

MALOY KRISHNA DHAR

OPEN SECRETS



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Maloy Krishna Dhar

Published by Mainak Dhar

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A NOTE TO READERS ABOUT MALOY KRISHNA DHAR

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On the 19th of May, 2012 at 5:10PM, Maloy Krishna Dhar, bestselling author, widely regarded strategic expert and commentator, highly decorated police and intelligence officer, and yes, my father, passed away after a month long battle that began with a stroke and was compounded by renal and multi-organ failure. I was with him through all those days and at the end. It is perhaps the way of the world that we spread our wings and go far from our roots, but the one comfort I have is that I was able to be with him, to talk to him, to remind him of all he has done for us, and to thank him for all he has taught me. Most of all, I was able to tell him what I had never told him—of just how remarkable his journey in life has been, and of just how proud I feel to be his son.

Many people take such occasions to mourn and cry. I feel the pain, having now lost both my parents, but Maloy Krishna Dhar is not a man to be mourned and cried over. His life is one to be celebrated and learned from. Dying is a biological inevitability, but what matters is what one does with the time one is allotted. On that count, my father led a life so full and so eventful that his life itself could make for a bestselling book like the ones he authored.

He began his life on July 13, 1939 in Mymensingh, now in Bangladesh, and had very happy memories of his childhood. Those were however soon clouded when his father passes away when he was but a child, and the Partition of the Indian subcontinent rent apart the world he knew. In his book *Train to India*, he recounts how he and his mother had come to India on a train amidst the communal carnage, him carrying a small pocketknife in his attempt to protect his mother from the marauding mobs. He saw the worst of man, saw people being killed in front of him at such a tender age, and arrived in India without much to his name. Many people in his position could have, and indeed did, settle for what they assumed to be their lot—harbouring hatred from the bloodshed they saw, and settling for whatever meager opportunities came their way. That was not the path Maloy chose. He escaped his harsh surroundings, not physically at first, but through his quest for knowledge, realizing that an education was the way he could create a better life for himself and his mother. His love for learning and letters was apparent in what he chose to learn—he studied Comparative Literature in College, and would later tell me that reading classics from other lands opened his mind and inspired him to raise his own game. He started his working life as a journalist, and could certainly have had a comfortable life compared to his childhood, but once again, Maloy made the leap that very few others in his position would have. He appeared for the elite Indian Civil Services Examination and was selected into the Indian Police Service in 1964.

His early years, spent in Naxal infested areas in East India (an issue we grapple with today, and on which he had very insightful views) brought out many aspects of his remarkable character. One, he was absolutely fearless. Many people try and judge what position or point of view will bring them advantage. Maloy had a simple inner compass of right and wrong, and would be guided by it, no matter the consequences. My late maternal grandfather, himself a senior Police officer, would tell me stories of how he saw the early career of his to be son-in-law with a mixture of dread and undisguised admiration. Maloy was the kind of man who once got into a jeep with a driver, and went after a man-eating tiger that had come loose in the plantations. He once cornered and shot a dreaded

outlaw whom other officers would not touch because of his political connections. When asked by others whether he realized what he had done, he said, 'I shot the bastard.' That is the kind of man Maloy was. Second, for all his hard and uncompromising exterior, he was a man of deep perception. Despite his mandate being to stamp out Naxalites, he took the time to understand their root causes and understood and empathized with why many of them chose the route they did.

His next stage of his career took him into an arena where he was to excel for almost 30 years. He was appointed to the Intelligence Bureau, the Indian equivalent of the American FBI, though with some of the external mandates the CIA has. His early years there, with a newly married wife and young kids were in the troubled North-East of India, including Nagaland, where I was born. That region at that time was seeing a violent insurgency against Indian rule, and Maloy faced the challenge as he did every other challenge in his life—with no fear, and with the greatest of empathy. That combination made him life-long friends among those who could have been enemies. He did not talk much about his work, but growing up in Delhi, I would meet visitors from Nagaland and Manipur who would tell me that Maloy was the first and perhaps only government officer they trusted. He would always play it straight, never try and manipulate them and what endeared him to them was the fact that he was utterly without fear. I remember a story of how he once supposedly went into a village known to harbor insurgents, alone and with only his personal sidearm, and drank the local brew with the headman, trying to understand why they were supporting them, and how he could help act as a bridge to end the violence.

As I was growing up, my father's work often played at the center stage of some of the turbulent times in India's history, though often I was too young at that time to realize what was happening. He handled the terrorism desk for years, handling the Khalistan separatist movement, and later the Pakistan sponsored terror in Kashmir and beyond. Again, it is amazing the respect he garnered through his approach to work and life. As he lay critically ill, one of the calls I got was from a man who was once a Khalistani separatist and later joined the mainstream political process. He told me about how many people in Punjab would miss him terribly, because in the midst of a terrible crisis with excesses committed on both sides, he was a rare officer. A man who was willing to listen and empathize without shooting first, yet also a man without fear. One story of my father's from this period, which he recounted later in one of his books, was of the terror siege at the Golden Temple that came to known as Operation Black Thunder. He pleaded to not deploy crushing force that would have led to high collateral damage but instead had trusted men on the inside whom he wanted to supply. As a senior IPS officer, he could have delegated the terribly dangerous task, but he dressed up as a fruit seller, with a basket of fruit on his head concealing weapons and walked into a complex with hundreds of heavily armed terrorists to get the weapons to his men.

The twilight of his career was mirrored by personal tragedy as my mother, Sunanda, was diagnosed with Cancer and passed away in 2001 after a five-year battle. Maloy stood by her, shared her pain and her triumphs. He had once told me that my mother had been his first and only love. He perhaps never really recovered from her loss and today; my one consolation is that the two of them are reunited. For a man whom many saw as a hard-nosed officer, he kept every single letter my mother wrote to him and left them for me in a large bundle, with instructions to burn with him at his cremation. He loved as he lived, fully and sparing nothing of himself.

In his final days in service, his inner compass and values were tested as perhaps never before. In investigating the espionage case affecting India's Space Programme, he had leads pointing in uncomfortable directions for the powers that be. He was under huge pressure to ignore the evidence, and since I was grown up, he explained the situation to me along with my mother, and told me that

‘Son, I may suffer and you and your mother may also have some inconvenience, but I cannot do what is not right.’ He persisted, faced a lot of pressure and retired one step shy of the top job in the Intelligence Bureau, but never buckled under the pressure he faced or recanted the evidence he had. A lot of it he later wrote about in his books. Interestingly enough, nobody has come forth to challenge those facts.

With his career ending on a bitter-sweet note, and devastated by the death of my mother, Maloy could have settled for the retirement that most other senior officers do. Evenings at clubs, meet old friends, try and wrangle for some government junket. Instead he went back to his original love of literature and continued his fight for what he believed in by reinventing himself as a writer. His first novel, *Bitter Harvest*, chronicled the tough times he saw in Punjab during the insurgency and was highly praised for the sensitive portrayal of what common people went through, often tormented by policemen and terrorists alike. His biggest bestseller came in the form of *Open Secrets*—a first of its kind—a no-holds barred chronicle of his career as an Intelligence Officer, laying bare the political machinations that often prevent our forces from doing what is right. It sparked intense debate with its plea to free our intelligence services from their political masters and to truly empower them to serve and protect the people, not the politicians in power. It was as fearless a salvo, if not more, than the one he fired as a young officer to fell the politically connected outlaw. He laid out what he believed in, not hesitating to name names, and challenged those who disputed the facts to engage in debate. Suffice to say, nobody took him up on it. *Open Secrets* remained the #1 Non-Fiction bestseller in India for many months and still is regarded as a seminal work, the first of its kind in India. His later work covered other aspects of his work, some in fictional garb like *Operation XXX*, the story of a deep cover agent, *We The People*, a brutal expose of our electoral politics, and some that will act as a guidebook for future intelligence operatives such as his work on Intelligence Tradecraft.

He started his website, maloykrishnadhar.com, which I will maintain and continue, where he posted typically brutally incisive views on the state of our nation and politics. A man like him got respect from everyone, admiration from many, and brickbats from some who didn’t like his direct and uncompromising approach. He shrugged off all those brickbats and just kept doing and writing what he believed to be right and just. His expertise and views were widely sought after and we used to often joke about his celebrity status with new channels vying to interview him.

In his last years, his writing turned more introspective and he wrote *Train to India*, published by Penguin India, where he chronicled his early life and through the eyes of a young boy, the cataclysmic changes Bengal saw during and after Partition. He has an unfinished book on his computer, which I have promised that I will see through, an expose of the human trafficking that plagues the subcontinent, often with the active connivance of people in positions of power. Till he was conscious in hospital, his mind was sharp and active. He would ask me to send updates to his friends on Facebook, asking me if he could Facetime with Aadi (oh yes, that was another aspect of his reinvention—he was more tech savvy than most people a third his age) or Twitter. He was perhaps not the most demonstrative of men, but in his final days, as we often chatted, he told me that he was proud of the man I had become. Coming from my father, I needed no fancy prose or declarations of love—that was the ultimate accolade I could have ever hoped to earn—to be a fraction of the man he was.

73 years cannot be summed up in one note, and a man like my father cannot be reduced to one eulogy, but as a writer, perhaps this is the best tribute I can pay to him. When a man like him passes, I don’t want legions of crying and babbling people (no matter how good their intentions). In many ways, Maloy was a man born in the wrong century. His courage, his strict code of honour, his sense of

what was right and wrong and acting on that irrespective of the cost or risk, would have made him right at home in the company of legendary warriors of yore like the Norsemen or Mongols. When one of their mighty warriors passed, people did not cry, but they celebrated their life, their battles won, and their legend lived on in song and in the heart of future generations. I was lucky to have been a part of his journey and his legend will live on in my heart and my words and in what I in turn pass on to my son.

Maloy Krishna Dhar wore many hats—journalist, policeman, spy, author, husband, father—but the simple summation of my father Maloy was that he was a real man—the sort we should all be lucky enough to have in our lives.

The book you hold in his hand is part of his remarkable legacy that I am trying to share with readers around the world.

Mainak Dhar

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Open Secrets is dedicated to Sunanda Dhar, my life partner. She had smilingly supported my wild ways of unconventional intelligence production, even in hostile terrains like the North East. She had shown magnanimity in tolerating my battle of conscience and the tantrums of the two quarrelling squirrels inside me, which often pushed us to the precipice of uncertainty and insecurity.

In Open Secrets an intelligence operator has for the first time offered an insight into the working of the prime intelligence organisation of India—the Intelligence Bureau. In India any open writing and pronouncement about the intelligence community is frowned upon as an act of betrayal against the Establishment. Such revelations are aplenty in ‘free democracies’ in the western world, where the intelligence establishment is regularly brought under public scanner, through legal and constitutional means. I have made the first attempt to break the taboo of guarding the intelligence fraternity under the permanent veil. I beg indulgence of my colleagues who lived with my unconventional ways and had given me whole hearted support. I salute these faceless and nameless intelligence operators.

PROLOGUE

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‘Open Secrets’ is not an autobiography. An insignificant person, who just performed the basic human rituals of living a span of life and loving a lady, raising a family and serving the intelligence community to earn bread, cannot stake claim to be a part of the history of his time. Hence, he has no right to burden the world with his story; which is not history. But, I have been, like many other individuals in my position, a carrier wave, through which certain events of history were transmitted from historical persons to non-historical persons; the rulers to the ruled. Certain events had flowed down my stream that I happened to carry to the event horizon, which is called the dustbin of history.

I feel that such carrier waves and such streams have a right to tell what gold-nuggets and garbage of history had flown down to the event horizon through their media. Such media wave, in that tortured logical interpretation, is a part of the history. Hence he can also claim to be a part of the immortal events.

‘Open Secrets’ has arisen out of the Vedic feeling of ‘*So Aham*’—I’m the Him; I’m the part of the Infinite. I hope those who will have time to read this account will be magnanimous enough to pardon a megalomaniac who considers himself as a part of the infinite-history. It is not his-story, it is not his autobiography. It is a part of the History; it is a part of the Infinite.

With this grandiose and quixotic assertion I wish to communicate to the readers that I do not have the temerity of writing a history of the Intelligence fraternity of India. That is a vast and complicated subject, which can better be treated by a scholar.

At worst Open Secret can be treated as the first open confession of an intelligence operative.

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Intelligence apparatus is an integral part of statecraft and governance. It is one of the most ancient tools that has formed the integral part of the evolution of human intelligence in certain portion of the cranium that has endowed the Homo Sapiens with the instinct of survival, fighting against all odds and ascertaining his superiority over his adversaries—elemental, human, animal and all sorts of adversaries. In the crudest sense it has given the insatiable urge to a housewife to ferret out what cooks in a neighbour’s pot and what happens below their quilt.

Intelligence as an attribute of man’s evolution through the process of selection has become synonymous with his quest for knowledge. Intelligence infrastructure as a part of social evolution and statecraft has become synonymous with diplomacy, law and order, stability and welfare of the governed and governing people and a powerful bridge between war and peace.

In internal context it is a perfect tool for repression and welfare, a supreme tool for ensuring law and order and maiming and silencing people’s voice. In external relations it plays complimentary roles to statecraft and diplomacy and takes the front seat when certain objectives are required to be achieved through means other than statecraft and diplomacy and war. Intelligence fraternity can carry out wars through peaceful means, it can wage wars through low intensity attrition and it can play havoc through sabotage and subversion. It can seek out the fault lines of the enemy and cause tectonic

explosion under his feet. It is as powerful a weapon as a fusion bomb is. It depends how and in what fashion the intelligence infrastructure is used by the ruling clique against whom and at what point of political evolution of a nation state. It is the strongest defensive weapon that can defend the home front by denying intelligence to the enemy and by sniffing out his illegitimate and undiplomatic activities by using superior intelligence tools.

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As a modern nation state India has inherited a well defined intelligence machinery from the British which had chiselled out a well-greased system of collection of intelligence with the uncanny combination of gathering strategic and tactical intelligence through established machineries in the Central Intelligence Bureau, Intelligence Units in the Armed Forces, Border Scouts, Special Rangers and well-groomed individual agents, besides the finely groomed revenue collectors, village level officials and civil servants. In British India the system was well orchestrated between the Central Intelligence Bureau and the intelligence and criminal investigation departments of the British governed provinces. There was no dearth of coordination between the British Indian territory and the territories governed by the princes and kings, on matters related to the security of the Crown Empire. The Empire was interested in limited areas of activities of the Indian nationalists, a little bit of communal situation, communist infiltration and activities of groups and individuals that threatened the stability of their colony. Its intelligence machinery was also required to tailor its threads with the intelligence machineries at the Home Office and other intelligence gathering machines elsewhere in the Crown Colonies. The British ruled with an iron hand and did not harbour any pretension of following legal niceties when it came to the perceived subversive activities of the nationalists. It suited the Empire to treat its Indian intelligence branch as a ‘bureau’—a subsidiary administrative unit.

No one expected the Empire to restrain its administrative machineries in dealing with the ‘swadeshi rogues.’ The Intelligence departments at the centre and the provinces were as mercilessly used as the police and army were. All spheres of human activities were covered by the agents of the Empire—the academia, the campuses, labour forces, print media, performing arts, government and private offices and even the bedrooms of the suspects. In a limited way the gadgets of technical intelligence were used to intercept mails, communications and dissemination of revolutionary and seditious ideas. In short, the intelligence apparatus gave blanket coverage to all activities inside the country. The intelligence gathering in the neighbouring countries and areas of influence were discharged through diplomatic missions, trade missions, liaison offices and itinerant spies; all accountable to the Viceroy and the Home Office.

The growth of British intelligence system in India and other key colonies was independent of the growth of MI5 and MI6, the internal and external wing of intelligence system of Great Britain. There were frequent interchanges between the intelligence personnel of the colonies and the home-based personnel. But in India the evolution of the Central Intelligence Bureau, the intelligence outfit of the Great Empire had followed the contour of specific requirements of the Empire, in India and in the neighbouring countries, especially China, Russia, Afghanistan, Middle Eastern countries and some countries in the South East Asia.

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The history of the intelligence infrastructure of the countries like the USA, UK, France, and Germany show that each country had fashioned its machineries according to the historic requirements it faced from time to time. They went through an evolutionary process. The USSR had also fashioned its intelligence apparatus in accordance with its needs to build up a closed and captive society in the name of communism. It is the case with China.

In 'free countries' like the USA, UK and France the modern versions of the intelligence infrastructure in post-World War scenario amply bear the testimony to the fears and aspirations of the respective nations. However, in accordance with the democratic traditions the USA and the UK have finally opted for adequate legislation to streamline the functioning of their intelligence organisations. There is no doubt that certain ruling cliques of certain period in modern history of these two democratic nations have used the intelligence machineries against its own people and institutions. Even the post-9/11 legislations and activities of the FBI, Homeland Security and the CIA have given rise to certain questions if the USA was not taking away liberty of its people in the name of protecting them. Same questions are being raised elsewhere too.

