

'Resolving conflicts is the only way ahead for India'

Sundeep Waslekar, 42, practises a unique profession. The management of conflict. He lives in Versova and since 1990 has been running a research centre in Lokhandwala. He calls it the International Centre for Peace Initiatives. Amidst the fierce bustle of India's commercial capital he pursues what looks like a somewhat lonely intellectual trajectory.

He has been away from Mumbai only twice, for any length of time. Once, when he was in Oxford in the eighties, doing his PPE. Philosophy, politics, economics: the usual resort of all easygoing guys, as he describes it. Then again, in the nineties, when he went to Stockholm on a quasi-diplomatic assignment with an inter-governmental agency. The International



Extraordinary People
Prithvi Nandy

Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. IDEA in short. An organisation researching various things but mostly concerned, again, with finding ways and means to resolve political and sociological conflicts. In fact, that is his theme songs. Resolving conflicts. He sees himself as an enabler, a catalyst. Someone who may or may not always succeed in resolving contentious issues but who believes that half the battle against conflict is won when the issue reaches the negotiating table.

Waslekar has based much of his strategic thought on the Indian classics. The *Manusmriti*, the *Isa Upanishad*, the *Arthashastra* and of course the *Mahabharata*, the all-time classic on political management. In fact, he believes that there is a typical triangle at work everywhere. One corner of the triangle is resource management. The other, political management. The third, conflict management.

● **What is your book *Dharmarajya* all about? The ideal BJP state?**

No, it answers some of the questions raised in my first book, *South Asian Drama*, where I tried to explore the travails of misgovernance on this subcontinent. *Dharmarajya* is about how to reform our governance. It tries to provide some clues as to why conflicts occur and how they can be resolved.

● **Why do conflicts occur so frequently in our polity and why do they take such dreadful twists and turns?**

The issues are common everywhere, not just in India. The first issue is the integrity of the ruler. We have certain typical characteristics that we attribute to a good ruler and the first of these characteristics is virtue. A leader without virtue is never seen as a true leader. The second issue is that justice must be seen as above the ruler. It must be held in absolute esteem. The third issue is that citizens must



Pradeep Chandra

A HEAD FOR PEACE: Sundeep Waslekar's book *Dharmarajya* tries to provide clues as to why conflicts occur and how they can be resolved

participate in governance. It is the duty of every person to act, not to sit back and complain. You can easily tune modern governance to these basic values and traditions of Indian society.

● **What about the Indo-Pak conflict? Why is that not de-escalating?**

Simply because both sides do not trust each other. They are not talking enough to each other. Each believes the worst of the other. The conflict escalated so much in April 2000 because the Pakistanis were convinced that India was seriously considering hot pursuit into their territory. While India was convinced that Pakistan was readying itself to launch largescale incursions into Kargil again. Mutual fear, mutual mistrust led to the escalation of tension.

● **What do you see as the future of Pakistan?**

There are five possible scenarios we have listed. Only one of them is positive. The rest are distinctly dangerous. The best is option one, where Pakistan dramatically changes its trajectory and becomes, like Turkey, a modern and progressive Islamic state. This is what Musharraf is actually talking about. This is what the US wants,

Option two is that they continue to be what they currently are: a confrontation between orthodox religious forces and a modern economy anxious to grow and globalise. Option three is they become like Iran under the Ayatollahs, where supremacy vests in the religious orthodoxy. Option four is worse.

Pakistan could become like Afghanistan under the Taliban and its modern institutions are disallowed to

function freely. This could lead to absolute chaos. Option five, which is the most dangerous for India, is that the military sees option four coming into play and decides to have a war with India to draw away attention from Pakistan's inner conflicts. This is the most dangerous possibility of all. Such a war can put South Asia behind by decades.

● **And the scenario for India?**

We have drawn up four alternatives. Option one is we remain where we are. With our huge distortions and inherent conflicts. Modern India versus backward India, but held together by our consummate political skills.

Option two is where further polarisation takes place. The states become more decentralised. The political mandate is more and more fractured. Some parts of India do very well; some do very badly. The third option is complete stagnation. Everyone follows Bihar and India goes sick. This is the worst possibility. The best possibility is option four, where the powerful triumvirate of politics, business and media takes charge and decides to take India ahead. This can be easily achieved. It requires very little apart from courage, commitment and conflict management skills.

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