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. The cartoons are a perceptive history of independent India from earliest times to now such as no one has done before, not even Nehru.



M.S. Gill

20 February 2006

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...time, thanks to R.K. Laxman. In these times of social politics, he is able to puncture the vanities of our political masters with a few rapier thrusts and expel the hot air. For me, Laxman's little dhoti-clad man is the greatest Indian of the century: he has not only survived our politicians for nearly six decades, but managed to hang on to his innocence as well. Why can't we have his statue somewhere in Delhi, like Peter Pan in London?

But Laxman is more than a mere cartoonist. With a few strokes of his pen, he has documented the entire period of our independence, showcased in this superb collection, starting with his endearing yet perceptive portraits of the self-agonised and increasingly ineffectual Nehru. The cartoons are a perceptive history of independent India from earliest times to now such as no one has done before, not even Nehru. It's something I hold against Nehru—that he died without writing his account either of the freedom struggle or his 17 years in office. It's this volume of Laxman's that gives us a peep into the very soul of these guys who ruled us, a painless guide to our political history with none of its intimidating solemnity. Historians to come will be able to pick up real nuances of our political history from it. There's Indira, for example, transformed overnight by her first electoral triumph from a goongi gudiya to the well-known vulpine caricature; or the cartoons from the critical Janata period when the absurdity of real life rivalled his own skills at caricature. By comparison, Laxman's more recent cartoons of Manmohan and Sonia stand pale. No doubt then: Laxman is essential for maintaining the psychological health of the nation.

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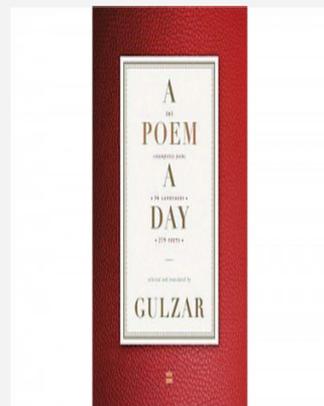
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