Such questions are being asked because these countries value democracy as well as liberty enshrined in their respective constitutions and conventions. They are equally apprehensive of the sanctity of their elected democratic system as well as their freedom and liberty. There are inbuilt institutions in the system to ask uncomfortable questions to the ruling cliques and investigate into their actions, including the intelligence gathered by their agencies on internal and external security matters. The CIA and the FBI are accountable to the Congress and the Senate and other statutory bodies. The MI5 and the MI6 cannot get away with intelligence faux pas and every action of the system is zealously scrutinised by the watchdog committees of the Parliament. It is, however, admitted that the intelligence organisations of these 'free countries' do give wide coverage to the activities of their citizen in almost all sphere of activities. Their systems keep track of the citizen from the Cradle to the Grave. No other country, except, perhaps the former Soviet Union, has documented their citizen in such exhaustive and comprehensive manner.

India has not been able to keep track of its own citizen. The faulty system allows unhindered entry of alien nationals from the neighbouring countries. Periodically some Indian politicians wake up and raise slogans for comprehensive documentation of the citizens of the country. Vote-bank beggars in the right, left and centre of the political spectrum oppose them, because they depend a lot on illegal migrant voters from the neighbouring countries. They also shed crocodile tears in the name of 'secularism'—an apartheid mechanism devised by the Indian democracy. Once in a while the intelligence and police agencies are whipped up to trace out the illegal settlers. They even violate the rights of the natural citizens.

However, the intelligence institutions of the USA and the UK by and large try to avoid the clumsy ways and means that openly violate the democratic and constitutional rights of the citizen.

The evolutions of the Indian democracy and constitutional liberty have outpaced the growth of systemic accountability of its police and intelligence fraternity. Or one should say that these sectors of state activity have systematically flouted the norm of parallel growth compatible with the growth of the concepts of democracy, liberty, human rights and value system of the democratic society.

These important national institutions continue to suffer from the bane of feudal and imperial curses. Moreover, the so-called institutions of the iron frame, the entire length of the spinal cord of Indian administration, from *Panchayat* (rural self-government) to national level, has been mutilated and subjugated in the name of suborning them to the 'rule of the people, for the people and by the people'. Several institutions of the country, including the judiciary, have been distorted and subverted to suit

the political class.

It is not my intention to write another sterile thesis on the state of Indian administration and judiciary. Such thesis are propounded at regular intervals, several commissions are instituted routinely to examine the system breakdown and several such reports, including reports on police and intelligence reform have been gathering dust if not already eaten up by ants and termites of the system.

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All that I wanted to highlight in Open Secrets is my limited tryst with the intelligence fraternity, peripheral brush with the political system and a little bit experience of the horror-house, which is Indian democracy.

Indian intelligence institutions are multi-layered. The prime intelligence organisation, the Intelligence Bureau, was inherited from the Imperial Intelligence Bureau, popularly known as Central Intelligence Bureau. The post-independence political system has more or less maintained the structural formation of the IB (Intelligence Bureau) with the apex organisation at the Centre (core of the paradoxical Federated Unitary Democracy) and its subsidiary units in various federating (unified with the centre) States (former and reorganised provinces). The very concept of federated unitary system gives rise to several contradictions in the constitution of the country and relationship between the States and the Centre. Some Commissions, including the Sarkaria Commission, had gone into these aspects, which are yet to be resolved to the satisfaction of the aspirations of the people. A Unitary Democracy is incompatible with the concept of a Federated Democracy, whose integrity is ensured by a pragmatic and flexible constitution.

The Intelligence Bureau has a cascading bureaucratic structure with the Director at the top cone of the pyramid. It is a replica of any other 'ministry' of the government of India with the exception that it is treated as a 'Bureau', an administrative unit under the Union Home Ministry. The definition of Bureau is: "An office for the transaction of business. A name given to the several departments of the executive or administrative branch of government, or their divisions." (*Black's Law Dictionary*-Sixth Edition).

From the legal definition it is clear that the Intelligence Bureau is an administrative creation of the Union Government of India, as inherited from British India. The State has the prerogative of creating/establishing organisations, bureaus, and departments for carrying out specific administrative tasks. The IB is one such department, which is administered through normal service rules applied to the IPS officers and government servants of other categories.

However, intelligence cannot be treated as 'just another department' under a ministry. While the chief of the Research and Analysis Wing has been endowed with the powers of a full secretary to the Government of India, his counterpart in the IB is still accountable to the Home Secretary. More often than not he is answerable to the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister. The IB's accountability ends at the door of its prime consumers.

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The central infrastructure of the IB is supported by subsidiary units, which are generally known as the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIB). Some of the units are still described as units headed by Central Intelligence Officer (CIO). These units were basically located in the former territories ruled by the princes and kings. For some reason or other this anomalous situation continues, even though the

princely states have been amalgamated with the reorganised states. The cascading field formations travel down to district and sub-division level (revenue unit). In exceptional cases such units are diversified to the police station level also.

Till a decade back the people speaking the language of the state (sons of the soil) basically staffed the territorial SIBs. For example, in the South Indian states the senior and junior echelons of the officers were drawn from within the state only or at best from neighbouring states. Say for SIB Madras (Chennai) 90.5% of the staff was drawn from Madras (Tamil Nadu) state. Some stray officers from Kerala and Andhra Pradesh could aspire to be posted there on grounds of proximity to the home state of the concerned officers. It was the case with states like West Bengal and Maharashtra. Such rigid copying of the linguistic reorganisation of the Indian states was blindly followed well after 1990. Some changes are being brought about in this highly objectionable system, which had endowed the SIBs with narrow parochial perspective.

In the name of maintaining meaningful dialogue with the state police and intelligence machineries a large number of police officers were (still are) brought on deputation from the state police forces. The post independence governments have blindly followed this Imperial system. This system has certain advantages and a lot of inbuilt disadvantages. Indian politics has become segmented on caste, creed and ideological lines. Officers coming on deputation from a particular state often cannot rise above the constraints imposed on them by the environment from which they graduate to the central intelligence department. This has often caused serious perspective distortion.

The perennial philosophers of the organisation, vested interests of the Indian Police Service (IPS) and the political breed have scrupulously maintained the essential 'police culture' of the Intelligence Bureau, almost as it were during the Imperial days. In pre-Indira Gandhi days the IB was basically guided by the 'ear marking' scheme. This scheme enabled the IB to earmark certain IPS officers while they were under training in the Police Academy. They were earmarked on the basis of their performance in the All India Services Examination, performance in the academy and confidential reports on their shaping up process. A number of brilliant officers, including the illustrious Directors like Hari Anand Barari, M. K. Narayanan, and V. G. Vaidya were inducted through the earmarking scheme. The humble author of this book was also an earmarked officer.

Of course, some officers also were inducted on 'deputation' from state cadres. They were later absorbed as 'hard core' officers. This system was abandoned after 1970 to accommodate 'loyal and committed officers' and also to bring the IB at par with other Central Police Organisations (CPO), like the CRPF, BSF. The IB was opened up as a waiting room for IPS officers from the less glamorous state cadres like Manipur and Tripura, Assam, West Bengal and any other state where the prevailing political culture did not suit certain officers. They used the IB to cool off and to catch up with other opportunities. Such lateral inductions basically depended on political pressure. The IB had lost the privilege of building up its own committed cadre and was compelled to depend on cadre of officers loyal only to themselves or to certain colour of politicians. This policy shift had done maximum damage to the organisation and transformed it to as mundane and controlled central police organisation as any other uniformed force under control of the Union Home Ministry. Since the advent of Indira Gandhi the IB had become an essential adjunct of the Home Ministry and the office of the Prime Minister.

Refusal by the corps of IPS officers and the political masters to allow induction of talents from lateral fields in the academia, media and other specialised streams of study and profession has limited the functional ability of the IB in the face of diversified demand from economic, scientific, information and technology related fields. In the age of computronics, satphone, satcom and other

advanced fields of imaging technology the Technical Wing of the IB has become redundant. This fossil is being carried on the back of the IB by inertia. It is required to be urgently remodelled and modified with induction of suitable talents from open market. Lateral induction of specialised talents is likely to widen the horizon of working philosophy and efficiency of the IB. Some efforts were made by the R&AW to adopt an open recruiting policy. But the exercise ended up in the welfare of associates and relatives. The outcome has not seen the expected professional panacea.

The general corps of officers at the cutting edge level (middle and junior) are also required to be equipped with newer tradecraft assets and advanced education and training in information technology and other specialised branches of knowledge like civil and military aviation, complicated weaponry system and some such trades which require attention of the IB in security related matters. International terrorism has transformed the entire spectrum of knowledge base of the terrorist masterminds. To match up with military genius of some of the terrorist masterminds the cutting edge level intelligence officers are also required to acquiring proficiency in such complicated streams of studies. For every small matter they should not run to the outside experts. They should be equipped with basic knowledge of these trades in which the international terrorists are so adept. The average IB officer does not even know the difference between various explosive devices and triggering mechanism. They are not oriented with the techniques of war pursued by the terrorists, mujahedeen's, and fidayeen fanatics.

It is hoped that sooner than later the political planners and the members of the intelligence fraternity will understand the need for broad basing the foundation of national intelligence and free them from the clutches of captive police working philosophy and techniques.

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The Indian constitution has empowered the States to handle its police forces and organise its criminal and other intelligence services within the ambit of the police infrastructure. Policing in India, especially in British India, had developed along the tradition, and rules and regulations framed by the Bengal, Avad, Punjab, Bombay and Madras models. Some indigenous practices have also crept in certain provincial police forces. By and large the British model has been maintained with minor cosmetic changes. The composite story of the growth of Indian Police and its post-independence evolution is a vast subject of study by a social scientist. Unfortunately policemen themselves or commissions headed by administrative service officers have so far carried out most of the studies. Policing is not merely a law and order problem and problems of men in uniform. Policing is a social problem and it should also be studied by the social scientists.

In spite of existence of several police regulations, the Police Act and a few specific Rules framed by the respective state governments the police forces are controlled by the political hierarchy through the Home Department or the department responsible for general administration. The States have also followed the pattern of the Union Government and maintained firm political grip on the intelligence generating units of the State Police Forces. The State Intelligence Branches/CIDs/Special Branches are supposed to generate intelligence for maintaining law and order and protect the lives and properties of the citizen from the marauding criminals, habitual lawbreakers and the so-called terrorists. These units are supposed to report to the Director General of Police/Inspector General of Police and the Home Secretary of the State. However, the Home Minister and the Chief Minister (very often the CM holds the Home portfolio) is the real boss of these intelligence-generating units, who use these tools of administration to secure their political bases and to spy on their political

opponents besides keeping a tab on security and intelligence aspects.

The State Police has under its disposal vast means to generate grassroots level intelligence through rural police, village level administrative machineries and service sector employees of the government. They have at their disposal the local self-government machineries too. The Central Intelligence and Investigation agencies do not enjoy that kind of reach.

It was expected that the Central and State intelligence units would be able to institutionalise a uniform system for cooperation and coordination at cutting edge and apex levels. The reality is different. In spite of the IB maintaining some sort of police format there is hardly any meaningful cooperation between the state and central agencies. The going was smooth as long as the same political party ruled both at the centre and in the states. But the situation has changed. Different parties/coalitions have come to rule in the centre as well as the states. These political satraps have their own ideological, political, and group interests to promote and protect. Smooth exchanges of intelligence take place in very rare instances, mostly related to insurgency, terrorism and attacks against national targets.

The ambience of cooperation had marginally improved after the Bombay serial bomb blasts. But, Pakistan's proxy war in the North East, Punjab, Kashmir and elsewhere in the country has brought out the inefficiency of the informal arrangement between the IB and the state police agencies. Some weak and informal arrangements have recently been reached between the central IB and some State police units. The police units in states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have responded more constructively.

However, what is required is a national level institutional arrangement, which has not materialised even after the Joint Intelligence Committee has been revamped and the National Security Council reconstituted. The Intelligence Bureau has also set up a new stream of activity for multi-agency coordination. But these high sounding vocabularies end up in vocabulary itself. The ground level reality is: there is urgent need for re-examination of the entire gamut of intelligence generation process by the State and Central organisations and devising of integrated ways and means for fast communication and interaction.

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There also exists the crying need for cooperation and coordination among the Central Intelligence and Investigation agencies. Certain external challenges to national security, infamous Kargil episode included, have proved that the prime intelligence organisations and investigating agencies have failed to exchange, process and evaluate crucial intelligence continually. Despite the existence of apex coordinating bodies (the JIC, NSC etc) the apex decision-making body, the Union Cabinet, often personified by the Prime Minister, Home Minister, External Affairs Minister, and the Defence Minister has not been able to react in time to stave off grave crisis.

Serious gap of communication between the IB and the State Police on the one hand and the IB and the R&AW and the CBI on the other, had become apparent during security operations in Punjab, Kashmir, Assam and against the Pakistan sponsored Jihadist elements. The most glaring example of total intelligence failure was the Kargil adventure by Pakistan army. The R&AW, the Military Intelligence and to a lesser extent the Intelligence Bureau had miserably failed to unearth the Pakistani design and warn the policy planners. Whatever intelligence was available was not coordinated to cull out a coherent collage. The rest is history.

It is not my intention to dissect the post-Kargil events with a surgical scalpel, though there is

ample scope for this. A nation learns its lesson through mistakes. It is hoped that the lessons have been learnt. However, the recent incident at Surankot (Hill Kaka) in Kashmir has proved beyond doubt that India is yet to tighten up its intelligence girdle and work out a near foolproof coordination system. The repeated fidayeen attacks against military and civilian targets also prove that lots of grounds are yet to be covered by our intelligence community and our political masters and institutions are yet to meaningfully tighten the systemic screws.

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Coming to the aspects of systemic screws I would like to highlight the specific aspect of control and command of the Central Intelligence and Investigation agencies. It is proudly claimed that the IB finds a mention in some footnote of the Constitution of India. The IB is a transferred department of British India, regularised as any other bureau and department of the Ministry of Home Affairs. It is treated as a subordinate bureau and there are instances galore to prove that this kitchen bureau has had been used as a chambermaid by the political leadership. This does not speak very high of the democratic practices and constitutional guarantees.

It is funny to note that Article 33 of the Constitution of India was amended in 1985 (Act No. 58 of 1985—[The] Intelligence Organisations (Restriction of Rights) Act, 1985, wherein the IB and other intelligence organisations were placed in the class of Armed Forces in matters of Constitutional rights and organised trade union activities. This was necessitated by unprecedented unrest both in the R&AW and the IB over accumulated grievances. The lawmakers of the country had not felt the need for regulating the activities of the intelligence organisations and making them accountable to the supreme representative organisation of the country; though politicians of different hues have tasted the bitter curd of vendetta by their rivals. India had witnessed the destructive dances of its intelligence organisations during the Emergency regime and the regime that followed. Indian democracy can be as oppressive as the regime of Idi Amin. There is no dearth of evidence to support this statement. Rights of the citizen are more frequently violated even under normal circumstances. A shaky ruler can run amuck and rock the foundation of the country.

The present system is not good enough to ensure free democracy and constitutional liberty. Mere government notifications are not good enough to give legal status to the prime intelligence organisations, which have evolved along with the political system of the country and democratic aspirations of the people. If the systemic evolution has made the administrative services and other spheres of national activities accountable to the elected representatives of the people why the most powerful tools of the state machinery should be kept under the wrap of secrecy and the hazards of informality that can be misused and manipulated by a few politicians?

Democracy is a defined entity. Constitutional liberty is a concept that keeps on defining and redefining itself according to the aspirations of the people living in a democratic Nation State. One common feature that bonds both the concepts is the rule of law and total accountability of the entire system to the democratically passed Acts of the sovereign body, the Parliament and the written constitution that enshrine all the guarantees of liberty, equality and freedom to the citizen.

However, the Indian system planners, political thinkers and activists and the opinion makers among the intellectuals, media world and even the judiciary have not yet come out with concrete proposals to empower the Intelligence and Investigation Organisations of the country with adequate Acts of the sovereign body and free them from the machinations of the rulers of the day.

This national lapse has given unbridled opportunities to the political class to misuse and abuse the

intelligence and investigation agencies of the Union and the States. Thousands of examples can be cited to prove that the ruling class of India, which manages to get elected through the ballot boxes, are not real democrats, who believe in liberty, equality and freedom of the people. The ruling elite has grossly misused the Intelligence Bureau, the Research and Analysis Wing of the Cabinet Secretariat and the organisations like the Central Bureau of Investigation

I do not intend to dig out instances of flagrant violation of the constitution and other provisions of the laws of the land by these organisations only to serve the end interests of the political masters of the day. Every act of irregularity has been committed in the name of protecting national interest. This is bogus claim.

I have made a humble effort to narrate a few instances of illegal activities, which I had committed to protect the interests of the ruling masters of the day and to earn my bread. I was all the while aware that I was doing something, which I should not do as a believer in constitutional democracy. One does not enjoy the rape of his body and conscience. Certain circumstances compel the sufferer to live with it, when there is no remedy available that can take the sufferer out of the dark tunnel of compulsion. An involved officer in any intelligence and investigation agency almost becomes a member of the organised mafia. He can afford to get out only at the cost of inviting a few fatal bullets or an accidental hit by a running truck at a lonely intersection. He is like a 'prostitute' who enjoys the human rights of being raped, simply for the keep.

