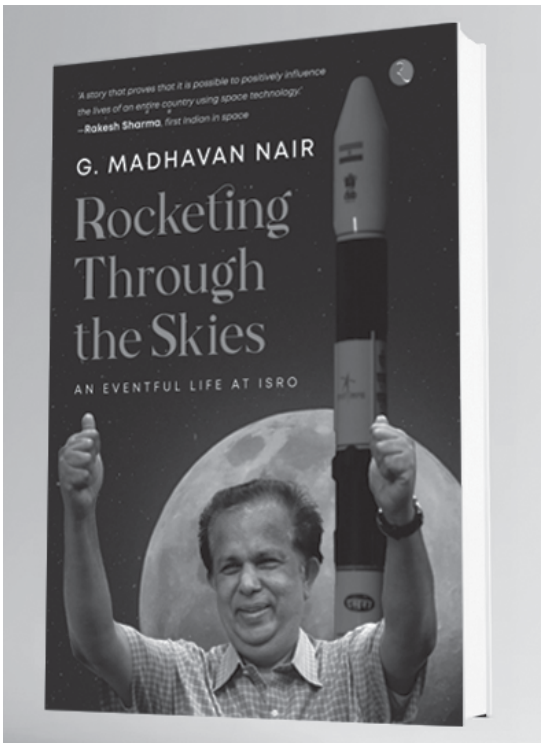
Book Review

Rocketing Through the Skies
An event full life at ISRO

By G. Madhavan Nair,

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About the Author

The book provides a comprehensive retelling of the life of G. Madhavan Nair, spanning from his childhood to his tenure as Chairman of ISRO until 2009. Mr. Nair served as the Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) from 2003 to 2009, overseeing significant milestones such as India's Chandrayaan-1 mission, manned space missions, and the implementation of space-based services like disaster warning and tele-education. His noteworthy contributions led to him receiving the prestigious Padma Vibhushan award in 2009.

Jaya G Nair, the author, penned this book shortly after G. Madhavan Nair's retirement. Having worked for ISRO in technical and techno-managerial roles, she continued her literary pursuit's post-retirement, culminating in this book as a result of her unwavering passion and interests.

Appreciation and Critique

In his early years, the young boy, born in the old Travancore state, experienced a nurturing upbringing under the loving care of his maternal grandparents. His life was marked by exploration of nature, immersion in streams, and contemplation of rose gardens and spirituality. The seeds of his scientific curiosity were sown during this period. His memories include a modest life with relatives, younger siblings, festive celebrations, and visits to temples for Vidyarambham. Despite facing challenges like the sad demise of his mother and his father's remarriage to his maternal aunt, he recalls these early experiences fondly.

From a tender age, the subjects like Physics and Mathematics captured his interest; Science experiments intrigued him towards the maiden experiment of building a radio with one diode with an antenna which was a long wire connected across two coconut palm trees and radio was designed, when it was switched could hear the programmes from Thiruvanathhapuram Station of All India Radio. During 10th standard school days a flying model of an airplane was built with the help of his friends Balan and Ashokan. Another feather to a kid was building a Water scooter which will move by the action of water jet created by sucking in water and expunging it though nozzle at the rear with the help of his friend Balan.

Proceeding to plus-two education, he pursued science with French as a language, gaining proficiency in reading French novels. For Engineering he joined and excelled from University College, Thiruvanthanpuram and his soul mate Radha surpassed from Government Women's College.

During this period, he had his first encounter with TERLS- Thumba Equatorial Launching Station was established near the sea of the Villge Thumba. Additionally, he familiarized himself with the emerging field of computers, as well as advancements in lasers and atomic power. In his pursuit of employment, he sent multiple applications to various institutions, eventually securing a position as a Laboratory In-Charge in the college where he studied.

Around 1950 he joined BARC training school where subjects on nuclear, thermodynamics were given significance. He was privileged and honored to be trained by Dr. Ramanna from Mysore who himself was much loved disciple of Dr. Bhabha. This period marked a crucial phase in his educational and professional journey.

The aspiration to join the atomic power station in Kota came to a halt with the offer of a new job at TERLS, where the highest entry-level salary for an SC-grade scientist was Rs. 400. This marked the conclusion of

the journey into the microscopic world of atoms, as the focus shifted entirely to the infinite realms of outer space, propelling the individual into a new orbit of exploration and discovery.

As a newcomer in 1968, space research took precedence, and the individual was assigned to the rocket engineering division under Dr. Kalama at the Bishop's house in Thumba. Discussions revolved around the necessary new laboratory instrumentation, telemetry, and radar, with Nair noting down Dr. Kalaam's dictation. The first interaction with Dr. Sarabhai left a lasting impression, with words of encouragement: "Welcome young man to the world of space, which is full of challenges. Keep your eyes and ears open and strive to excel."

The journey continued, and during one of his monthly visits, Madhavan Nair demonstrated the remote-controlled ejection of a rocket nose cone from a distance of 100m using a telecomm and system, earning appreciation from Dr. Sarabhai.

The task of developing SLV-3 was assigned to the young scientist, with a two-year timeline for the launch attempt. French scientists were skeptical, considering the limited time for developing both software and hardware. Despite facing three major tragedies during this period, Dr. Kalama remained determined to complete the project. Although SLV-3 was launched on August 10, 1979, it only travelled for 317 seconds before falling into the Bay of Bengal.

Amidst media criticism, the second launch of SLV-3 in 1980 proved successful, marking the inaugural occasion when an Indian rocket placed the Rohini Satellite precisely into its designated orbit.

The launch of PSLV-D2 in 1994 was a triumph, bringing joy to the entire nation as it successfully positioned the satellite into a polar, sun-synchronous orbit. Following the initial setback with the failed first mission of PSLV, ISRO achieved a remarkable feat with a continuous series of 56 launches, 54 of which concluded successfully.

On October 22, 2008, Chandrayaan was launched, making a historic lunar landing on November 14 and adding another noteworthy achievement to ISRO's repertoire. Madhavan Nair's list of accomplishments extends beyond this, encompassing his contributions to scientific research and his journey through the skies in rocket technology.

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