openly flout regulations but he certainly chose on many occasions to follow his own conscience rather than zealously applying rules. It was unclear to him whether the Emergency was unconstitutional, but he certainly believed that it was deeply anti-democratic. It may also have reminded him of the freedom movement when political prisoners had been held in British jails. His friend Guhan, who was Finance Secretary in Tamil Nadu, had stronger views, but then Guhan also had close personal relations with some members of the DMK. In any event, the result of this was that Tamil Nadu had about the most lenient regime at that time amongst the Indian states; and awkward questions were even asked in Delhi about why this was so. It is likely that the central government would have acted at this stage to impose a more draconian regime, but fortunately, in 1977, elections were held and Mrs Gandhi suffered a resounding defeat. This is an aspect of KS's career which some of his contemporaries are aware of, but many choose to ignore. Much later, in the mid-1990s, Ashis Nandy reminded me of it, but also admitted that others were unwilling to give KS credit where it was due.

The end of the Emergency also meant a recall to Delhi. For a brief period, as the Janata Government was being formed, KS collaborated with H.K. Paranjape, Rajni Kothari, and others, in drafting documents that were to help define the new government's foreign policy. He was then appointed Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, working closely with the Cabinet secretary Nirmal Mukherji, and then was named Secretary in the Department of Defence Production. This last post was, however, not destined to last. With Mrs Gandhi's return to power in 1980, it was obvious that he would be moved to a less important and strategic position. Finally, an incongruous solution was found. He was asked to return to the IDSA as director and the post was now upgraded to the rank of secretary. This second stint in the IDSA lasted seven years, until KS's retirement in 1987.

These were years in which he came to be associated with the 'bomb lobby', also emerging as a prime target for those who opposed the Indian nuclear programme. These ranged from Gandhian pacifists, to self-styled 'anti-modernists', to Trotskyites, and to a new generation of US-trained doctorates in international relations. In their view, KS was nothing less than a full-blown ideologue of the Indian desire for

regional hegemony, and the attacks were often couched in surprisingly personal terms.⁴ In the most absurd of these constructions, there was an 'Indian nuclear establishment', made up of crypto-fascist south Indian Brahmins with a desire to regain the power they had lost in their native provinces by other means. To my knowledge, KS has never once responded to them in print and even kept a semblance of cordiality with some of the most vicious critics (which I freely confess I would never be able to do).

An odd example of this came in the mid-1980s when an Indian Airlines plane (IC-421 on 24 August 1984, to be precise) en route to Srinagar, on which KS was a passenger, was hijacked by a group of so-called 'Khalistanis'. A traumatic few days ensued, while the aircraft was taken first to Pakistan (Lahore and Karachi) and then the Persian Gulf, where the hijackers eventually surrendered in Dubai. We were particularly concerned since KS is an insulin-dependent diabetic, and we feared he would run out of his insulin supplies. On his return, he wrote an extended account of the hijacking in the newspapers,⁵ and some years later, one of his critics (and long-term acquaintances) Ashis Nandy chose to write a rather snide piece on him, suggesting that the hijacking was in fact a rather droll affair, something like a slapstick comedy.⁶ KS himself had written of the black humour of the episode, in particular the behaviour of some of his fellow-passengers.⁷ Indeed, I must confess that I would rather not be seated next to Nandy during a hijacking, for no doubt he would inform the hijackers of how their acts reeked of a reprehensible modernity, and then read sermons out to them from the collected works of that guru Raimundo Panikkar.⁸ But it is worth noting that the level of the 'debate' had sunk rather low by the late 1980s, though a lower point was to be touched in the 1990s in a remarkably shrill column by Ramachandra Guha in the *Hindu*.⁹

KS's position on the Indian nuclear weapons programme has possibly not been entirely consistent. With regard to its expense, he has consistently argued that it is vastly overestimated by pessimists—though he argued against overly optimistic estimates already in the early 1970s. He has also argued periodically that it would provide a form of deterrence, if both India and Pakistan were to acquire nuclear weapon status, as in fact they have done in the last few years. This is an argument that can probably be contested, though whether the Kargil conflict is conclusive proof of its lack of validity may be disputed. But the most important argument must be seen as a nationalist one,

namely the view that India must assume a proper place in view of its size, demography, and economic potential in the concert of nations, and that this is only possible with a nuclear status. The example of China after 1964 is clearly significant for him and he does not accept that India should accept the 'protection' of the US or some other power, in view of the fact that the national interests of the two do not coincide.