But, unlike the unfortunate woman, he enjoys certain aberrant facilities: the facility of pursuing his own agenda that can either be illegal money making or following his ideological commitments and political preferences. The most alert boss remains satisfied with the finished product of the task with which the officer has been assigned. He may not ever get to know if the officer pursues his own agenda without being very blatant and ostensive about it.

I had been an errant officer, as far as the acts of pursuing my personal political preferences and idiosyncrasies are concerned. This should never be done without an official mandate. I strongly feel that some inbuilt system should be there to keep an in-service check on all officers, even very high-ranking officers. A particular unit of the IB is supposed to take care of in-service verification. However, this job is done in perfunctory manner. I must admit that I was not the lone traveller. There were and still are several senior officers, who pursue their own agenda; some make money out of the sacred national trust, some advance career prospects and a few dabble in ideological pursuits. This is a likely breeding ground of Goerings and Himmlers in the backyard of constitutional democracy.

It is not impossible for an ambitious officer to build up his own empire inside the organisation. Some senior operators elk out their living by expanding their areas of influence in a given sector of activity and establish total hegemony. Such aberrations have taken place in the North East operations, Punjab, and Kashmir operations and are still taking place in arenas related to Pakistan's proxy war against India. This has given rise to a system of hegemonistic overlordism in the IB-all in the name of specialisation.

The Director IB is supposed to be the most powerful person. But he is also a prisoner in the hands of his officers, especially the officers who are efficient and ambitious. Such officers are exclusive chefs, out of whose kitchen the Director is compelled to eat day in and day out. Simply because he has to earn his daily bread by catering to the needs of the Home Minister and the Prime Minister and he does not have, in most of the cases, direct linkages with the ground level operators.

It happens very often when weak Prime Ministers and tottering Home Ministers have to eat out of the hands of the Director IB. They use the IB and other agencies to supplement their political apparatuses. The IB is tasked to carry out election prospect study, verify credentials and suitability of

the ruling party candidates and to meticulously study the weaknesses of the opposition candidates. The IB is used to monitor all communication arteries of the opposition leaders and other individuals considered inimical to the leadership. The political breed has of late started using the R&AW also to carry out such exercises.

Surprisingly the Home Ministry and often the office of the PM have also encouraged Para-Military organisations like the Border Security Force (BSF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to gather internal intelligence in addition to whatever operational intelligence they are required to collect in a given operational theatre. The chiefs of these central police forces vie with each other in supplying classified political intelligence to the political masters. This is a sheer game of double-dealing and constitutes flagrant violation of the intelligence-gathering mandate given to the IB.

Over years the political system has misused the intelligence organisations. A glaring example of misuse of the assets of the R&AW and the BSF is the private use of the ARC and BSF aircrafts by the politicians, their family members and the senior bureaucrats. Such material misuse is a part of the feudal system. What is more insidious is the misuse of the agencies in interfering with the elected governments, indulging in toppling games and spying on every conceivable individual and groups of individuals including the members of the bureaucracy, judiciary, Bar Councils, university professors, and members of the media.

Blanket communication monitoring including cell phones, fax and Internet communications have seriously compromised the liberty of the citizen. The officers and bodies who are entrusted with such jobs do not supervise the checks and balances. Most of such monitoring is done in the name of tracking down the terrorists. In a number of cases the unscrupulous officials of the IB, R&AW and the CBI blackmail innocent citizen.

What is more appalling is the misuse of the tool of 'enquiry.' The subject under enquiry is often squeezed for pecuniary benefits by the officers of IB, R&AW and the CBI. Some IB officers, in the centre and in the SIBs, carry out private business enterprises in collaboration with people of questionable integrity. In Delhi one of them was engaged in illegal manpower export. Complaints from the victims very rarely reach the superiors as common people in India suffer from the impression that 'gratis is shared from top to bottom.' Mostly this allegation is applied to the police. That the central intelligence and investigative agencies are also affected by this principle is unbelievable.

The State is entitled to carry out certain security exercises to ensure law and order and to prevent internal and external threats to the security and integrity of the country. But in several cases the innocent and unsuspecting people are victimised. IB alone does not monopolise this dirty area of operation. The R&AW, CBI, DRI, Revenue Intelligence, State police forces and a couple of other agencies are involved in these exercises. The instances are innumerable and the operating field is expanding at a pace as faster as the expansion of the Universe.

This game is not peculiar to India. Such are the practices world over. But in 'real free democracies' there are strong checks and balances and often an errant Nixon, Bush and Blair are called upon by the system to give account of their activities to the sovereign bodies of their respective countries. Even acts of war and peace are scrutinised by such bodies.

In case of India neither the politicians nor the bureaucrats of the general administration and the intelligence community are accountable to anyone. The intelligence agencies get away even after mercenaries drop arms at Purulia and a Kargil happens to the country and the top men of such organisations are rewarded with gubernatorial assignments. It happens because the buck stops with the Home Minister and the Prime Minister.

It is not difficult to get past the systemic safeguards and please a HM and a PM, and a few advisors to them. An agency like the IB is not responsible to any elected body of the country. They prosper if they can keep two 'key consumers', the HM and the PM happy and if they can grease the palms of certain key officials. Such greasing act is not difficult as the intelligence organisations have sufficient unaccounted resources to keep hungry mouths happy.

Should not a 'free India' enact laws to administer its intelligence community both at the Centre and in the States? Should not the country safeguard its future from errant leaders like Indira and Sanjay Gandhi, who mercilessly used the intelligence and enforcement machineries to execute the dictates of national emergency? Who can prevent the fundamentalist political entities to use these functional agencies to impose on the nation their brand of nationalism? Only the constitutional system can do that.

I have been advocating this for near about a decade. I would like to draw the attention of the discerning members of the opinion makers, the judiciary, the media, the academia and the intellectuals to think over this loudly and to start a national debate in and outside the Parliament. Such acts are essential for the politicians too. Some day or the other, taking advantage of the weakening fabric of our democracy, some unscrupulous intelligence men may gang up with ambitious Army Brass and change the political texture of the nation and give IB the colours of the Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan. That will be the most unfortunate day for Indian democracy. India cannot afford to suffer that indignity from which most of the postcolonial regimes in Asia and Africa are suffering. Appropriate legislations to make the intelligence fraternity accountable to the constitutional system are necessary to stop their abuse by the politicians and the insider professionals. It is required for the safety of the democratic system, which has conferred upon us some aspects of liberty, equality and freedom.

I am not a Satan turned saint. It is not that I woke up one night and felt the bite of conscience. I have tried to explain that I have been a victim to two quarrelling squirrels inside me. The bread earner mostly defeated the dream merchant. I have suffered and I still suffer from the indignity of carrying out orders, which I would have not done had I continued in my teaching and journalistic profession.

'Open Secrets' is not an autobiography. It is an attempt on the part of a backer and wrecker of the system to share his anguish with his countrymen. An inside sinner is honestly trying to share his pains. I will be immensely happy if the discerning sections of the people wake up to the need of democratising these key institutions of the nation and safeguard the constitutional liberty of the people.

There are instances of transmission of garbage over the carrier wave. If the 'I' in 'Open Secrets' has carried any flow of garbage the responsibility is mine.

I understand that most elected lawmakers and bureaucrats, past and present, will accuse me for breaching the limits of service rules. I appreciate their likely reaction. I have been one of them and I fully understand that 'servitude', 'submission' and 'infinite tolerance' are some of the psychological transformations that are brought about by the "SYSTEM" in bureaucrats/operators like me. They learn to 'sublimate' the palpable wrong doings of the people in power. They learn to live with it. People like us become fatalistic and start believing that scams, scandals, political debauchery, legalised robbery and plunder and criminalisation of the society and polity are some of the evolutionary traits of a people and a nation.

I had opted for the golden dream and lived in that ambience but refused to be hypnotised by those mantras. I would not mind if my friends consider me a later day hypocrite. I care more for the country and the people and not the "SYSTEM", which should evolve keeping pace with the expectations and

aspirations of the people. The “SYSTEM” should not devour the people. The people of India aspire to have an honest constitutional democracy and accountability from everyone they pay for running the affairs of the nation—the politicians, bureaucrats and other system managers and servants.

ONE

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THE ACTION BEGINS

We are face to face with our destiny and we must meet it with a high and resolute courage. For us is the life of action, of strenuous performance of duty; let us live in the harness, striving mightily; let us rather run the risk of wearing out than rusting out.

Theodore Roosevelt

September 1, 1965.

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The Darjeeling Mail slowly clambered into the platform of Phansidewa railway station exactly at 0740hrs after a night long huffing and puffing like a drained out warrior. It was a great relief to think about the prospect of climbing down from the hell-hole, the crammed compartment, which carried, besides the human passengers, a couple of bamboo-thatch coops full of fowl, about 20, from gappaa dot org, container load of milk and several baskets of fresh vegetables. I too felt like an exhausted trench fighter, with the singular difference that he could afford to fire a few rounds at his invisible foe in the other trench and vent a little bit of his frustration and anger. The steam inside me kept on gurgling like an overheated broth.

For a budding officer of the Indian Police Service (IPS), the journey was anything but glorious. The barrage at Farakka, on the River Ganges was a far dream in 1965. The train terminated at Tildanga and we were required to cross the mighty Ganges/Padma River by a steamboat ferry and remount the train compartment at Jagannathpur.

Our travails had started from there. The wet-market suppliers pulled and pushed us around and forcibly occupied almost half the space, supposed to be reserved for the overnight passengers. The policeman that I was, just out of the training institutes at Mount Abu and Barrackpore, decided to maintain the law and restore the order.

I had great faith in my quality of leadership. To reassert my conviction I exhorted my co-passengers to pick up courage and off load the intruders.

“Are you new in this line? Is it your first journey by this train?”

An aged person, who was mightily distracted from the Bengali newspaper he was reading attentively, looked up and almost snubbed me.

“Yes. I’m new. But this is no way to travel. We all have paid our fares and our seats are reserved.”

“That’s correct. That’s the real position. But there is nothing called reality. The most important real state of the matter is perception.”

“I can’t follow you.”

Baffled as I was by the great philosophical reply of the gentlemen next to me, I replied in a rather stupid voice.

“Look around. Have you seen the ticket checker? And have you noticed those police constables?”

“Yes. I’m a policeman too, an IPS officer.”

I proudly declared my identity.

“Must be. But you’re a rookie. You haven’t grown roots as yet. The vendors are regular travellers in this train and the ticket checkers and the policemen collect their “*chai pani*” (graft money) as an extension of their pay and allowances. Look and keep your eyes open.”

The elderly person again buried his head in the newspaper pages.

He was not far from the truth.

First appeared the ticket checker, attired in an oil smeared and crumpled black coat and an equally spotted white trouser. The fowl, milk and the vegetable vendors made an orderly queue and paid rupee one each to the representative of the Indian Railways. The ‘ticket-*babu*’ counted the money and picked up the fattest hen.

“Don’t rob the poor man sir.”

The fowl vendor begged.

“It’s my *upri* (extra income),” The long arm of the Indian Railways swung the hen, estimated its weight, and left the compartment, “Don’t you want to travel in this section?”

“*Shala*.” The fowl vendor scowled.

The rail-robber was followed by a pot-bellied policeman in battered uniform, with a mouthful of betel leaf and a cigarette dangling from a corner of his lips.

“Hey Ramjan Ali,” he shouted at the fowl vendor, “Prices of things have spiralled up. Isn’t it?”

“Yes sir. Pakistan has blocked the flow of raw materials like fowls, fish and milk.”

“This fucking Pakistan is stupid. What’s their problem? Why can’t they allow their merchandise to our side?”

“Sir that’s a political matter and I’m a poor *murgiwala* (fowl seller).”

Ramjan Ali wrenched his palms to prove that he wasn’t responsible for the foolish economic policy of the neighbouring Bengal, now called East Pakistan.

“Yah. Politics isn’t my forte too. But now onwards you people have to increase the tax amount by four annas (one quarter of a rupee).”

The policeman announced in a grave voice.

“Sir we’re poor vendors.”

A milkman tried to register a mild protest.

“Don’t bother. Mix a pint of water to a kilo of milk. Any water you like. I don’t mind that. But you must pay the increased tax.”

“Sir,” Ramjan Ali tried to intervene.

“That’s all. Fill in my cap.”

He took out his cap and placed it before the vendors, who poured their tax contributions with grumbling murmurs. The keeper of the law pocketed the amount and stepped out of the compartment with royal elegance.

“So sir,” The elderly gentleman lifted his head and spoke to me, “You’re a rookie policeman. What’s the meaning of being a policeman if you aren’t a *daroga* (police station chief)?”

“What do you mean by that? That’s a lowly police job.”

“That’s the mightiest job I’ve known in 55 summers. He’d licked me when I was a student way back in 1945, and when I tried to storm the sub-registrar’s office with the tricolour in my hand. We wanted to proclaim an independent India. He broke my bones. He has not changed since then. He is paid from the exchequer and he earns a fat *upri*.”

“What’s that?”

“That’s the Bengali terminology for looting and grabbing under the cover of the law. He drives in

fear and people pay him as they pay offerings to their gods to keep the malevolent divinities at bay.”

“That’s funny.”

“Well son!” The old man shrugged, “Once upon a time I had resolved to fight against the *upri* system. I thought it was an evil of the British system. No it’s not. We Indians are a stinking corrupt people. Our religion is corrupt and we try to survive by corrupting our gods. It’s in our philosophy, taught by our great Aryan ancestors, the Muslim invaders and the British imperialists.”

He stood up and collected his luggage. He was getting ready to disembark at Phansidewa.

“May I know your name sir?”

“I’m Jagadananda, the Headmaster of a school.”

“Which school?”

“Naksalbari. That’s a far off place on the Nepal borders.”

*

The journey was gruelling but the education was enlightening, especially the lesson imparted by headmaster Jagadananda. I tried to shrug off the encounter by rationalising that the views of a disillusioned cynic should not be accepted as the gospel truth. Much later, when I encountered Jagadananda again at Naksalbari I felt the need for re-educating myself. I was a chronic greenhorn, just out of the university and the exalting realms of journalism and teaching in a degree college. I was full of dreams and the job I landed in the Indian Police Service gave me the feeling that I had acquired the correct broom to clean up the society and to fight injustice.

My solemn thoughts received a few jerks. The coal fired rail engine entered the platform of New Jalpaiguri station with painful grinding and panting sounds and finally came to an exhausted stop releasing clouds of vaporous steam. The other jerk, rather jerks came from the fellow passengers. They jostled and pushed us with a view to stream out of the iron cage. In exactly two minutes, the fowl, fish and milk vendors had disembarked. We trudged along the narrow aisle and disembarked as if we had just returned from the frontier trenches.

The first thing I did was to run for the waiting room for a change of clothes and to brush up my appearance. I simply wanted to make myself a little more presentable before I looked out for the transport, which was supposed to take me to Darjeeling, the headquarters of my Superintendent of Police (SP) and the person who was supposed to shape up my first initiation in superior police service.

I was very proud of the uniform and I caressed the fall and the creases and the dusted my brown boots as I emerged out of the waiting room and looked out for the police jeep. The stiffly starched uniform and the early October chill air from the hills buoyed up my sagging morale. This was my first trip to the queen of hill stations.

The immediate vicinity of the open space, where I stood, looked lush green. The verdant vegetation was disturbed only by the squatting human figures evacuating their bowels. I jerked my head up to disengage from the naked buttocks and the ugly truth and careened my neck out in search of the driver and the jeep, which was supposed to pick me up for the most scenic journey to Darjeeling. The driver was nowhere to be seen. Not yet a hardened policeman I hadn’t learned to curse the subordinates. I lighted a cigarette and looked around. A pair of *doels* (Bengal magpie) twittered from a nearby guava tree and a couple of green parrots with red beaks performed their mating exercises from a spruce tree nearby. Music emanating from the natural apiary amused me.

As I turned around to look out for the driver I was struck by the most wonderful vision. Between

the gaps of the verdant and misty hills stood before my eyes the elegant views of the Kanchenjunga and a slice of the Mount Everest peaks. The heavenly whites were silhouetted by dark edges where sunlight failed to light up the sparkling ridges, gullies and shoulders. The dance of light on the mighty mountains had added a fairy tale beauty to the distant peaks. I fell in instant love with the majestic mountains. My mind transcended beyond the half naked human figures dotting the grounds ahead of me. I forgot the bovine creatures munching and mulling the green grass. I forgot the *doels* and the parrots filling my heart with music. I forgot the finches, maynas, and storks pecking at the human and bovine defecations for insects and larvae. My eyes and senses were riveted to the distant snow peaks. I thought I had discovered my real love.

The dream sequence was disrupted by a smart metallic clicking sound and a swashing salute.

“Welcome to Darjeeling sir.”

I returned the salute and looked up at the short Gorkha.

“*Kee naam ho timro* (What’s your name)?

The flabbergasted Gorkha returned a melted smile.

“*Mo (I) Ang Bahadur ho (am) sir. Tapaiko (your) driver. Hujur le ramro Nepali bhannu hunchan.* (Your honour speaks good Nepali)”

“Shall we go?”

