



## About the Author

Born on 5th October, 1934, Mahesh N. Buch had his school education in Lahore and Rajkumar College, Rajkot. He studied economics at St. Stephen's College, Delhi, Pembroke College, Cambridge and Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University. He holds a Doctorate in Science (Honoris Causa) from the Rajiv Gandhi Technical University, Bhopal.

Mahesh N. Buch joined the IAS in 1957 and voluntarily retired from Service in 1984. He has traveled extensively in Europe, the United States and South and South East Asia. His areas of special interest are forests, environment, the wild life, the urban planning and development and governance. After retirement he has been Vice Chairman of the National Commission on Urbanisation, Member of State Finance Commission in Madhya Pradesh, Chairman of a Committee on slums in Delhi, Member of Biodiversity Board in Madhya Pradesh and various task forces of the Planning Commission. At present he is Chairman of an Applied Research Organisation called the National Centre for Human Settlements and Environment which is located at Bhopal and is active in the field of environment management, watershed development, urban and rural planning, skill development and promotion of livelihood projects as also consumer protection. He is also Chairman of the Gwalior based Atal Bihari Vajpayee Indian Institute of Information Technology and Management, an autonomous institute of the Government of India. He has written four books in the past and a very large number of articles and papers. He lives in Bhopal and obviously loves it. He is married to Nirmala and has one son, Vineet.

## INTRODUCTION

**“Let me go forth, and share  
The overflowing Sun  
With one wise friend ....”  
[Sir William Watson in “Ode In May”]**

Most civil servants have a somewhat exaggerated notion of their own importance in the scheme of things and the role that they play in shaping the nation. The fact is that though a civil servant at senior level may be involved in the process of decision making and in the implementation of policy, this role is limited not only because the final arbiter is the elected representative of the people but also because the civil servant owes his presence in a particular post to the political masters who have placed him there. Just as no one can choose the place, time and family of birth, the average civil servant does not decide his own posting. Lest one's head be swollen with a sense of self importance, let the civil servant reflect that had his posting been otherwise, he would not be involved in the framing of policy which makes him feel larger than life.

I went through this experience myself, when I spent the whole of 1970 without a posting because my Chief Minister was annoyed with me. Subsequently his wife developed jaundice, I was pulled out of my slumber, told to do something about the water of the Upper Lake at Bhopal, notoriously polluted and found myself wearing fourteen hats, all relating to urban planning and development, municipal management, management of the environment, etc. By this accident of illness of the Chief Minister's wife, I was launched on a career

which, quite undeservedly, has won me the reputation of being an urban planner, administrator and environmental expert. Supposing the lady had not contacted jaundice? I would probably have been posted to a department dealing with fisheries and animal husbandry, women and child development, perhaps stamps and registration and would not have become an urban expert. These little accidents are what decide a civil servant's fate, which means that at best he is a puppet, who sometimes performs well on the stage and at other times is a failure.

Unlike other civil services throughout the world the Indian Administrative Service, of which I was a member, enjoys a constitutional position which sets it apart. Together with the other two All India Services, Indian Police Service and the Indian Forest Service, the IAS has the distinction of being federally appointed, allotted to a state cadre, liable for service anywhere in India and abroad and, though serving the State, is under the ultimate rule making and disciplinary control of the Central Government. Other Federations do not have a provision for such a service which holds the senior positions in both Federal and State Governments. This extraordinary position exposes IAS officers to a wide range of postings and experiences without parallel. Because the Service is meant to administer the districts its officers come in the closest touch with the citizens, both rural and urban. Because its canvas is universal, members of the Service are exposed to all sorts of departments, situations, problems, crises and experiences, which people in no other walk of life enjoy. If a Service officer keeps his eyes and ears open he can see the entire spectrum of India's social, economic, political life, the aspirations of its people, their culture, languages and life styles, in fact the entire cosmos of India. I have tried during my service to keep my eyes and ears open and unfolding before me constantly was the wonderful world of India which no fairy tale can replicate nor fantasy envision. It has been a wonderful life, in a marvellous country, amongst the most lovable people in the world, a life into which I would be prepared to be born again and again and for which I would even forego ultimate moksha.

The temptation to write about life in the IAS has always been strong, not because I want to blow my trumpet but because there is so much to be shared with people. There was, however, great hesitation on my part because, like many other civil servants, one has the tendency to overuse the first person singular. There is also the inclination to hark back nostalgically on one's own career and to open every sentence with the words "When I was ....". My wife calls this my anecdotage and I have always shied away from this whiplash. However, there are many friends who have heard my stories, who have urged me to commit them to writing, not by way of a personal eulogy but because they are amusing and even informative in their telling and should not be buried with my carcass. I have paid heed to their urgings and have attempted this little book, which is bound to be somewhat autobiographical without being an autobiography. There are times when, like Galahad Threepwood of Blandings Castle, I have been tempted to circulate chapters of my book to friends and foes and then sit back for bids not to publish. However, I promise to stop short of the positively scurrilous and actionable and instead confine myself to that which is printable without inviting expensive libel suits. What I have tried to do is to share experiences rather than promote myself. It will be for my readers to judge whether I have succeeded or whether this is yet another inane outpouring of a civil servant with little literary merit and a super inflated ego.

The book is not a chronology of events and, therefore, is written in no particular order or is even logically arranged. In a manner of speaking it is like a country ramble where one goes where one's feet ordain. It is also ad libbing in an extreme form or, in other words, a lazy man's excuse for writing as thoughts occur, rather than arranging one's thoughts in some semblance of order. It is Jerome K Jerome's "Three Men In A Boat", it is P.G. Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster at his woolly best, it is Mahesh Buch in his most irreverent moments. For this I offer no apologies, but I do assure my readers that nothing I have stated is apocryphal or deliberately untrue. If there is some exaggeration, well, that is an old man's prerogative. What interest does an unembellished story hold? But even this ornamentation, I promise you, is credible.

I must explain the title. In 1974-75 the Directorate of Town and Country Planning prepared the Development Plan of Khajuraho. As Commissioner, Town and Country Planning and Secretary of the Environmental

Group of Departments I wrote the preface. The words used were, “Once in several life times, when the month consists of Sundays and the harvest moon is blue does a planner have the opportunity to prepare a plan for an ethereal paradise such as Khajuraho”. Khajuraho and its temples are really amongst the wonders of the world and it takes a combination of all the three phenomena I have mentioned before one is fortunate enough to plan the future of this town. In my life and my service career there has been this happy combination of several life times, a month of Sundays and the harvest moon being blue throughout the month. It has been a lovely life and when I left the Service only twenty-two years of my life were my own because twenty-eight years had been given to government. Even in the twenty-four years thereafter the harvest moon has continued to be blue, very largely because I have no regret for what I did or for what I am doing. It is for this reason that I have chosen as the title of the book, which I hope will be a happy one, the expression “When The Harvest Moon Is Blue”. This introduction, therefore, is the hors d’ouvre or antipasto to what I hope is a meal at least pleasantly edible, if not epicurean. Come, friends, and join me at the festive table.

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