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Title of the Book: *Autumn Leaves – Kashmiri Reminiscences*

Author: Ram Nath Kak

Publisher: Vitasta

First Published: 2002

ISBN: 978-8186588000

Reviewed by:

N. Subhadra Chari

Autumn Leaves -Kashmiri Reminiscences, an autobiographical book by Kashmiri Pundit & Veterinarian Shri Ram Nath kak. In the preface of the book the symbolic meaning of the title was explained convincingly in few words that autumn leaves are the memories of the author's life in Kashmir. The book has total 55 sections in four parts& eachpart was given appropriate headings to summarize the events of his life more pertinently that enable the readers to go with the flow of his description at various stages of his life precisely without vagueness in the book. The I part was named as Growing Up (1-18) sections, II part was Householder has (19-42)sections, part III named as More Travels (43-49) sections and the last IV part was Reflections which has (50-55) sections. The book captivates the entire attention of the readers,effortlesslygrippingto accompany in his life journey. His simplicity of expression & his natural style connects the inseparable bound with the readers and with ease one gets engrossed in his life account.

It's refreshing to read pleasant reminiscences of the author devoid of negative influences of partition, an issue of his age. He presented his memorable events gracefully by exploring the dignity of the Kashmiri people in one of the most difficult period in the Indian history. His autobiography reveals his lively approach for life situations and his interactions with people speaks volumes about his optimistic attitude and non-judgmental nature categorizes him as affable and sociable person. This book reading will transport the readers to the beautiful places and people of Kashmir and its vivid description of the natural beauty entails us to relate to its prehistoric culture and its pride in its exquisiteness known to be as paradise on earth, the very tough political struggle for its possession lies in its title among the states in India.

This autobiographical book attained a sort of classic status and it's richly deserve this honor of appreciation as it portrays brighter aspects of the common man in the valley with all its natural aspirations to live a normal life in not so normal socio- political conditions with persistent faith in humanity in hard time to survive with poise and grace. The book comprises of rich sources of the substantial socio—political incidents of his age which largely influenced his life and society significantly. General impression and perception about the Kashmir as a difficult state due to its international debatable issues was superficially referred in this autobiography. The delicate matters of politics related to the Hindu & Muslim religion, & regional and cultural aspects of Kashmiri people were mentioned in the book dealt with utmost sensitivity by respecting the differences due to its diversity and uniqueness. The most admiring aspect of this book lies in its cultured language that reveals the elegance of words and its unpretentious description of happenings appeals positively to the mindset regarding the portrayal of core problems in the valley.

Author was government employee in veterinary department and had been frequently transferred to various places of Jammu and Kashmir. He gave lively description of his visited places, on language, its strategic importance, its natural beauty, its historic and cultural heritage, regional and religious inspirations and impact on the people defining essence of their life in society. Writer was also concerned with the political standpoint of the state and also fought time and again, against the corruption prevailing at that time paving a way to live an honest life. He wrote about his family, his wife Sarojini, and how his family was constantly struggling with him due to his frequent transfers to various difficult places of Kashmir. He depicted the places and gave description so vibrantly that one can feel as if they are present in those places along with the author enjoying the hardships of topography.

Part I Growing Up sections (1-18)

Kashmir's religious background was described and how missionaries and scholars from here spread Sanskrit culture and learning to Central Asia, Tibet and China. He talks about his childhood and how he lost his mother at an early age and was brought by his maternal aunt Didda. He also described the beauty and history of the Kashmir. Later years he struggled but supported by his brother's family completed his studies and got his first posting at Baramulla in the government department.

Part II – Householder (19-42)

In 1943 he got married to Sarojini after three months she was on a family way. He took her to Baramulla but soon he received transfer orders to Pahalgam known to be tourist town in south Kashmir. He received transfer order to Jammu. After six months, he was transferred to Gulmarg, and then to Shopian and his family was in Srinagar. In section 28 he vividly describes the historical culture of Kashmir and in section 29 he wrote about the birth of Himachal Pradesh.

In later sections he mentioned about the war with Pakistan. He was later transferred to Kathua, a place connecting highway to Punjab and Kashmir. He gave brief description of Amarnath yatra. Partition of India brought instability and insecurity to the people of Kashmir and disturbed the social, religious, political & emotional harmony and stability of the Kashmiris. The saga of partition affected all states of the country but most sensitively affected was Kashmir and later became the victim of terrorism. Sheik Abdullah and his political activities were described in shaping the politics of Kashmir. Sir Aurbindo death in 1950 was also mentioned in the book. He was transferred to Billawar and later posted back to Baramulla and from there he received transfer order for Udhampur and then to Basohli.

Part III- More Travels sections (43-49)

He was transferred to Kalgan and then back to Baramulla. He was also transferred to Ley, capital of Ladakh and important for the trade route as it connects Tibet through which pashmina wool was imported to Kashmir. When he was in ley there were border clashes between China and India in Ladakh and in 1962 a war broke known as Indo-China war. In 1965 Indo-Pak war broke out and the rest is history. He was posted to Jammu in 1967. One can feel as if travelling to various parts of Jammu and Kashmir in the book. Author retired in 1976.

Part IV Reflections sections (50-55)

He was retired and was living a settled life in Delhi. He visited America in the year 1985-86. He gave an account of his children's contented life and how happy he was with his post retirement phase; where he recollected all his memories with delight and pleasure and that is reflected in his autobiography. The way the writer narrated his bitter experiences left no bitterness and his struggle for life was ordinary but had an extraordinary effect on his acquaintances to live an honest and truthful life.

Conclusion

When I took the book for reading I thought it would be on Indian politics focused on Kashmir issue but I was pleasantly surprised it is an autobiography of a Kashmiri pundit and veterinarian, who lived a peaceful life in Kashmir.

Reading this autobiography concludes that simple observation makes a simple life.