This time I spoke in Hindi and explained that I spoke a smattering of Nepali that I was taught at Barrackpore Police Training School, by none other a man than B.C.Roy, the Deputy Inspector General in charge of training. Ang Bahadur assured that he would teach me Nepali in two months. Reassured that my Nepali was not bad I leaned back on the seat and lighted another cigarette and focussed my mind on the impending first interview with the Superintendent of Police.

September 18, 1965.

The first few days in Darjeeling completely deflated my ego bag.

The Superintendent of Police (SP), a kind middle-aged person, made it clear that I was a rookie. No officer could claim his rank-badges by simply passing out from the training colleges. The training colleges, he emphasised, simply exposed the raw materials to certain casting process. The real anvil, where the rookies were finally shaped out, was in the field-stations. He lighted a cigarette and indulgently offered one to me. As an old world social creature I politely declined the offer and patiently waited. He spoke slowly rather in a hushed tone. His big eyes spoke more than his lips. I was given to understand that my mastery in law, horse riding and my excellent record of sportsmanship would have to be pushed to the backburner. As a police officer I was supposed to learn the works performed by the constables and the *darogas*. The Indian policing system, he emphasised, hinged on the *daroga*. An inheritor of the Muslim *kotwal* (police chief) the institution of *daroga* was fine tuned by the British as a tool of criminal administration and as a mighty coercive arm. Mastery of the functioning of a police station and ground level revenue administration were the forte of a successful police chief.

His lectures continued for about three days after which I was consigned to the *Burra Babu* (chief clerk) of the police office and to the care of the DSP (Deputy Superintendent Police), headquarters. While the former was supposed to teach me the intricacies of record and accounts maintenance, the later was assigned to teach me the functioning of man management, provisioning, mastery of the logistics, maintenance of armoury and inspection.

Subodh Tarafdar, the *Burra Babu*, was a hated and dreaded creature. He was supposed to act as

the gatekeeper of the SP in all matters related to logistic procurement, deployment, transfer, posting, promotions, leave and what not of the men he commanded. Subodh was not interested in teaching me the tricks of the game he played. He disliked, I suspect, my eagerness to learn the magic that helped a successful police chief to keep his force well trimmed and motivated.

At the very first look one could say that Subodh was a bandicoot, an expert in stealing and thieving and taking graft from the subordinate officers. My impressions were fortified by discreet advices from Dilman Subba, a sub inspector attached to the headquarter office of the SP. After gathering some tangible evidences I took the earliest opportunity to share a rare cigarette with Mukherjee and apprised him of what I was told by Dilman. I received another invitation to dinner at the residence of the SP and at the end of the nice evening he thanked and directed me to report to Maity Dewan, the DSP headquarters.

Maity Dewan wasn't a bright officer but he was a sincere person. He told me in plain language that to perform well in the hill district of West Bengal I must learn Nepali and he directed me to a head constable, Padam Singh, to pick up the language in its spoken and written form. I must say that Dilman, Maity and Padam had done me a great favour. My entry to the magic world of Nepali language convinced me that it wasn't a less sweet and lilting a language than my mother tongue Bengali was.

But Maity was caught in the *Dusserah* (Durga Puja) ceremonies, like most of the Nepalis were. October was the major festive season for the Bengalis and the Nepalis, who were culturally addicted to Durga Puja (mother worship).

The Darjeeling police lines staged one of the most gorgeous *Dusserah* ceremonies. The Nepali rituals for the mother worship were vividly colourful and the police force turned out in all its regalia for a breathtakingly beautiful Master Parade. The officers and constables turned out in their best tunics and uniforms, brass and silver flashing all around and the enchantingly beautiful Gorkha cap shining against the blazing whites of the Mount Everest.

The eventful day arrived on October 25. As advised by Maity Dewan I dressed up in the best tunic I had and the shiniest boot that my orderly constable Dhanbir Magar could produce after a grinding hour-long labour.

As the youngest ASP (assistant superintendent of police) I was supposed to lead the parade and pay *salami* (salute) to the Deputy Inspector General Police, who had turned up with his family of four to grace the occasion. I felt nervous, despite the finest tricks of the Master Parade that I had learnt from my *ustad* (trainer) Gopal Ram at Mount Abu.

The turnout of the participants was excellent and movements of the parade formation went out flawlessly and the final moment of truth arrived when I was supposed to march up to the DIG, offer him a sword salute and invite him to inspect the parade.

My training did not fail me. I marched up in steady steps, raised and lowered my sword, offered a mighty salute and declared; '*sriman parade nirikshan ke liye taiyar hain*' (the parade is ready for inspection sir). For a fraction of a moment my eyes missed the eyes of the DIG. They were locked with another pair of eyes. Those were the most loveable eyes I had ever seen. Nobody required telling me that the soul and heart behind those eyes belonged to the eldest of the three daughters of the DIG.

My SP, the discreet and watchful person, standing next to me whispered in an inaudible voice.

"Go back to the parade. Lead the DIG."

I forced my eyes back first, for a fleeting moment, at the SP and later at the DIG and conducted him down to the parade ground. I must say that he was a lousy inspector. His footsteps did not rhyme with

the drumbeats. He walked like a lousy white-collar *babu*. I escorted him back to the rostrum and ordered the parade to stand at ease.

I dismissed the parade and climbed up the rostrum and took a back seat and prepared to witness the wildest and goriest part of the ceremony. Like some Bengali worshippers they offered live sacrifices, mostly buffalos and goats. The broad and shining swords of the police line butcher severed heads of over fifty animals. A couple of mutton legs, blood still oozing out, were brought up in a huge platter as part of the sacred offering to the mother goddess.

It was not a new fun. Such large-scale animal slaughters during Durga Puja were common to some of the Hindu aristocratic families of Bengal and in the princely courts of Tripura and Cooch Bihar. I was not unduly worried either over the gory rituals. My mind had drifted away from the blood covered slithering carcasses of the sacrificed animals. It resumed my search for the eyes I had just encountered.

I went back to my quarters at Rup Naraian Dahal Road with a heart that was lost in the labyrinth of memory. The evening came and went past and the nightfall enwrapped me like the yonder clouds had lapped up the Everest afar.

*

I did not sleep. My restlessness did not escape Dhanbir's notice,

“What are you thinking sir?”

Dhanbir, my orderly constable, asked as he cooked a chicken and rice dinner for me.

“Just like that.”

“Remembering home sir? Puja is the time for visiting home”

“That's correct.”

I repeated after the orderly. This was the first Durga Puja I was forced to spend outside my small hometown.

“Would you like to have a little rum sir? We Nepalis can't live without several *toaks* (a measure) of *roxy* (local brew) everyday. But I've some rum for you.”

“Give me one.”

I sipped the rum and slipped back to memory lanes in search of the missing link.

Yes, the owner of the eyes at the parade ground was the same I had chanced to meet at Bali Jute Mills ground at a neighbouring town way back in 1963. Her eyes had not changed though she had put on a little weight. I closed my eyes and placed the two frames against the canvas of my mind. I suddenly jumped up on the bed with an exhilarating shout.

“*Kee bhaoya saab* (what's happened sir)?”

Dhanbir shouted back.

“I got it Dhanbir, I got it.”

“What have you got? What did you lose?”

“No Dhanbir, I didn't lose anything. I have rediscovered a diamond.”

“*Kaha payao huzoor* (where from did you get it?)”

“Don't bother Dhanbir. Please lay down the dinner and leave me alone. I want to rest.”

I ate the hot dinner with great satisfaction and hit the bed. I slept like a pig after a long time. But I did not dream those magic eyes. Perhaps the eyes were lodged inside me, in my own compartment of love.

The rediscovery of love at the parade ground had transcended my young sensual perceptions. It

was, I thought, a love of different kind. Events finally rewarded me in 1968 with the hand of the wonderful lady, whom I spotted way back in 1963 and had rediscovered in 1965. We were finally married in February 1968, thanks to the initiative of my SP and a couple of Kalimpong based friends.

*

Maity Dewan wasn't a good teacher, but he was a warm-hearted hill tribal. One cool morning, after the lights of the *Deepavali* (festival of light) were nipped and the sounds of the crackers were drowned in daily routine, he called me to his room.

"There is a big job for you."

He offered me a cup of tea and a cigarette.

"What's that?"

"There is a strike in Pankhabari tea estate. You would accompany DSP Haren Banerjee with a posse of force and maintain the law and order."

"Is there any fear of breach of the peace?"

"There are many. The labourers did not get bonus during the festival season and the stingy *marwari* (a person hailing from the Marwar region of Rajasthan) has declared a lockout. Have you heard of Deo Prakash Rai, the Gorkha League leader?"

"Yes."

"He's camping at Pankhabari. We expect big trouble. Your fire walking starts from today. Get going."

Therefore, I, the assistant superintendent of police on probation, boarded the jeep accompanied by Haren Banerjee, the seasoned DSP. Haren was a loveable person. I discovered that talking in a hushed voice was the forte of his character, which he had assiduously cultivated as a resident donkey in the DIB (district intelligence branch). He was the designated officer who carried out most of the shadowy and dirty works of the district police.

Much later my Intelligence Bureau instructors at Delhi's Anand Parvat training centre told me that charming glib tongue wasn't the best attribute of an intelligence officer. After serving the prime intelligence organisation for about 30 years, I know that they were wrong. No set formula can be prescribed for a spy and a spymaster. Both glib talking and reticence were equally important forte of the trade. In fact, a successful spymaster is a consummate actor and communicator. Voice modulation is a part of the script he is called upon to characterise as one of the consummate *dramatis personae*.

"You've to be careful sir. Deo Prakash is a dangerous fellow."

Haren tried to educate me about my task ahead.

"Is he a killer?"

"Not exactly. But he is a drunkard and he can incite the workers to violence."

"What is our role? Are we supposed to break the strike and help the management?"

"You're new to the job sir," Haren spoke as if he was quoting out of the *Hitopodesha* (collection of Indian fables), "Motiram Bagaria, the owner of the Pankhabari estate is a personal friend of the Deputy Commissioner."

"That's fine. But what are your orders?"

"To arrest Deo Prakash and take him down to Siliguri jail."

"Why?"

"He's a trouble maker and that's the order."

"Where are we putting up for the night?"

I asked Haren anticipating that I wouldn't have to spend the cool Himalayan night in the open.

"Don't worry sir. Manager Rat Basu has fixed us up in the Pankhabari tea garden's guesthouse."

"I would like to stay out. Drop me at the circuit house."

"What's your problem sir?" Haren looked at me with confused eyes, "The nearest government guesthouse is at Kurseong, five miles from the tea garden. There are no good hotels nearby."

"Suppose I stay at the Kurseong circuit house and join you tomorrow morning."

"As you wish."

I changed over to my own jeep and trudged the hill up back to the government rest house that overlooked a school run by the Seventh Day Adventist Church. My sleep was disturbed rather late in the night. Dhanbir woke me up with a sharp push.

"Wake up *saab*. There's a call from the SP."

"Hello Maloy," the SP spoke in his usual soft voice, "I believe you've not accompanied the DSP."

"That's not correct sir. I have accompanied him. But I'm spending the night at Kurseong rest house."

"Any reason to stay there?"

"Sir," I replied rather officiously, "I cannot give an impression to the labourers that I'm a part of the management."

"I understand. Good night."

A.P. Mukherjee disconnected the line without giving me a chance to return his benign wishes. I thought over his style of dialogue delivery and tried to dig out the finer nuances. I was foxed. However, I decided to stick to my decision and asked Dhanbir to fix an early breakfast at 7a.m.

Sleep was the last thing destined that night. Dhanbir again woke me up with rather a violent shake up. This was accompanied by another tremor outside. I heard several voices arguing amongst themselves and some of them taking my name in loud inebriated voices.

"What's happened Dhanbir?"

All that he told me in Nepali was that Deo Prakash Rai, the Gorkha League leader, and two others waited for me in the drawing-dining room and they were drunk and armed with *khukri* (sharp and stunted machete).

"Have you got your pistol?"

Dhanbir asked in a nervous voice.

I ignored his panic. I was taught the cultural trait that to be a worthy Nepali one must be dressed in *dawra-surual* (Nepali upper and lower dress) with a *khukri* dangling from his cummerbund (anglicised version of a tight cloth belt) and have a few ounces of intoxicant in his stomach.

I asked him to put the woollen dressing gown around me and to help me with a cigarette. So armed, minus the pistol, against the wishes of Dhanbir, I entered the room where the three stalwarts of the Gorkha movement were seated.

"Are you the new sub-divisional police officer (SDPO)?"

Deo Prakash Rai shot the question in a gruffly voice.

"No. I'm the new ASP on probation. Can I help you?"

I managed to speak the sentence in grammatically correct Nepali, but with atrocious accent.

"Ho..ho..ho..." Deo Prakash brought out laughter from the depth of his stomach, "This *keta* (boy) will go far."

He directed the remark at one of his associates. He was, I learnt later, Sange Pradhan, a right hand man of the Gorkha leader.

"I'm happy that you haven't taken the hospitality of the Pankhabari management. You're new to this

place and I know it's easy to walk through fluffy snow than permafrost." He continued his narration in his usual flowery language, in mixed Nepali, English, Hindi and Bengali, "The workers of Pankhabari have not been paid for last six months. Rat Basu, the manager, is a friend of the Deputy Commissioner, and the Commissioner in Jalpaiguri is very chummy with the owner, Motiram Bagaria."

"I know." I nodded peevishly.

"The *Dusserah* has come and gone. Now Christmas and the New Year are approaching. The labourers have no grain to eat and no clothes and fuel to save them from the winter."

"I understand."

"I know you want to arrest me. You're welcome. But before you put the manacles you've to kill a couple of workers and I can assure you that all the Darjeeling and Duars (foothills) tea gardens will go on indefinite strike. What do you want?"

"I am not the one who takes decision. But I assure you that I'll speak to my SP. Till then you hold on."

"Hold on to what?"

"Status quo."

"Can you offer anything better?"

"As of now, no. It is better that you too think over the best alternative. I don't think you'd like to give an indefinite strike call just before the festive season and the New Year."

"When do I hear from you?"

"I think 10a.m. should be a reasonable time."

"*Ramro* (beautiful). But work out a solution."

"One thing," I asked the Gorkha leader, "Who told you about my stay in this rest house?"

"You have your ways and we have our intelligence."

Deo Prakash and his friends walked out and the engine sound of their Land Rover told me that they were going downhill, towards Pankhabari.

Ratikanto alias Rat Basu was a weasel of a slippery customer. After a strenuous effort I could limit his hospitality to a cup of tea, which was accompanied by mountains of cakes and sweets from the Flurry's of Darjeeling.

Haren nudged closer and whispered.

"Deo Prakash is camping at Sataibari. My men are following him. I'm in radio touch with them. Let's go and pick him up."

"You better talk to the SP. I think the orders have changed."

"But the Commissioner spoke to me only ten minutes back."

"You're subordinate to the SP. Better take the orders from him."

I turned back to Rat Basu, who by that time, had started explaining his genealogy tracing back his direct lineage to the family of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, the illustrious freedom fighter.

I didn't have the heart to tell him that live or dead, the Netaji would have banished Rat from his clan for his proximity to the white sahibs and now to the fat *marwaris*, who had done more to fatten their pockets and very little to serve the people of the country. One of their illustrious ancestors had sold Bengal and India to Robert Clive, the British clerk turned a General and a plunderer. The white sahib looted the dough and transferred to England and the fat *marwari* usually transferred his money to the new industrial hub centres in Mumbai and Delhi and built marble *havelis* (palaces) in the Rajasthan deserts.

Haren Banerjee turned back from the phone with a pale face and faced me with a rather doubtful

look.

“Should we go out and make the police arrangements?”

I asked him.

“Yes sir.”

Haren followed meekly.

“Aren’t you arresting Deo Prakash? He’s at Sataibari.”

“That’s not my orders Mr. Basu,” I replied gingerly, “My orders are to make adequate arrangement for the protection of the estate properties and lives of the management staff. That’s what I am going to do.”

“But the SP told me otherwise.”

“I’ve received my orders and I’m going ahead with that.”

“I will call the deputy commissioner and the divisional commissioner.”

“You’re welcome Mr. Basu.”

The main approach road to the Pankhabari tea garden had branched off from the Kurseong-Matigara-Siliguri gravel road. It reduced the distance between Darjeeling and Siliguri almost by about nine kilometres.

I positioned a posse of one junior commissioned officer (JCO) and three constables at the factory gate and four lathi-armed constables for the personal security of the management staff under the supervision of the officer in charge of Kurseong police station. Aita Bahdur Rana, the supple and fat Nepali sub-inspector, grinned mightily and conveyed in broken Bengali, for my benefit, I presume, that I had taken the correct action. Tension was building up in almost all the hill tea estates-Sonada, Bijan Bari, Lopchu, Mokaibari, Simana, Panighata, and Happy Valley. The tribal Santhal, Oraon and Munda labours had joined the Nepali labourers. In addition, he shared another piece of intelligence, the stalwarts of the Gorkha language and separate Gorkha province agitation were honing up their weapons. They would welcome a general strike in the tea gardens to press their demands. A mere localised labour unrest would have become a political issue.

