ANIL AGGRAWAL'S
Internet Journal of Book Reviews
A sister journal of AAIJFMT · Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology

VOL. 6, NO. 2 · JULY – DECEMBER 2007
Downloaded from www.anilaggrawal.com · ISSN 0972-9674 (Online) · https://www.anilaggrawal.com/br/vol_006_no_002/reviews/books/page002.html

# Wheels and Wings: An Autobiography

## THE BOOK

**Author** K.C.G. Verghese

## HOW TO CITE

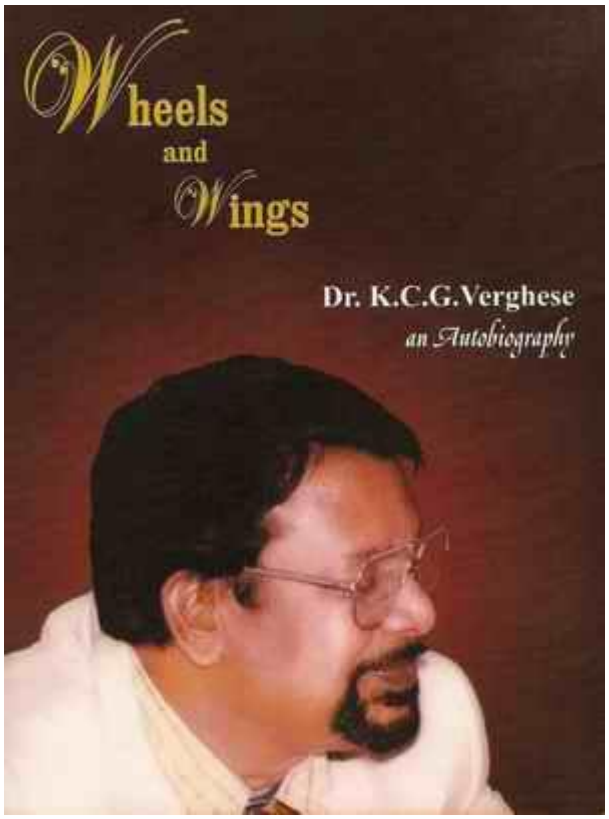
Basu B. Review of *Wheels and Wings: An Autobiography*, by K.C.G. Verghese. *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews*. 2007;6(2).

Ref: Basu B. Wheels and Wings: An Autobiography by K.C.G. Verghese, ***B.I. Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2005***, (Book Review). *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews* [serial on the Internet]. 2007; Vol. 6, No. 2 (July - December 2007): [about 4 p]. Available from: ; Published July 2, 2007. (Accessed:

Email Mr. Basu by clicking here

> *...AN EXCELLENT BOOK ...Hopefully, Wheels and Wings will touch the hearts of many youngsters and inspire them to follow in the steps of the author and do something worthwhile for the country...*

Wheels and Wings: An Autobiography *by* K.C.G. Verghese, Hardcover, 11" 8.5".
B.I. Publications Pvt. Ltd, 150 Agarchand Mansion, Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, Publication Date 2005. xxx + 178 pages, ISBN 81-7225-293-5, Price. Indian Rupees 625.00




Think of a village lad in India who has dreams - dreams of cars, planes, building institutions - and much more than any average child in an Indian village can ever dream of. But, for this youngster it was not just a dream; it was a vision that he had for the country when he grew up. And by sheer hard work and diligence he saw his dream come true. *Wheels and Wings* is the biography of this man from Kerala who "paved the way for the Automobile Revolution in India, vociferously advocated delicensing of industrial production, initiated the 'Open Sky' policy, and was the prime mover behind the privatisation of engineering education in Tamil Nadu.

Verghese was born in the small village of Kunnam, situated near the sacred river Pamba in the Pathanamthitta district of Kerala where he spent his early childhood. We get a flavour of life in those remote places, which would seem quite strange to us city-dwellers. Kerala is known for its wild elephants and one would expect its people to be unafraid of them. But the reality was quite different, as we learn from Verghese's account. He writes, "Those were the days when it seemed to us that man's greatest enemies were the wild elephants and tigers. The same villagers who could effortlessly pick up a snake on the edge of a small stick would shudder at the very mention of an elephant."