The simple fact is that it is here that he and his critics diverge. KS's critics are for the most part simply not interested in international power politics and either see nuclear weapons as immoral, or dangerous, or argue for a vision of international relations in which India should content itself with a secondary role. It is not my place here to defend KS's position, simply to point out that it is a very direct consequence of allying realpolitik to a nationalist position, and that most of his critics are not nationalists but rather internationalists (for example, Trotskyites), pacifists, or hold to one of a number of other positions, including an implicit defence of an US-dominated world order. The problem, however, is that nationalism has intellectually not been respectable in India since the 1950s and it is hence associated with a lunatic fringe, the assumption being that all nationalism is right-wing ultra-nationalism. The Indian urban bourgeois milieu simply does not consider nationalism to be a 'normal' option, as would be the case in France, Brazil, the US, or elsewhere. Rather, driven either by a sense of guilt stemming from the partition, or by a set of internationalist ideologies, which the West has successfully exported, the idea that anyone would argue from the point of view of 'Indian national interests' appears absurd to most.

An anecdote might help to clarify this. In 1988, while visiting Paris for some lectures, I was violently assailed by an Indian lady, on account of the fact that in my presentation I criticised some aspects of the work of the historian Irfan Habib. 'I know who your father is, and how he hates Pakistan', she declared, adding that we were all 'Hindu communalists'. Yet, KS's own point of view has consistently been that Pakistan too must defend its own national interests and that a certain number of its policies can be justified on these grounds. Here, on the occasions that he has visited Pakistan since the 1980s, conflicts of opinion have been less sharp than many have imagined. Naturally, this is because of a form of convergence in the logic of realpolitik. And, of course, some idealists would find this reprehensible, waxing sentimental instead about the common cultural heritage between the

two nations, rather than discussing how their opposed interests could be accommodated without leading to excessive conflict.

An admitted weakness of this 'realist' viewpoint is that it does not analyse the internal functioning of states and how such internal political questions may impact on the conduct of foreign policy. In this sense, the years after 1987—when KS retired from the government at the age of 58—have permitted him to reflect more on political questions. His preoccupations have been multiple but one of the central reflections turns on corruption, which he sees as directly linked to the nature of the electoral and political process in India. The experience of his stint in defence production and the impression that the illegal moneymaking of the political class could have a serious impact on this department, has partly led him to grow disillusioned with how the Indian state functions. Again, it should be stressed that like many people of his generation and background, KS believes strongly in modernisation and regards India as a case of an insufficiently modernised country, where the institutional bases are too weak and too much remains dependent on the individual and his or her whims. His recent experiences in the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) confirmed him in this rather pessimistic diagnosis. One might see him in this sense also as 'Nehruvian', even though his admiration for Nehru is less than total. Though many have seen him as anti-Western, this is not really the case; his argument is simply that often Indian interests do not coincide with those of the Western nations.

These views have been expressed in the past 15 years in a variety of newspaper columns that have been far more wide-ranging than the writings of earlier years. In 1987–88, after his retirement, KS spent a year as Nehru Professor in St. John's College, Cambridge. It was a low-key year, one in which he recovered from a setback to his health and also began to plan his life after the IDSA, including a move to a modest post-retirement flat in Vasant Kunj. I must admit that I was somewhat nervous about how he would spend his 'post-retirement' years, in view of the fact that at 60, he was still roughly as energetic as he had been 10 years before. It was difficult to see KS pottering about the garden, repairing the iron and the toaster, or translating literary texts. In fact, he continued his routine practically without missing a beat. As a matter of principle, he entirely let go the reins of the IDSA to his successor Jasjit Singh, instead of trying to play the role of grey eminence. He continued to travel, lecturing both in India and abroad. Though he began to complain now that travel was not as interesting

as it once had been, in part because of food-related issues, he still made periodic visits to the US, and added Brazil and Israel to the countries he visited.

In these later years, he has continued to write a prodigious number of columns, first for the *Economic Times* (where his 'Global Watch' column won him many new readers, even amongst my friends and contemporaries) and more recently for the *Times of India*, which has employed him for a number of years now as consultant editor. He has also participated in writing editorials for that newspaper and until the late 1990s also continued to travel extensively to attend conferences and deliver lectures. In the 1990s, his appearances on television have also made him a more visible figure; he has remarked that his bank manager treats him with greater respect as a consequence. For those who had thought of KS as a figure of the older generation, the *Times of India* years have also brought some surprises because of the ease with which he has fitted into the milieu of journalists who are often younger than his own children. To be sure, this new cohabitation has not been entirely free of tension, often on the predictable lines of 'realists' versus 'idealists' in matters of international politics. But KS has not been afraid to speak out on issues of domestic politics either, deploring the killings in Gujarat in 2002, in an article that spoke from the heart.¹⁰ Though he travels far less now, he continues to follow international events keenly, on radio, television, and by trawling through a vast battery of newspapers daily. It is only a matter of time, one supposes, before he uses his freshly won skills on the computer to inaugurate an Internet column!