I thanked Rana and left for Darjeeling with mixed apprehensions. In my first outing I had taken a stand against the mighty deputy commissioner and the divisional commissioner, who, many told me, was a legend by his own right. Mr. Ivan Surita, an honoured Anglo-Indian, had drifted to the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) through short service commission in the Royal Indian Army. The deputy commissioner, another IAS, was an unknown commodity to me.

That evening I was summoned to the control room of the SP. Maity advised me to put on the best-starched uniform and the best-polished boot.

“Anything wrong, Maity?”

“Why worry? Haven’t you appeared before the Orderly Room earlier?”

He reminded me of the system in which an errant officer was required to appear before his superior to receive his punishment.

“No, Maity. What’s the matter?”

“Don’t lose heart. Have a cigarette and keep faith in your god.”

Maity dismissed me and I rushed to my quarters for a change of uniform and boot.

It wasn’t an Orderly Room. There was no officer to present me before the boss. I was gently ushered in and was asked to take a seat by none other than the legend himself, Ivan Surita, the commissioner of Jalpaiguri division.

“So you are Dhar?”

“Yes sir.”

“What was your logic behind defying my orders? Why didn’t you arrest Rai?”

“Sir,” I started nervously, “I’ve been taught to take orders from my commander, the SP. I had done that. And if you’ve time I can explain my logic.”

Ivan lighted a cigarette as a glint of smile went past his face.

He heard me patiently, including my freshly gathered intelligence from Aita Bahadur Rana. Finally I conveyed that the arrest of Deo Prakash would have cost the state government tremendously. The Gorkha movement was almost at its peak and the government in Calcutta too wasn’t really very steady. On top of it the just concluded war in the Kashmir had left the country in a situation of flux. Would it be prudent to offer a new front to the Gorkhas just for satisfying Rat Basu?

“Well, well! Where from you picked up that kind of worldview? I’m mighty impressed. Have a drink with me.”

Surita poured a stiff whisky for him and a small one for me. In his characteristic gracious manner he spoke rather loudly.

“Thanks. Keep it up.”

We shared the drinks, and at the end of the day the SP called me to his room, told me that I would be attached to the office of the sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) Siliguri for practical training and for my police station training I would have to spend eight weeks at Naksalbari. I accepted the order stoically. It wasn’t a punishment I knew. The orders of the SP had given me the opportunity to make myself a part of the history in the making in the jungles of Naksalbari. It offered me an opportunity in meeting the owners of the eyes again, which had made a permanent place in my mind.

I was fortunate to be a part those historic times, perhaps the last days of the innocent times and beginning of the cruellest of times that besieged India soon after the 1965 Kashmir war and subsequent change in leadership both in Delhi and Calcutta.

The Congress government was highly discredited and the party apparatchiks had lost touch with the reality. The Communist Party of India, now divided into two factions, had sharpened up their electoral strategies and had almost paralysed the state through industrial and service-sector strikes. Lawlessness had replaced the calm and civilised social and security ambience. In fact, in Bengal, the political parties had already initiated the process of surrendering the constitutional process to the muscle of the underworld and the barrel of the gun.

The Hindutwa movement and its political front, the Jan Sangh, were yet to take root amongst the Bengalis. The Bengalis from East Pakistan suspected both the Congress and the Hindu political outfit as they had failed to protect their interests. The Communists had started exploiting their helplessness. The society was nakedly divided. Taking advantage of the tottering political hold of the Congress and change of guard in Delhi the much-neglected social and economic reforms had started rushing at devastating speed against the existing value system. Clashes and changes were in the air. The domestic changes were being intricately linked up with the global changes.

TWO

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THE FIRST TEST OF WATER

The fool, with all his other faults, has this also: he is always getting ready to live.
Epicurus

December 6, 1965.

My attachment to the office of the SDPO Siliguri was an invigorating experience. Deepak Ghosh, the young sub-divisional police officer, wasn't a wizard in police work, crime investigation and prevention. The police force, as I saw it from a little distance, was not equipped to fight crime. The police stations were located either in rented and dilapidated government buildings, the officers and men were far fewer than required by the graph of crime. They were devoid of mobility. Some police stations did not even have a single jeep. The concept of police patrolling in the crime prone areas had become redundant.

By 1965, Siliguri had become a hub of political and criminal activities, besides being the main artery between mainland India and the Northeastern states. Criminal gangs from neighbouring Bihar, Nepal, Bhutan and East Pakistan operated with impunity in the narrow land link euphemistically called the chicken neck. They operated freely in tea estate areas, plundering, maiming and assassinating the affluent tea estate managers and lumber traders. Some of the illegal lumber traders were in cahoots with the interstate criminals. On top of it the smuggling routes between India and Nepal flourished with the connivance of the corrupt politicians, police and revenue officials.

Siliguri and its neighbourhood had assumed strategic importance after the fatal war with China in 1962. The just concluded war with Pakistan had enlivened the area with increased military presence. The Baghdogra airport had become operational as a fully-fledged Air Force base. The nearby hamlets around Binnaguri hummed with activities, where the military engineers and the Border Roads were busy in setting up the infrastructure of the Corps headquarters.

In addition to strategic military concerns a strong pro-China Left Communist movement was raising its head amongst the landless masses and the deprived tea estate workers. Charu Majumdar and his able lieutenant Kanu Sanyal spearheaded the movement. They had found an able ally in Jangal Santhal, a tea garden labourer. The Charu group had broken away from the parent Communist Party after the formal 1964 split between the Moscow and the Chinese camp followers that had divided the Communist monolith into CPI and the CPI (M); M representing the name tag Marxist, more Marxist than an ideological follower of poor Marx.

The Siliguri police chief Deepak managed to float above the troubled waters. My overtures to him to discuss the political, criminal and the security scenario did not evoke much response. He was a typical and good policeman. He followed his orders meticulously and did not lose his sleep over the thunderclouds that had started gathering around him. Both he and his wife were very nice to me and more often than not I was their houseguest. I must thank the couple for arranging my pre-marriage meetings with Sunanda, the daughter of the mighty DIG, who had by then consented to be a part of my

dream.

I accompanied Deepak to almost all the heinous crime scenes and learnt the essentials of forensic techniques and the intricate details of writing case diary, manipulation of general diaries and meticulous investigation process. The other trick that he taught was the methodical inspection of police station. Deepak was not a genius but he had in him the ingredients of an incisive investigator. He taught me the benefits of patience and examining a given clue over and over again. Repeat analysis and examination, he emphasised always resulted in better understanding of any situation.

But he did not like my dual approach to any given problem and issue. He never agreed with me that a given situation should be immersed in the concoction of conflicting ideas with a view to arriving at a perfect solution. There were no quarrelling squirrels inside his mind. He strictly followed the Police Regulation Bengal (PRB), the Vedas for the Bengal police officers. He never did anything beyond the Indian Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, Indian Evidence Act, Police Act, and the Police Regulation Bengal. The only time he ignored the dictates of the books when he was asked to do so by his immediate superior. I appreciated the disciplined policeman in him, though I did not like the absence of human touch, the subtle touch of conscience.

*

Naksalbari was a sleepy town on the borders of Bihar and Nepal. With its sprawling tea gardens, rice producing alluvial land and rich forest resources Naksalbari was strategically important. Tentulia in East Pakistan wasn't far away from the centre of Naksalbari market. Nevertheless, common border with Nepal added more vulnerability to it.

A queer mixture of people inhabited the area. The majority of the tea garden labourers were Santhal, Oraon, Munda and Ho with liberal sprinkling of Nepalis. The upper caste Bengalis were *jotedars* (landed gentry), forest contractors or traders. The lower caste Bengalis mostly tilled the lands of the *jotedars* and tea estate lands on *barga* (crop sharing) system. The Bengali migrants from East Pakistan overwhelmed the original inhabitants, the Coch, Mech, Bodo, Toto and Rajbangshi population. Economically they were the worst hit. Suffering from political and economic neglect the original inhabitants, the sons of the soil, they had nowhere to go. Much later these people were infected by the ambience of insurgency in Assam and had started championing the cause of Kamtapuri, a separate homeland for the aboriginals of the region. By 1995, Kampatapuri movement had drawn the attention of the Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan and the Directorate of Forces Intelligence of Bangladesh.

Even in 1965, a huge floating population from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Rajasthan had started spreading their economic tentacles in the area taking advantage of political and economic neglect by the Bengali 'bhadralok' politicians of Calcutta. It was palpably clear that a vital part of Bengal was very fast losing its Bengali and aboriginal characters.

The Bengali refugees from East Pakistan had no fixed vocation. They grabbed anything they could. The Biharis were mainly related to the legal and illegal exploitation of the forest resources, smuggling between India and Nepal and some of them had started taking up military contracts at Baghdogra, Siliguri and Binnaguri. The Punjabi population was entrenched in the transport sector.

The aboriginals of the land were nowhere in the economic and political map of the area. They were mostly landless and jobless. A few families tended cowherds, goats, and sheep. But they were always open to the risk of cattle theft by the Pakistani and Indian gangsters. Naksalbari was a goldmine to some and pit-full of misery for the most.

The other Bengal, the southern and western part of the Indian Bengal that thrived around the accidentally grown city of Calcutta (Kolkata) and its industrial hubs didn't bother to wreck their heads for the northern part of the state. In fact Calcutta had hardly bothered about the rural and peripherally urban Bengal, which was not blessed by the urban riches and the urbane culture of the hangers on of the empire and the neo-rulers.

The new inheritors had failed to pick up the signals that 'sonar Bangla', the golden Bengal had started withering away. Its industry and commerce had started gravitating to the greener pastures, its agriculture floundered for the lack of adequate infrastructure and by 1965, it had lost the political shine. The new political masters in Delhi had focussed their priorities on other horizons.

In short, the northern part of Indian Bengal had plunged into deep political, economic and cultural crisis. Siliguri was fast turning into a city of opportunist hounds, which had started descending on the virgin tract with hungry colonial motives. Only a few British companies managed to survive the onslaught of the *Marwari* traders in the tea sector. The Darjeeling-Siliguri-Jalpaiguri duars, like Assam, were the most lucrative tea producing centres. But the revenue from tea and forest industry wasn't ploughed back to the region.

The economic chaos had started breeding a new ideological warfare. But Delhi and Calcutta preferred to believe that administrative fire fighting could extinguish all fires, including the ideological fire and the fire burning in the stomachs of starving masses.

*

That was the *summum bonum* of the briefing I received from Shailen Mukherjee, the officer-in-charge of Naksalbari police station. A well meaning person and an indifferent police officer, he believed like most other police officers that his sacred duty would be well performed if he could register lesser number of reported cases and swept most of the dirty mess under the green grassy carpets of the wild fields of Naksalbari.

I did not go by his briefing. But I must say that Mukherjee and his deputy Netai Pal had taught me well the nitty-gritty of running a police station, crime prevention and grass-roots level intelligence collection.

I realised much later, after I spent about a decade in the Intelligence Bureau, that police stations are the most important fountainheads of intelligence. The elaborate system of rural *chowkidars*, *dafadars* (village level security/revenue functionaries), village headmen, village teachers, postman and a few village level health workers and preachers could work out wonders for an alert intelligence boss in the district headquarter.

A discerning police officer invariably devoted some time with them to find out facts and trends in remote villages. On top of it these village functionaries invariably reported to the SHO all-important developments and developing situations in their respective areas. The weekly 'hat days' (flea markets) were used by the police station in charges to gather information about the interior areas. These were regularly despatched to the sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) and the SP. The district intelligence officers turned this information into intelligence pieces. The monthly report of the SP to the Inspector General of Police and occasional special reports kept the state government in regular touch with the remotest and tiniest villages in the state.

The Intelligence Bureau officers and agents of the government of India could never match the penetration and sweep of the police station functionaries. Unfortunately, in post independence India the emphasis had changed. The police stations had degenerated into mere administrative decors,

which detected lesser number of crimes, prevented much lesser and functioned more as the wish tree of the politicians and police and civil bureaucrats. The fear for the police station, I felt, had increased much more than it was during the independence movement. The police are now more identified with the political vested interests and mafia than they were in the colonial regime.

My short tenure in Naksalbari gave an opportunity to renew the contact with Jagadananda Roy, the revolutionary turned teacher, whom I had chanced to meet in the crammed train compartment. I must admit that Jagadananda Roy, the headmaster of a Naksalbari school, had helped considerably in shaping my views on the socio-economic problems of the area. An old revolutionary, he had led several struggles against the British in the remote areas of Midnapore, Birbhum and Bankura districts. A gold medallist in English from Calcutta University, Roy had spent 13 years behind the British prison bars. He was wooed by the Indian National Congress to join the state legislature. Jagadananda preferred to take up the job at Naksalbari against protestations of his well wishers. A chronic bachelor, he lived alone in a decent hut behind Naksalbari's only cinema hall, Neelam.

I spent some of my spare time listening to his narrations on the rural economic scene and the mindless mistakes committed by the new political masters by endowing demonic affluence to the big cities. India's soul lived in the villages. Neglect of the rural economy, he felt, would increase the gap between the rich and the poor. India would soon be exposed to massive social explosions. Jagadananda fascinated me. He was an illustrious soldier of the independence struggle and had chosen the path of violent non-Gandhian methods to reach his goal.

I understood his concerns. I had my ears close to the ground and I could pick up some of the rumblings building up inside the labour shacks and deprecated villages. I had, in fact, started gathering some data from the employees of the junior land revenue office and the *chowkidars* and *dafadars* controlled by the Union Board, a kind of local self-government unit. The picture wasn't encouraging. I shared some of the reports with my SP. He encouraged me with a sanction of Rupees 25, from his secret service fund. This kingly amount was sanctioned by the SP only to the officers of the intelligence branch. A rookie was not even supposed to know that the SP handled some such sacred and secret funds.

I avoided socialising with the tea garden managers and the forest contractors. Some of them queued up in the police station to invite the budding ASP. But I kept myself to the police station and often accompanied Mukherjee or Pal to the scenes of crime. I had to complete the quota of my independent investigation of at least two burglary cases, one case of homicide and a couple of cases under minor acts. I was supposed to maintain the General Diary of the police station and draft the First Information Reports (FIR) and write the Case Diaries of heinous crimes. I devoted the slotted time to my assigned duties. I hated to be rated as a fluke by my subordinates.

My spare time was spent between the pages of books that I managed to purchase from Siliguri's ill equipped stores. In between my work and books I dreamt of Sunanda, whom I had pledged to marry. Nevertheless, I was in the midst of a fast approaching cyclone, the famous and infamous Naksalbari movement.

*

It was a late December afternoon. I was deeply engrossed with the pages of *India's China War* when Netai Pal, the assistant sub-inspector, triumphantly entered the police station with two armed constables guarding his flanks. A midget sized black goat tied to a rope occupied his left hand and the other held the rope that was tied to the waist of an angry looking man with a head-full of curly hair.

His square face, big flat nose, red shot eyes and a deep laceration on the forehead told me that Netai had returned after arresting a dreaded criminal.

My attention was diverted to the angry man in dirty cloth and the visible injury when Netai greeted with a smart salute.

“What’s the matter Netai?” I asked.

“Sir, this man is Jangal Santhal. I’ve arrested him in a theft case and recovered the stolen property.” I stood up.

Jangal Santhal, I was educated by Haren Banerjee, was the third face of the Left Extremist Trinity. The first two were Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal. It was difficult for me to believe that Jangal Santhal would commit a petty theft. However, he was put behind the lockup, and in the absence of a lockup for animals; the goat was tied to a bamboo pole, next to the banyan tree. It munched at the greens without any concern for the gravity of the case just detected by Netai Pal.

I didn’t feel it prudent to question the veracity of the claim made by Netai.

I walked up to the lockup and sat down next to the cage in which Jangal Santhal was incarcerated.

“I’m M.K.Dhar,” I introduced myself rather officiously; “I believe you’re Jangal Santhal?”

“I’m Jangal Santhal. But I don’t care if you are an ASP or DSP. Get lost.”

“What for have you have been booked by Netai? Can you tell me the truth?”

“What’s the hell are you going to do? You’re as good a lackey of the *jotedars* as Netai is.”

“Perhaps I can help.”

“You can’t. Charu master and Kanu have gone underground. Police has no charge against me. That’s why they have booked me in a theft case.”

“But it’s a bail-able case. You can get out in no time.”

“Who would be my guarantor?”

“Your party men.”

“Police wouldn’t allow them anywhere near the court.”

“Should I talk to the headmaster?”

“No. Don’t put him in trouble. Go and get prepared to meet me in the battlefield.”

Jangal raised a few slogans in praise of Chairman Mao of China and in support of his struggle for the proletariat. That did not deter me in offering him a cup of tea and a cigarette. The head constable on duty explained that I was not supposed to share food and drink with a criminal under the provisions of Police Regulation of Bengal, drawn up about 70 years ago. I brushed off his objections and shared a joke or two with Jangal.

Shailen Mukherjee enlightened me further at the dinner table.