After doing engineering from Machilipatnam in Andhra Pradesh, Verghese took up teaching at the Institution of Automobile Engineers in Chennai. He had good knowledge of automobile engineering subjects and made it a point to make himself familiar with the latest in the automotive industry worldwide. In 1966 he started the Hindustan Engineering Training Centre (later renamed Hindustan Institute of Engineering Technology, HIET) as an educational institution intended mainly for foreign students. It attracted students from Sri Lanka, Africa, and the Gulf countries, besides Singapore and Malaysia. Subsequently Verghese started a course on aviation engineering at HIET, which was approved by the Department of Civil Aviation. He went on to establish many more institutes including the Hindustan College of Engineering, the Hindustan Institute of Management Studies, and the Hindustan College of Arts and Science. Today the Hindustan group has students

from about 40 countries. The Technology Information Forecasting and Assessment Council (TAIFAC) of the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Hindustan College of Engineering for setting up a Centre of Relevance and Excellence in Aircraft Maintenance.

> *...Verghese claims it was a meeting in 1981 with the then Union Industries Minister at which he had suggested the scrapping of the licensing system and advocated collaboration with foreign partners that eventually led to the finalisation of the Maruti deal with Suzuki Corporation of Japan...*

Verghese claims it was a meeting in 1981 with the then Union Industries Minister at which he had suggested the scrapping of the licensing system and advocated collaboration with foreign partners that eventually led to the finalisation of the Maruti deal with Suzuki Corporation of Japan. He says, "The success of the Maruti experiment opened the floodgates for a host of other car manufacturers, mostly from overseas. Daewoo, Hyundai, Ford, Mitsubishi, and others soon set up shop in India. Today, all of India is enjoying the benefits of foreign collaboration and liberalisation of industry."

In the early 1980s, when Verghese wanted to import an aircraft for his aviation institution, he had to face a lot of hassle, both bureaucratic and technical. Undeterred, he finally did import a Cessna 172 aircraft. His *Air Asiatic* was the first in India to get a private air taxi operator license in 1989. It operated with a Boeing 737. It was the forerunner of the spate of private airlines that came up subsequently.

In 1994, Verghese set up the Orient Flight School (OFS) in Pondicherry to train pilots. Today OFS has a fleet of 10 aircraft and pilots who had graduated from the School are flying major carriers all over the world.

> *...In 'Afterword' at the end of the book Verghese takes a hard look at the situation in India. He questions the very relevance of loss-making public sector enterprises when private enterprises were able to provide better services at lesser cost and still make profit. It is now well known that Bangladesh is developing faster than India and the poverty level is much less, thanks to the enterprise of people like the Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Banks...*

In 'Afterword' at the end of the book Verghese takes a hard look at the situation in India. He questions the very relevance of loss-making public sector enterprises when private enterprises were able to provide better services at lesser cost and still make profit. It is now well known that Bangladesh is developing faster than India and the poverty level is much less, thanks to the enterprise of people like the Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Banks. At the time India got its Independence in 1947, the living standards of people in countries like Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia were almost the same as in India. But today "why is India still at the same level, while all these countries have made giant strides?" asks Verghese.

According to him, "It is for every one of us to think about where this country is headed and see what we can do individually and collectively to help India Incorporated come out of the red. We are a billion-strong nation of talented and diligent people. We don't really need to leave our home ground in search of greener pastures." Coming from one who has seen it happen, these words are prophetic and should help change the mindset of our educated youngsters who are seen queuing up in front of foreign embassies for visas. Hopefully, *Wheels and Wings* will touch the hearts of many youngsters and inspire them to follow in the steps of the author and do something worthwhile for the country.

*-Biman Basu*



*-Biman Basu*

*Biman Basu is a prominent writer of Asia, having written more than 15 books on various subjects. He has reviewed a number of books for various journals. He has been associated with Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews since its inception. He can be contacted at basu_biman@yahoo.com. More information about him can be had by clicking here.*

---

*-Editor-in-Chief*