The last few years have also seen him engaging in a series of consultative positions, in the NSAB and also in the visible public position of the head of the Kargil Commission, where he worked closely with George Verghese and others. Belatedly, in the 1990s, JNU also offered him a position as an honorary professor, which unfortunately did not involve many hours of direct contact with either colleagues or students. Yet, his positions in his columns continue to provoke and even surprise, though those who know him well can see the consistent thread that runs through. And he has not been above writing the occasional humorous 'middle' column in the *Times of India*, under a pen name that I shall not divulge here. If I mention this last aspect, it is because the portrait that I have painted here may seem to be that of a single-minded, serious, even stern individual. To be sure, no one would think of KS as frivolous or light-hearted. He does not play sports though he

does watch one-day cricket on television. His hobbies are few and include a weakness for the music of Lata Mangeshkar and M.S. Subbulakshmi. He has taken very few vacations in his life and certainly none involving his whole family. The work ethic has dominated, though he is scarcely a true Weberian, for his generosity is proverbial to the point of being impractical. He has had no students and no direct disciples, though there have certainly been a few (usually unsuccessful) attempts to imitate his style and his positions. It remains to be seen whether his intervention in the field of strategic studies in India has helped consolidate the field institutionally since 1968. Whether or not this is the case, there is certainly far more debate, and it is far better informed, than when he assumed charge of the IDSA those many years ago.

What I have attempted to present here, then, is the portrait of an 'academic' who was never quite an academic, a career bureaucrat who never followed the normal career lines that are traced for one, a consistent optimist about the Indian nation state who has been repeatedly disappointed by it, and an analyst who has combined a devotion to realism in international relations with a devotion to the Indian national interest that can only be defended in terms of sentiment. This, then, is a person made up of the contradictions that characterise all of us, whose atheism did not prevent him from continuing to observe the annual religious ceremonies for his parents for many years and whose loyalty to his many friends has often exceeded the bounds of the reasonable. It is common to be dazzled by those amongst his contemporaries who possess a slippery rhetoric and an ability to produce flashy if predictable paradoxes, those who have been called India's 'export-quality intellectuals'. Is KS then someone who is best understood as an 'organic' Indian intellectual in his own right, unencumbered by a too-heavy theoretical baggage acquired at second hand, that is to say not a mere by-product of some encounter with Laski, Lenin, Adorno, Ivan Illich, or Erich Fromm? I would suspect that this is the case. And it is in this light that I would invite readers to re-read not merely the voluminous writings he has produced over the years, but his weekly columns and analyses. For political realism is as Indian (and as *laukika* [as worldly]) a tradition, indeed more so, than many of the mystical options that are put forth by writers claiming a rootedness in the hoary mists of the Indian past.

NOTES

1. Paul Streeten and Michael Lipton (eds), *The Crisis of Indian Planning: Economic Planning in the 1960s* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).
2. Mohammed Ayoob and K. Subrahmanyam, *The Liberation War* (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1972).
3. K. Subrahmanyam, *Bangladesh and India's Security*, compiled by D.K. Palit (Dehra Dun: Palit & Dutt, 1972). In the same year, he also published *Perspectives in Defence Planning* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1972).
4. See, for a relatively moderate instance, Amitav Ghosh, 'Countdown: Why Can't Every Country have the Bomb?', *The New Yorker*, 26 October–2 November 1998, pp. 186–97, where we learn inter alia, that 'The leading advocate of India's nuclear policies is K. Subrahmanyam, a large, forceful man ...', a description which also suggests that Ghosh's powers of observation are rather limited.
5. These articles appeared in the *Indian Express*, between 28 August and 31 August 1984.
6. See Ashis Nandy, 'The Discreet Charms of Indian Terrorism', in Ashis Nandy, *The Savage Freud and other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).
7. K. Subrahmanyam, 'Fruitful Hijack', *The Times of India*, 1 November 2000.
8. It is ironical to note that the virulence of attacks on Nandy and others has been growing of late; he who sows the wind does reap the whirlwind. For an example, see Meera Nanda, 'Reclaiming Modern Science for Third World Progressive Social Movements', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, No.16, 1998, pp. 915–22.
9. The essay is reproduced in Ramachandra Guha, *An Anthropologist among the Marxists and other Essays* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).
10. K. Subrahmanyam, 'Dharma was Killed in Gujarat', *The Times of India*, 4 April 2002.