The instructions to arrest Jangal had come from the top. They did not want him to go underground and lead the crudely armed tribal peasantry. Charu was the brain, Kanu was the planner and Jangal was the fighting arm of the movement.

Jagadananda explained the things better. The politicians back in the Writer’s Building (state secretariat) were determined to maintain the law and order. They wanted to assure the tea magnets and the forest contractor lobby that under no circumstances the left extremists would be allowed to bare their fangs.

India’s second round of engagement in Kashmir with the Pakistani aggression had concluded inconclusively. But, China was still breathing on India’s neck from across the Sikkim borders and the presence of the Chinese troops and air formations in the Chumbi Valley gave a grim reminder of the humiliating defeat of 1962. China had plenty of ideological supporters amongst the Indian communists. They were keen to emulate and implement the tenets of violent Cultural Revolution in

India. The breakaway communist faction headed by maverick Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal had found a human tornado in Jangal. He was their front paw in the Naksalbari belt. Neutralisation of Jangal Santal was a priority.

The logic was good. But I felt ashamed to think that the police force could stoop down so low to temporarily immobilise a revolutionary of a sort. I, as a member of the establishment, did not support the pro-Chinese slogans and abhorred the idea of pushing the country into another phase of uncertain bloody revolution. But I agreed with Jagadananda that this social twister was not going to be over with Naksalbari. The entire country would be infested by the gangrenous struggle between the establishment and the proletariats. The have-nots would be striking back with greater ferocity. No particular ism could brand and bridle them.

The gathering storm was not a simple struggle between the landowners and the sharecroppers and the landless peasants. Deeper rural-economic issues were involved. However, the governments in Delhi and Calcutta had no time to look into the economic woes of the rural populace and they had no intention to divert budgetary funds to the remotest corner of northern Bengal, Uttar Banga in Calcutta lingo. Nobody could blame either China or Pakistan if they took advantage of the developing situation and provided it with ideological and logistical support. Which hostile neighbour would not like to see his enemy's house on fire? Why should he run with bucketful of water to extinguish the fire if it ensured better security to his own house? Vast majority of human neighbourhood had not taken Jesus Christ's gospel seriously enough. The logic was irrefutable, but the big establishment refused to see either the smouldering fire or the ready faggots and the gleeful faces of hostile neighbours. They thought they had done a great job by booking Jangal Santhal in a petty theft case.

That wasn't my last encounter with Jangal Santhal. I had the unique chance of meeting him again in 1967 at Jhoru Jote, an indefinable revenue location near Naksalbari. But I must return to the pregnant events, which preceded that encounter.

THREE

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GETTING INTO THE ACTION

I am ready to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter.

Winston Churchill

January 8, 1966.

Two surprise communications waited for me at the office of Deepak Ghosh.

The first letter was from the deputy secretary home, government of west Bengal appointing me as the Sub Divisional Police Officer, Kalimpong. I was to replace Mr. Gossain, who was promoted out to Jalpaiguri.

It was indeed good news. Kalimpong was a dream hill station and my batch mate Deepak Ghosh of the Indian Administrative Service had just been posted there as the Sub Divisional Officer (revenue cum judicial) on the civil side. We had joined the service together and had spent part of the training at the Indian Administrative Service Academy at Mussourie. We were not buddies, but it was good to know that I would not be at rough sea.

The second communication was from the Principal Police Training College, Barrackpore. It directed me to appear before the DIG northern range for my final examination in sword drill. I thought I had completed that ceremonial drill at Mount Abu itself. But I was told that in the absence of any record there was no other option but to clear the examination.

Deepak again came to my rescue. He produced a ceremonial sword from the police *malkhana* (store) and requisitioned the services of a junior commissioned officer from the state armed constabulary. I was to appear for the test on January 12. I had only two days in between to refurbish the intricate ceremonial movements of the sword.

The paraphernalia for the sword drill was laid down at the sprawling courtyard of red brick lined colonial mansion that doubled as the camp office cum residence of the DIG. I was lined up on a white marker and the *subedar* (junior commissioned officer) shouted certain commands to acquaint me with the complicated motions of the sword.

The DIG appeared sharp at 10.00hrs synchronising his steps with the sounds of a bugle.

He stood at the designated marker and I went through the motions of raising, dipping and kissing the sword. It took me exactly seven minutes to complete the drill and the exalted DIG disappeared inside the building. We too prepared to leave.

“Please don’t go. Come and have a cup of tea.”

A cute young girl, about five, ran out of the house and invited us. We were foxed. We didn’t expect a cup of tea at the residence of the top boss and the invitation from the cute kid fortified my anxiety.

My anxiety was unfounded. Later I discovered that the invitation was from the wife of the DIG and his eldest daughter, the girl for whom I had started painting my dreams with rainbow colours. The tea was flawlessly Darjeeling, the pastry delicate and the eyes behind the curtains alluring. The deadly

sword drill had finally ended in a warm exchange of glances. ,

Before proceeding further I must make a confession. I had joined the Indian Police Service, a covenanted and constitutional position, as a reluctant policeman. I have taken keen interest in life and activities around me since my childhood. I was an activist, be it on the soccer and cricket fields or the percussion drums or social events around me. I was never rated as a disciplined child. I did not cherish happy memories about the police force.

The British police had repeatedly tortured my father and gaoled him for his participation in the non-Gandhian way of independence struggle. I thought I was cut out for a teaching job or journalism. I had taken to writing poems and short stories from my childhood and I had finished a Bengali novel *Bejanma* (Bastard) in 1954, the year I passed out from school. The story set in the tea gardens of North Bengal could not go to the publisher's desk as my elder brother one day thrashed me up thoroughly for indulging in illicit adult activities at a forbidden age. He had succeeded in destroying some parts of the manuscript. The remaining part is still with me.

I did not have fascination for a government job as I was already in touch with the Hindu activists headed by Gurucharan Chatterjee, a senior leader of the Rashtriya Swayansevak Sangh. I was in touch with the Jan Sangh activists also, especially Tushar Kanti Chattopadhyaya. At the same time I came under the influence of Birendranath Sadhukhan, a saintly person who headed local unit of the Indian National Congress. I was attracted to the RSS because of my hatred for the Muslims who had taken away my birthplace in East Pakistan. My attraction to Sadhukhan was prompted by his egalitarian worldview. I was caught in the midst of emotional whirlwind. Over a period, I thought, I would find out the correct bearing and set sail for correct political port.

Another small incident had increased my aversion for the policemen. A fat *havildar* (junior officer) had beaten and prosecuted me for riding a bicycle without light at 5p.m. in the month of July. On contesting he asserted that he had the right to decide if it were day or night. That policeman had left a deep scar in my mind. That's why I had opted for the Audit & Accounts Service and expected to join the Simla training centre after completing the Mussourie stint.

I received another shocking blow when my mother expired on August 20, 1964. I had decided at her cremation that I would initiate a proposal with the Home Ministry to draft me to the Police Service. I was sure to be allotted my home cadre West Bengal, as I stood second in the IPS and first in the Central Services. Mr. S.C. Dutt, a veteran ICS and a distant relation of mine, was the Director of the Mussourie Academy. Initially he was reluctant to my changing over to Police Service. Nevertheless, he yielded to my submissions and Delhi gave the green signals in November 1964

I was, I said, a reluctant policeman, but not a recalcitrant one. I remained an activist. Perhaps the training that I had received at the Police Training Colleges had sharpened that trait. I was ever ready to meet the darkest shadow in the next turn of the road. I was ever ready to meet my Maker. I believed in the prophetic saying of Churchill.

Besides being an activist I had assiduously built up a cocoon inside me from my childhood. I believed that behind every life there was a Mission. It was not synonymous with the goal of life, which is often touted as the driving force. I had been a successful soccer-field goalkeeper. I understood that defending the goal was a part of the war of life.

I was aware of the fact that I was born with two quarrelling squirrels inside my mind. One was related to the animal instinct of survival and the other to human attributes, which are described as finer sensitivities. I had been a victim, not very infrequently, of the scratching match between these two squirrels. I was not a straight social creature, but I was not a crooked one.

In my service with the government, the police and the intelligence I had adopted two approaches. I

was determined to secure my post and at the same time I had taken each and every assignment and task as a mission pregnant with human values. I knew that the textbooks did not support my approach. But I was brought up more as a free born child left to fend for himself at an early age. The fast currents of the Meghna and the Ganges and the bountiful nature around them had shaped my life differently. The seeds of activism and achievement were sown very early in my life and having seen the 'anti-life forces' from close quarters I had developed the disability of living with the forces that exceeded the reasonable limits of tolerance prescribed by the system around me.

All that I wanted to emphasise here was that my short stint in uniformed police was fairly eventful. My childhood inhibition did not deter me in discharging my duties faithfully and endeavouring to ensure as much as possible clean policing in my area of responsibility.

*

Kalimpong, the frontier post between India and Tibet, had run into bad times, by the time I had taken up my duties. The Chinese trade centre was in a dilapidated condition. Only the Queen Mother of Bhutan, some members of the Afghan royal family in exile, and a few Anglo-Indians had added to the old flavour of the once glamorous hill station. I was, however, fortunate to be blessed by two towering personalities. Justice Sudhi Ranjan Das, the retired Chief Justice of India, lived one hill feature above my modest quarters at 3rd mile Teesta Road. Kazi Lendhup Dorji Khangsarpa, the pro-democracy leader of Sikkim, and his European wife Kizini Eliza Maria Khangsarpa lived only two kilometres up hill.

I don't have a brilliant police officer's record because I simply did not have the chance to prove my mettle as one. Kalimpong urban area had very little to offer to an activist like me. But my hands were full with the robbers, who committed cruel robberies in the tea gardens and the small trading hamlets along Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet borders. Most of the robbers forayed in from Bihar, Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan. I was more occupied with the tea gardens and medicinal plantations on India-Bhutan borders. Another set of actors also demanded my time. The wild Himalayan tuskers, the cheetahs and the Royal Bengal tigers often played havoc with the lives and properties of the villagers in and around the tea gardens and on the fringe of the verdant foothills forests. The third category of creatures that kept me occupied was the stream of bureaucratic VIPs and their families, for whom Kalimpong was a coveted tourist stop.

I did not have difficulty in blending my time between the robbers, the wild animals and the urban VIPs. It wasn't much of a tight rope walking. But three incidents in my short police life had left deep impression on me. Fortunately all these came my way before I got married.

A series of cruel armed robberies with murder in the tea gardens on Bhutan and Jalpaiguri borders had rattled the state administration. The powerful tea lobby had prevailed upon the Writer's Building that some extraordinary measures were required to save the industry from running into recession.

I was summoned to Darjeeling and was given a pep talk by my SP and the Deputy Commissioner, emphasising the need for tackling the robbers firmly.

I plunged into the job with my usual enthusiasm.

But, Dawa Norbu, my Circle Inspector of Tibetan origin cornered me at the Gompu's restaurant, where I had gone for a delicious Chinese dinner.

"Careful sir. The fields are spiked."

Norbu liked to talk in broken but flowery English.

"What's the problem Norbu?"

We talked as we shared the dinner.

“The government in Calcutta is shaky. The Congress Party is sure to be defeated. The likely coalition of the Bangla Congress and the Communists may come to power.”

“Yes, I know that.”

“Be it known to you sir,” Norbu spoke like a typical Tibetan, “Most of the tea garden labour unions are affiliated to the Left groups. The pro-Chinese communists too have started spreading tentacles to the Indo-Bhutan borders. The Jaldhaka Hydel Project Employee’s Union is a hub of the followers of Charu Majumdar.”

“These are known facts Norbu. Tell me what you are hinting at!”

“Go slow. It’s a time for change. You’re a restless person. You may run into trouble. These politicians are dirty.”

“Thanks Norbu.” I assured my veteran Circle Inspector. I had developed a stout respect for him. He was lethargic and his policing instincts were shallow. A sly police station in charge could easily throw dusts into his eyes. But Norbu was a gem of a man and he wasn’t wrong.

My assumption of charge of the Sub-Division was greeted by a spate of robberies and murder in the tea gardens bordering the neighbouring district of Jalpaiguri and alongside the international borders with Sikkim and Bhutan. I lorded over two full police stations, Kalimpong and Gorubathan, and a couple of posts along the international borders, with nominal manpower and nonexistent logistical support. The officers and the men virtually did very little to perform their duties as the keepers of the law and upholder of the order. It was a funny situation. But I declined to go by Norbu’s advice. The government jeep was converted as my temporary home, in which Dhanbir Magar carried his mobile kitchen and two armed guards ensured that I was not trampled by wild elephants and shot by the dacoits. Driver Nima was rather a piece of decoration. He reluctantly occupied my seat and I did the perilous driving, logging 60 to 70 kilometres per hour in the hill section. I knew they all cursed me. But they were a disciplined lot. Only Dhanbir dared to stand and politely pointed out that a man like me should live longer.

“What do you mean by that?”

“*Huzoor*,” He would add, “It’s fun to drive fast, but it’s no fun to die fast.”

“Do you mean that I drive too fast?”

“Very fast sir. *Alik dhilo janu hos* (drive a little slowly). You can run for a longer time.”

I did not listen to him. Keep running was the motto of my life. Dhanbir cared for me and I liked the piece of advice only to ignore it.

I was out most of the nights visiting police posts, deploying police and Village Guard patrols and cultivating potential informers who could give definite leads to the gangs, which devastated the tea gardens.

A lucky break came when I was woken up well after 2a.m. from my cold bed in the Gorubathan forest rest house. Dhanbir, woken up from his *chhang* (millet beer) induced sleep, came in and whispered.

“Wake up *saab*.”

“What’s the problem?”

“No problem sir,” He grinned as he spoke, “My friend Jibraaj Porel has come. He has important information.”

“Why so early in the morning? Ask him to come around 7a.m.”

“Please try to understand *huzoor*. This man has walked down four miles from Singidara village to talk to you. He can’t afford to see policemen in daylight. He knows the dacoits.”

I jumped out of the bed and asked Dhanbir to brew some tea and closeted myself with Jibraj Porel. Dhanbir returned with a glass of rum for our guest and a cup of tea for me.

Singidara, he explained, was a hilltop forest village on Bhutan border. Samsing, the nearest tea garden was located three kilometres downhill from his village. Rate Magar, a factory hand in the Samsing tea garden and a trade unionist, owed allegiance to the Communist Party (Marxist). He was the local leader of the dacoit gangs, which collaborated with the gangs from Bhutan and the neighbouring district of Jalpaiguri.

Jibraj was a clever guy. He was not motivated by any higher ideal. Rate Magar, in his capacity as a trade union leader had terminated the services of twenty female leaf-pickers, who were hired to pick the early winter pekoe flush. The labourers supplied by Rate substituted them and he had become richer by rupees 3,500. Some of the retrenched pickers belonged to Singidara village and two of them were Jibraj's daughters.

Rate Magar lived in Phulbari, a neighbouring hilltop village. It was rather impossible to arrest Rate from the tea garden factory. The militant unionists surrounded him and his office was well fortified by the flags of the Communist Party. It was equally difficult to walk up the narrow hill stretch to his Phulbari home that was girdled by a thick forest. Like most other villages Phulbari too had a fairly large population of dogs, a few domesticated and the rest scavenging types.

We worked out the information and in a daring night raid managed to capture Rate Magar after he was immobilised by a musket shot, which had hit his buttock.

Literally speaking the operation was successful. But the complications started thereafter. We realised to our horror that Phulbari was out of my jurisdiction and it was under Odlabari police station in the neighbouring district of Jalpaiguri. The first information report was to be recorded there and technically the presence of an officer from Odlabari was essential.

I did not panic. But I did not fail to realise the complications that had arisen from my daring raid on the den of Rate Magar. I had overshot my jurisdiction by one kilometre and I was at the mercy of the Station House Officer Odlabari for framing a foolproof legal structure to justify the raid and use of firearms and to support the subsequent prosecution.

I rang up the SP at about five in the morning and requested him to speak to the SP of the neighbouring district. I have no idea of the action he had taken. Probably he had ignored my call and left me to my own resources.

In desperation I called the residence of the DIG at Jalpaiguri at six a.m. I narrated the incident as succinctly as I could and requested him that I required the assistance of an experienced DSP to draw a foolproof First Information Report (FIR) and to entrust the investigation to the SHO Gorubathan. My DIG was known for his ill temper and impatience. I did not expect much from him. But I had no other option but to depend on him.

The incident haunted me for quite some time. Rate Magyar had in the meantime expired from the gunshot wound. His political mentors became active in 1967 polls when the communist party became a part of the new coalition headed by a rebel Congressman. The new administration had ordered a magisterial enquiry into the 'killing of a communist leader, by a 'congress minded' police officer. The young magistrate exonerated the police party that had taken part in the raid and me.

But the communist party was not satisfied with the decision of the magistrate. In the meantime the gentlemen Commissioner Ivan Suita had expired and his replacement S.C. Bonnerjea was directed by the Writer's Building to enquire into the incident. Mr. Bonnerjea was supposed to be a tough person with a reputation behind him. One fine morning he turned up at Kalimpong and interrogated me on the Rate Magar case. It came as a surprise and a shock. I was not warned by any of my superiors.

He visited Gorubathan police station to interrogate the staff and to check the records. I did not know how to tackle the situation. But I did not fail to call the SHO up and instruct him to receive the Commissioner well and to show him all the records of the case. I remember I had added a few words of encouragement to the police station staff. We would cross the bridge together, I said.

We did it. After about a few days of my marriage, I think around February 16, 1968, I received a fat mail by post. It contained the findings of S. C. Bonnerjea, the Commissioner Jalpaiguri Division. He had not only exonerated my officers and me but he had added a lengthy paragraph about the skill and bravery that I had displayed in nabbing the notorious robber. His observation was qualified with the remark that because of my untiring efforts robberies in the tea gardens had gone down by 70%. The report was submitted to the Chief Secretary and copies were marked to the IGP, DIG Jalpaiguri range and SP Darjeeling.

*

The wild Himalayan forests of Kalimpong bordering Bhutan and Sikkim presented many surprises. Some of the satisfying jobs did not relate to copybook police work. Nonetheless, some of these events scintillated my imagination and broadened my understanding of the meaning of achievement.

Kalimpong and the foothills forests of Jalpaiguri boasted of wonderful flora and fauna. The orchids on top of the mossy trees as well as the spotted cheetahs, striped tigers, spotted deer, and mammoth wild elephants abounded the forests. These beautiful creatures resented human incursion into their habitat and on occasions they strayed into tea gardens and other human concentrations in search of food. I do not intend to give a tour of the magnificent Himalayas to my readers. But the amazing behaviour of a herd of wild elephant at Kumai tea garden was a challenge to my personal and professional capabilities. It was a kind of clash of personality between men and nature.

I was in the midst of a dinner at the home of Justice. S. R. Das, when I was directed to immediately proceed to Kumai to tackle a herd of wild elephant that had strayed into the tea garden habitat. Wild elephants caused serious damages to tea plantation and annually killed a large number of plantation labourers.

Way back in 1967 there was no direct blacktopped road to Kumai. There was no bridge over the rivulet that divided the Chalsa and Kumai tea gardens. I had crossed that rivulet on numerous occasions. But tonight driver Nima had to apply the emergency breaks and bring the jeep to a sudden halt.

“What makes you to stop here?”

I shouted at the stricken face of the driver.

He raised fingers at a herd of tuskers huddled in the gravel and sand of the rivulet. Some of the beasts were busy drinking water and the rest were frolicking by sprinkling water at the direction of a herd of spotted deer, which had gathered around the hole to quench thirst.

“What should I do?”

I asked Dhanbir and Nima for their expert advices.

“Let’s turn back,” Nima was forthright in his views, “This is the rogue herd. Let’s go to the Chalsa *dak bungalow* (rest house). We’d try to cross tomorrow morning.”

“That’s correct *saab*.”

Dhanbir added his opinion.

But my orders were clear. I was supposed to scare the herd away and remove the stricken labourers to safer areas. The herd of tuskers had moved down from Bhutan and rampaged through the

shanty coolie habitat, killing two persons.

I was obsessed with the idea of scaring away the herd and making my way and drive the rogue herd of elephants back to the Bhutan forest across the Jaldhaka River.

I reversed the jeep and kept it ready for emergency escape towards Chalsa. After the completion of the tricky manoeuvre I alighted from the jeep, borrowed a .303 rifle from a constable and fired in the air. The herd of spotted deer leapt up into the air and disappeared into the thickets. The elephants did not bother to acknowledge that they had heard the booming sound. I fired another round.

A huge animal reluctantly slithered out of the shallow water and pointed its trunk at the possible source of the noise. The beast, the raja of the herd, to use Dhanbir's vocabulary, shook its head a couple of times and finally fixed its gaze at the red tail lights of the jeep. A loud cry from its angry oral cavity sent warning signals to the rest of the herd. They too, two calves included, slithered out of the gravel and sand and lined up in a solid phalanx.

"Get into the jeep sir."

Dhanbir pushed me towards the front seat. But I declined to be intimidated by the frozen dark patch that was getting ready to come alive into motion. I fired another round into the air, just above the head of the leader of the herd. A chorus of angry cry rent the air. Dhanbir jumped into the back seat. Nima grabbed me by my arms and pushed me into the front seat and kick-started the jeep, as if it were a formula one-racetrack car. I looked back in anger. Something, probably the ecstasy of holding the gun and my injured ego prompted me to take out the service revolver and fire two rounds at the direction of the dark patch of cloud that had started rushing towards the red tail lights of the jeep. The ground below had started vibrating as if a minor earthquake had hit the immediate geographical area. We rapidly climbed up the Chalsa tea garden hillock and stopped the jeep for a breather.

The angry elephant herd broke out into a riot of destruction. The animals uprooted tea bushes and pulled down a few rest huts. The commotion and the sounds of firing had alerted the tea garden personnel, some were armed with .12 bore shotguns. A sizeable labour force too came out with lit torches, spears and bow and arrows. I gathered an impression in the flashlight that a force of about 70 had gathered behind me. That gave me an idea. I radioed the police and forest guard party at Kumai and directed them to charge the herd from the rear. They rushed in.

A hurried conference with the Chalsa forest ranger and the manager of the tea garden helped me to work out a battle plan. We divided the Chalsa party into three charging groups and directed the Kumai party to guard the left phalanx. Thus surrounded the herd suddenly came to a halt. On my signal simultaneous shots were fired from about a dozen firearms over the head of the herd. The tribal labourers fired flame-tipped arrows directly on the herd. Some enterprising people had started beating the drums and blowing the horns. The loudest possible human challenge unnerved the leader. He raised his trunk and bellowed out three short cries. The herd members responded with similar cries and turned their trunks towards the bed of the Jaldhaka River, which meandered past a hydroelectric station and melted into the forests of Bhutan.

We smelled victory and advanced while firing into the air from my revolver. The Chalsa and the Kumai legion followed me. Initially it was a slow movement. But the herd suddenly gathered speed. We too rushed in a body hurling arrows, spears and beating drums. The guns had fallen silent on my order. Victory was in sight. We were required to chase the herd for another kilometre across the international border into Bhutan. I knew that the Bhutan forest guards would drive them back into India at the earliest opportunity. The Bhutanese were at high risk too. Only a month ago a rogue herd had demolished the staff quarters of the Royal Bhutan Brewery at Samchi. But the war was won momentarily and by itself it was a great achievement without causing any diplomatic row.

I spent the rest of the night at Rongo medicinal herb garden guesthouse, which produced cinchona, an essential drug for treating tropical malaria.

Next morning, while seated at Gorubathan police station I received a few unexpected calls. The first call came from Ivan Surita, the Commissioner of Jalpaiguri Division. He used a few choicest vocabularies, which I always accepted as endearing words and finally thanked for exporting the rogue herd to Bhutan. The SP too called to congratulate me. The Deputy Chief Conservator of Forest called to enquire about the number of rounds fired and description of injuries that might have been inflicted on the retreating beasts. I had failed to satisfy him. It was later compensated by a written report with heaps of assurances that only five rounds were fired from the regulation weapons and the animals were sent off as cordially as possible.

The most rewarding call came at about ten a.m.

“Sir the DIG is coming on the line. Please take the call.”

A panicked sub-inspector rushed to me, where I was busy meeting a delegation from the nearby villages.

I rushed back to the phone and by instinct addressed the caller as sir. I was greeted by a faint laughter and plenty of good wishes. My fiancé was on the line. It was the greatest reward that I hadn't expected. I assured her that I wasn't a dragon killer and I wasn't going to expose myself to unwarranted danger. She knew it was a hollow promise. Danger and I were the most intimate bed mates.

*

The destiny moves according to a predestined speed. That's what a Hindu is taught to believe from his childhood. I was not a firm believer in many of the fatalistic dicta that ruled over the lives of common Indians, Hindus, semi-Hindu animists, converted Muslims and Christians, in fact everybody, who happened to grow up on the soil of this ancient land. My non-conformist attitude displeased many and invited derision from others. But gradually I had started learning the tricks to keep my trap shut and lock away my social views and views on religion.

Much later a *Vaishnaba* (a Hindu stream of worship) saint in Manipur taught me that tolerance wasn't an anathema to rational thinking. Tolerance rather helped in widening the knowledge base of a person who felt thirst for the truth. He had also warned me to acknowledge that truth wasn't a fixed object. It was a relative concept. It was, according to him like the layers of an onion. The final truth, he felt was *maya* (eternal void), which appeared to exist and very often appeared non-existent.

This minor indulgence in a stream of Hindu philosophy was prompted by two unforeseen developments.

Chandan Sanyal (name changed), my Calcutta University friend and my colleague in a Calcutta newspaper, had traversed a tortuous ideological terrain and come to the conclusion that political and social changes could only be brought about through the barrel of gun. He had joined the ranks of Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal. A prominent member of the Communist party (Marxist-Leninist) he believed in simultaneous rural and urban *uprising*. I had met him last in 1966 at the famous College Street coffee house, a favourite rendezvous of the real and budding intellectuals of Calcutta and the most fertile ground of spawning renaissance and revolution.

I received an early morning call from DIG state intelligence branch and faced a critical enquiry.

“I believe you know Chandan Sanyal?”

“Yes sir. We studied and worked together.”

“I want you to spot him in Siliguri and arrest him.”

“That’s not my area sir.”

“You’ve the orders from the IGP.”

“Where do I look for him?”

The DIG shared with me an address somewhere in Bidhan Nagar, an upcoming residential area.

The moment of truth confronted me rather brazenly. I was very close to the RSS and at a later date had fraternised with the Congress. I never felt aroused by the political ideas of the Bengal communists. Chandan was drawn to communist ideology and believed in the Chinese brand of violent movement. But our ideological incompatibility did not stand in the way of our friendship.

I went down to Siliguri all by myself in a hired private car. I did not take the police jeep. Bidhan Nagar wasn’t a big place way back in early 1967. The address was correct but Chandan wasn’t there. I was advised to come after a few days. It was a big disappointment.

My next stop was the ramshackle home of Charu Majumdar, the paternal figure of India’s Left Extremist movement. I had met him thrice, way back in 1966, along with a journalist friend of Darjeeling, who worked as a stringer for the BBC. The contents of only one of my initial meetings with Charu were shared with the SP. I was aware that Haren Banerjee was a close relation of Kanu Sanyal and I did not want him to have any peep into my personal contacts with Charu. I met him more as a student of current history to understand the workings of the minds of the people who wanted to kill for the sake of killing alone. People like Charu were no Che Guevara. He was a believer than a bigoted devotee of a jungle deity. He knew that to change the Indian social system the time wasn’t ripe and he didn’t possess any gun worth the name except the gun of Chinese communist ideology of the day. But I respected Charu for the power of his conviction and the strength of his magnetism.

His daughter, who I believe had later obtained a degree in medicine, unlatched the door. The suave girl demurred unintelligibly but allowed me in. Charu had still not gone underground and was running his political outfit from his home. He was not a good conversationalist. He liked to deliver shrill and loud lecture on class struggle and the inevitable victory of the proletariat. He was an avid believer in violence as a tool of emancipation of the exploited.

Seated in a wooden chair Charu’s face looked glum and sullen. I knew I wasn’t any more welcome to his home.

“What brings you here?”

“Just like that. I thought I’d renew the contact.”

“The contact point between your and my classes is in the battlefield. Get ready with the guns.”

“Can’t you reach your goal through peaceful means? Revolution doesn’t essentially mean war and bloodshed.”

“Don’t be silly. India can only be changed by violence.”

“We achieved independence through non-violent means.”

“You are a fool. Had the British not gone bankrupt they would have retained the colony for another two hundred years. Thanks to Hitler that he initiated the process of decolonisation by destroying the coffers of the colonists. The British simply escaped from India.”

Charu was like that. His political thesis wasn’t acceptable to me. But he had opened up to me, like Jagadananda Roy, new vistas to the millions of the toiling masses of India. I secretly wished that I could be a revolutionary like them. My discussions that day convinced me that the rumbling thunders of violent agrarian revolution were not very far. They were about to hit us more ferociously than the proverbial cyclones of the Bengal delta.

As I travelled back to Kalimpong I tried to frame the contour of the report I would have to submit

to the SP. I wasn't surprised by the prophetic utterances of Cahru. I knew that behind the frail figure there existed a violent storm that was sure to usher in a new era in Indian political system. He was not irrelevant. He was a vain prophet, who did not live to see his creed succeeding and transforming Indian political and social systems. But he sure had ignited the spark, which I was confident, would transform the hollow socio-economic realities that we inherited from the British Raj and which was being run in feudalistic manner.

But a bigger surprise waited for me at Kalimpong. As I walked into the compound of my Teesta Road residence Dhanbir rushed out to say that my cousin from Calcutta had arrived soon after I left for Siliguri.

It was my turn to be surprised. Chandan was seated cross-legged in the veranda with piles of cigarette butts on the ashtray and a burning one between his fingers.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"This is the safest place. How was your fishing expedition in Siliguri?"

"I don't do fishing in Siliguri. The nearby Teesta is full of rainbow trout."

"Trash the rhetoric. I'm here for a day. What do you want to do with me?"

Dhanbir produced a couple of cups of tea and we talked about the golden days back in Calcutta when we chased stories and begged the city editor to give us the third page coverage. We were yet to graduate to front-page banner stories.

"Do you think you have chosen the correct path?"

I asked Chandan, the only son of an affluent physician of Calcutta, as we ate dinner.

"Who knows? Only history can decide if I'm right or wrong. But the struggle is genuine and the revolution I dream of is bound to correct the distorted history of this country."

"But you're wanted by the police. They'd prefer to shoot you."

"I know. Put me in a train at one of the small stations near Siliguri. I want to disappear in Bihar for a while."

"Why Bihar?"

"I've to regroup some of the workers over there."

"Do you expect me to escort you to Siliguri?"

"Why not? I know you love me."

That fateful night I encountered one of the toughest wars of my life, the war within. Chandan slept like a log totally unconcerned about his security. I was tossing in the next bed struggling to keep afloat my love and affection over my conscience. I realised that conscience could often generate extreme pain. I decided to be guided by my love for Chandan. That scoundrel squirrel in me finally had its flag unfurled.

I woke him up at 4a.m. and asked Chandan to take the back seat. I drove the police jeep straight to Bagdogra railway station and put him on a local shuttle that was bound for Kishanganj in Bihar.

We shared a cup of tea served in earthen cups and smoked the same cigarette like we used to smoke way back in Calcutta streets as struggling journalists.

The coal fired shuttle chugged out of the dusty platform and I drove back to Kalimpong before Dhanbir was ready with breakfast.

"*SP sahab phone garnu bhakathiya* (the SP had made a telephone call)."

I called the SP back while munching an overcooked omelette.

"Did you call me sir?"

"Where had you been so early in the morning?"

"I'd been to Mal and Odlabari to meet an informer."

“You’re behaving like an intelligence officer.”

I didn’t know if it was a compliment or a dig at my unusual way of working through human assets who provided useful information on the tea garden dacoits.

“In fact I wanted to share information about Chandan. Some people had seen him travelling towards Kalimpong in a taxi.”

“That’s interesting sir,” I replied, “He wouldn’t like to come to Kalimpong. I’m afraid he may have taken shelter in one of the tea gardens around Mongpu.”

“Possible. Keep your eyes open. Alert all the check points and send me the report on your meeting with the other fellow.”

“Yes sir.”

I finished the breakfast and sat down on the Remington typewriter to compose a report on my Siliguri visit. Those days the office of the SDPO did not enjoy the luxury of a stenographer/typist. Once in a while a typing knowing constable used to help me out in drafting non-sensitive letters. I typed the confidential letters.

I did not mention the Chandan affair. Not that I suffered from amnesia. Chandan was a bright student and I believed that he was guided by a genuine faith in the ideology of ‘power to the proletariat through bloody revolution’. I suffered the pain of being untrue to my profession but I allowed my conscience and my affection to get the better of my training.

It wasn’t our last meeting. Chandan had managed to survive the ‘great Naksal killing in Calcutta, Barahnagar and other suburban towns’ by the then chief minister Siddhartha Shankar Ray’s police in 1970-71. He had reorganised the Naksal groups in Bihar and certain urban pockets of West Bengal.

We happened to meet again in 1974 again in Calcutta at the Neemtala cremation ground. Chandan was there, incognito of course, to cremate his mother. I was just transferred out of Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, and was being tossed from one chair to the other by my station boss.

FOUR

THE BRAVE NEW WORLD

It is only intellect that keeps me sane; perhaps this makes me overvalue intellect against feeling.
Bertrand Russell.

It was virtually an entry to a new world when I marked my presence at the South Block office of the Intelligence Bureau on July 1, 1968. The name sounded a new world charm and some of its achievements that I came to hear from informed and uninformed sources made me fearful and curious. This was supposed to be the hub of dreaded activities by an agency of the spooks. The sprawling but barely furnished rooms, crammed cubicles and the shanty corridor huts impressed me a lot. More impressive were the impassive faces and impersonal looks of most of the senior officers. The Director, an IP officer of the Bengal Cadre, lapped me up with a boring look and one and a half sentences of welcome. He wasn't interested to know the person, the persona and me. He was not interested to know my proclivities and views on the world of crime and intelligence and if I was at all suitable for the specialised job in the Bureau. To him I was simply another head of cattle. I was too raw a material to talk about ideas and inclinations. I was just another piece of 'ear marked' officer who was yet to be initiated to the voodoo rituals of the cloak and dagger realm.

The Indian Intelligence Bureau is perhaps the only spy organisation that treated the senior echelons drafted from the Indian Police Service as holy cows. They were supposed to know all and do all creatures, who did not require proper evaluation and grilling before the inner vaults were opened to them. My bookish knowledge of the KGB, CIA and the Mossad had left an impression that the IB would also make me walk over the fires and accept only if I emerged unscathed. But, there I was, a drifting raw material, who did know very little about the intelligence trade and the consumers they served. The first impact did not impress me. I was no better or worse off than a senior scale police officer.

I had imagined a picture about screw eyed, bushy browed gaunt faces that would tear me down with piercing questions. Nothing of that sort happened. My fantasy about the first meeting misfired. It was so disappointing! Here was a master who was not interested in knowing about the hand he just hired and to whom he was about to entrust a few important keys of his treasure vault! I came out of his room with my tail tugged in and a sense of frustration. He looked so impersonal and tormented a person! His name was Madan Mohan Lal Hooja, a direct disciple of the deified intelligence operator, B. N. Mallick.

The other two senior officers, one from Orissa, whose gaze was permanently locked at certain uncharted corner of the ceiling and the other a Punjabi with a hearing aid didn't impress me either. They appeared to be more bored with themselves than the red faced monkeys in the corridors and staircases of the South Block. There was nothing to be encouraged by the boring looks and callous unconcern of the senior officers. The rituals of cold-shouldering a new comer, I discovered later, had become a part of the culture of the organisation.

It was not a part of the British tradition. The British generally received all new comers with warmth. The initiation process was both tough and humorous. But the new breed of Indian intelligence

technocrats had transformed themselves to cast iron cookies. They looked impressive but in reality they were miserable human assets. The ambience of frozen impersonal unconcern often made me to think if the Marxist hawks in Calcutta were not better than the gaunt faced zombies I faced in the South Block!

However two officers, K. N. Prasad, a middle aged person from Bihar, and M. K. Narayanan, an all-white dressed vibrant officer from Kerala, impressed me a lot. They inspired confidence.

Prasad, a tough taskmaster and a known tongue lasher, displayed the mercy of talking to me about my education, service experience and my infantile and bookish views on the world of intelligence. I know he was amused with my propensity to take a bull by the horns, but politely reminded me that in the larger canvas of IB I should not charge my targets like Don Quixote. He emphasised on the needs for mastering the tradecraft of the intelligence game and to approach the targets with strategic planning and tactical spadework. I'm indeed grateful to the rough hewn but efficient officer. I should say that he was one of the gurus who made me to walk over the fire and taught me the tricks of survival. His rough appearance discouraged many to discover the gem of a professional in him.

M.K. Narayanan liked to dress in white trousers and white half sleeve shirts. Seated in his South Block corridor shack he explained to me some of the ingredients that went in making a good intelligence operative and analyst out of an insensitive cop like me. He emphasised more on the analytical capability of an intelligence officer. I found him to be a perfectionist and a serious believer in the final finished product than the raw nuggets produced by the field operatives. He was not an operations man, but his analytical capability impressed me. Intellectually he was head above a couple of other officers I happened to encounter in my initial outings.

The initial impression gave me a feeling of having landed myself in a super police organisation, which was not less regimented than the police forces back in the state. Here the regimentation did not end with the uniform and obeying orders. IB's regimentation aimed at changing the molecular personality of its officers that often generated a hallucination of total loyalty to the trade and the immediate commanders. This kind of loyalty emerged from fear factor. The situation was like a Hindu worshipping any God he thought would grant him the desired boon,

Very often the impact of regimentation and loyalty to a person degenerated into tunnel vision and abject transformation. Some of the junior officers that I encountered during my initial tenure in Delhi behaved as if they were bonded labourers. A good number of them were mere '*bandobast*' men (fixers), who attended to the needs of the senior officers. A few of them specialised in cultivating doctors and others gained admiration for befriending cutting edge level officers in other government departments. They combined the tradition of police orderly constables and sleek corridor operators.

The Intelligence Bureau was and still continues to be a police organisation. The Director, Intelligence Bureau, is accepted as the top cop of the nation. My first few days in the corridors gave me an impression that the policemen turned 'intelligence officers' of the IB still exuded the raw smell of the men in uniform. Regimentation and not indoctrination was valued more. The docile Japanese bow, automatic clicking on the heels and the inevitable 'yes sir' exhibited the firm rooting of the officers and men in police culture.

I had nurtured different ideas about a mammoth intelligence organisation like the IB. I expected more informality, more openness and free ambience where ideas could be freely exchanged. Here, I found expression of opinion and views were equated with leaking out secrets. Barring M. K. Narayanan, K. P. Medhekar and R. K. Khandelwal etc, I did not find the general rung of officers open to ideas and discussion. They hadn't yet understood the value of 'brainstorming', which was introduced in the IB for the first time by Narayanan much later in 1987-88.

I decided to go by the advice of K. N. Prasad and stored my impressions in a safe corner of my cranium. I refused to babble out fearing that my impressions could as well be described as sacrilegious and ultra vires to the Official Secrets Act.

On the fateful seventh day, I was instructed by a senior clerk to report for training at the IB's training facility at Anand Parvat (Mount Joy) somewhere near Karol Bagh. No one took care to explain to me the organisational structure of the IB and what I was supposed to do and expect. The concept of supplying the new entrants at my level with basic information kit and verbal briefing and debriefing by the senior officers did not exist. I was supposed to move from one building to the other, meet the senior officers and listen to them about what they were permitted to say or cared to say about their work. Fortunately one officer from my state helped me out.

The officer who guided me through the dark alleys of the IB was Gopal Dutta. Way back in 1946 he was SP of Mymensingh district in undivided Bengal and knew my undivided family. He was a colleague of my uncle, an IP officer in Bengal. Dutta had trained my father in law in police work way back in 1949. He took an immediate liking for Sunanda and me. In his inimitable way he explained the basic functioning of the IB and the intricate makeup of some of the senior officers.

P.N. Banerjee, a stalwart of the IB and later of the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), was a course mate of my father in law. He was a man of very few words. But his briefings had left deep impressions in me. He was the first officer to advise me to forget my police identity and to don on the new identity of an *intelligence operator-and not an officer*. In his view a policeman was entitled to the 'officer' suffix. But for men in the intelligence community the 'operator' suffix was more honourable. But in the Indian feudal ambience and police traditions in which the intelligence trade was rooted had never allowed the 'officer' label to be washed off.

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Located in the triangle of Karol Bagh, Rohtak Road and Najafgarh Road, Anand Parvat represented the Jurassic remnants of the Shivalik hills that were not yet flattened by the hungry colonisers and unauthorised slum dwellers. Whoever had assigned the name to this rocky strip had immense sense of humour. There was no *anand* in Anand Parvat.

However, the joyless joyous barren hillock offered a mixed bag. It housed the 'manufacturing lines' of the IB's training facility in sections of a dilapidated building owned by the Ramjas Trust and once used by the Allied Army during the Second World War. Another landmark of the joyous place was Kamal, an infamous restaurant, which catered cabaret dance and some kind of under the wrap flesh trade. A secondary school and a roaring brothel covered the other flanks of the training facility. The queer stellar configuration was amusing and ridiculous. But this was possible only in India, where the social pundits were ever eager to perform a purifying *yagna* (sacrifice) and close their eyes to the most heinous social evil.

So, I was ensconced by all kinds of pleasure around me at the appropriately named mount joy.

But I did not dislike the thinner than film 'cover edifice' of the IB. The shanty lane that lead to the abandoned ghost house, abundantly littered by human faeces, pigeon stool and pig droppings from the nearby *valmiki* (a caste) colony was no less romantic than the open sesame tunnel to the storehouse of hidden wealth. The mount joy training facility, however, had in its store a different kind of wealth, the tools of intelligence gathering and denying. I hated the gruelling climb but enjoyed the ambience of the haunted-house-look of the mossy and damp building that was declared unsafe for human use about a decade back.

Before I give a conducted but restricted tour of the training facility I owe it to the readers to tell something about the Intelligence Bureau.

M. K. Narayanan had a brilliant idea to observe the 100th year of the birth of IB in 1987. According to material researched out by his officers, the IB could trace its genesis back to 1887, when a formal intelligence unit was started by the government of Her Royal Highness the Queen Empress of India, Maharani Victoria. It had reportedly evolved out of the vintage 'Thuggy' department of Colonel Sleeman to a criminal and political intelligence catering 'department' of the 'Central Government.'

We all were elated to know that the IB was one of the oldest intelligence units that had efficiently served the Empire to consolidate its occupation and to suppress the nationalist movement. It was no mean an achievement. It was more gratifying to know that the Central Intelligence Bureau had worked in tandem with the mandarins of the Home Office and the Viceroy's Council to create two or more nations in India and to perpetuate the caste divisions with a view to permanently fragmenting the Indian society. Trained by the British, the IB as also the politicians, who succeeded the fleeing British masters, had not forgotten the noble trades of dividing and butchering the people.

The IB in post-independent India was not allowed to grow out of the kitchen pot of the governing class. However, the professionals had succeeded in sharpening and widening the tools of its trade to combat ethnic insurgency, communal holocaust, terrorism and other aspects of national security. The pioneers of the post-independence IB must be saluted for giving the country an efficient tool of national security in spite of the fact that the ruling class generally tried to use it for protecting and promoting their elite club. They never thought it fit to adopt a constitutionally validated Act to govern the IB and its sister organisations. The IB and the R&AW etc are the only organs of the government that are not accountable to any elected constitutional body of India and are not governed by any Act of the Parliament. They are subsidiary bureaus and departments.

Anyway, I wouldn't like to engage in a debate on an obvious issue that should have attracted attention of the intellectuals, the opinion makers and the champions of democracy and constitutional liberty.

The Central Intelligence Bureau is not a mammoth organisation. Way back in 1968 it had an approximate strength of 8000, all ranks included. But the actual intelligence generating elements were less than 4000. The rest included supporting and '*bandobast*' staff. I understand that over the years the IB has accrued some additional manpower and acquired a little bit of marginally improved Technical Intelligence gadgetry. The present intelligence generating strength is yet to catch up with the awesome human assets of the CIA, the former KGB and the neighbouring Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan.

The pyramidal hierarchy in Delhi was supplemented by the collation and analysis desks, often tailored to specific subjects, say communism, communalism, and units mostly catering to the geographical zones of the country. Different desks catered to different regions of the country.

The basic Delhi outfit is buffeted by counter intelligence units, which detect, identify and neutralise intelligence operations of other countries on Indian soil. The Technical Intelligence (TechInt), Signal Intelligence (SigInt) and Electronic Intelligence (ElInt) needs are supported by specialised units that have achieved a little bit of maturity and acquired some respectable gadgetry over years. But they lag seriously behind the prime intelligence organisations of the developed countries and even countries like Pakistan, Korea and Israel etc.

The counter terrorist units received very little attention till terrorism in Punjab blew up on the face of its creators. The Operations Cells, specialised in combating indigenous terrorism, were put on the

rails around 1986, after Operation Blue Star and the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Specialised cells to combat ISI operations in India and Pakistan sponsored Islamist terrorism had taken shape only after the Bombay serial bomb blasts in 1993. The political infrastructure and its intelligence edifices responded very slowly to the emerging geopolitical needs.

The Intelligence Bureau has its units in the States. These units are known as Subsidiary Intelligence Bureaus (SIB) and the offices of the Central Intelligence Officer (CIO). The SIB units cascade down to district and in some cases sub-divisional levels. The positioning of the subsidiary intelligence generating units depends on the exigency of situation. However, the IB has been maintaining Border Check Posts (BCP) since early fifties along the international borders with China, Pakistan and Myanmar. Some of these posts were later taken over by the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) of the Cabinet Secretariat. But IB's low-key presence along the international borders continues as a part of its counter intelligence and anti-terrorist agenda.

IB's recruitment policy has been traditionally restricted to two basic levels: the Assistant Intelligence Officer, Grade II (equivalent to police sub-inspector) and Constable, later renamed Security Assistant. The ACIO II rank is subdivided to the 'General' and 'Technical' streams. The General boys are trained as intelligence operators while the Technical boys slog it out as support elements. The Security Assistants are often used as field intelligence generating tools. But mostly this category is used as 'servicing' elements, often discharging duties assigned to office peons, personal orderlies, cooks and attendants. There exists an elaborate arrangement for training the ACIOs; however, the Security Assistants are exposed to very little training in intelligence tradecraft. Besides directly recruiting officer grade materials from open market under cover of the Ministry of Home Affairs a substantive number of officers are taken on 'deputation' from the State police and now the Central Para-Military Forces.

The senior echelons of the IB are manned by the officers of the Indian Police Service (IPS) and very few direct recruit officers who manage to rise through the ranks from ACIO II. The IB has maintained its police character from the day of inception and has resisted lateral induction of talents from other specialised fields. It is, in fact, a Central Police Organisation that dons a different fleece. The rationale behind maintaining police exclusivism is rather obscurantist and to some extent occultist. Arguments in favour of tapping vast specialised talents from different fields of activities haven't been encouraged by the politicians either. The police character of the IB suits their political objectives and the perception of accountability only to the immediate political masters gives them ample opportunity to misuse these agencies.

Before bifurcation of the IB by Indira Gandhi in 1968 and creation of a separate foreign intelligence outfit—the Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW), the IB was also entrusted with the delicate task of gathering external intelligence and some of its officers were assigned to the Indian Missions abroad.

The Counter-Intelligence units were designed to cover the activities of the foreign Missions in India. Certain units dealing with the Soviet Block, USA, China and Pakistan attracted the crème 'd la crème of the corps of officers. These were coveted units too as the officers had under their command fleet of vehicles. These units were supplemented by units, which helped in monitoring of mails, telephone traffic and other electronic communication system.

Way back in 1968 the IB was a small outfit. It did not have any specialised mechanism to cover the vast land and sea borders. It had no access to the activities inside the Armed Forces of the nation, though certain counter-intelligence coups were staged by some of its enterprising officers. It did not have any expert field unit to cover the vast areas of industrial activities, industrial security, aviation

security and many other fields of national activities, though nominal Industrial and Aviation security units existed in advisory capacity. These branches often dashed out advisories to concerned units and a few officers often went on lecture tour to industrial units. The organisation had started gathering expertise in these fields much later in the day.

The IB maintained liaison with the state police intelligence through the regional SIBs. But such liaison was inadequate and in many of the states the concept of gathering intelligence in a processed scientific manner did not exist. They were not tuned to the needs of the day and did not anticipate new inputs from external resources. IB, therefore, played the Big Brother, as long as the Indian National Congress (offshoot of the independence movement with the same name) governments ruled both in the Centre and the States. With the change in the political scenario, like in Kerala and West Bengal, the boss' role was drastically curtailed. The State Governments often hesitated to share intelligence with the Central Government, which was looked upon as an enemy entity.

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It's time to return to the mount joy and the training facility of the IB where I was deputed to restructure myself as an intelligence officer. I was supposed to go through the Basic Course that was designed to teach the tools of gathering and denying intelligence.

The Basic Course, as they termed the initiation ritual, didn't excite much imagination. A few of my course mates were fairly senior to me. The rest of my course mates came from the ranks of the Intelligence Bureau, the directly recruited Assistant Central Intelligence Officer Grade II and some middle level promoted officers.

What surprised me most was the behavioural pattern of the direct recruit officers of the IB. This most important workforce was recruited through the Union Public Service Commission under cover of sub-inspectors of police for the Union Home Ministry. They were trained at Mount Abu police training college, alongside the direct recruit IPS officers. Much later the IB had started its own training facility somewhere north of the Vindhyas. Trained rigorously as policemen, the direct recruit officers were required to undergo basic intelligence courses, attachment to police stations, mountaineering training and other assorted training courses before they were pushed to the border check posts. They spent the first five to eight years in the remote border posts in NEFA, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Jammu & Kashmir and at locations along the Indo-China borders.

The robust and intelligent corps of officers received their training well but they displayed abject submissiveness characteristic only of the men in uniform, who were recruited from lesser-qualified human resources. There was something wrong in the training, I thought, that had robbed them of the initiative and measured aggressiveness required by the intelligence operatives. I was surprised to see that the men requiring the spirit of innovation—both in human intelligence and technical intelligence were being moulded as a queer hybrid of police and intelligence officers. They were not trained as intelligence operatives and technocrats. They were rather groomed up more as ordinary career chasing government servants on whose shoulders reposed the most important pinions of intelligence and security machineries of the country. Perhaps, the Intelligence Bureau manned essentially by senior policemen, had not thought of fabricating a differently trained and chiselled crops of officers who would cease to be mere government employees and would emerge as an elite work force unfettered by the police culture. I would like to share more observations on this aspect as I proceed with my reflections.

There were three distinct categories of trainers at the Anand Parvat facility. The desk officers and

analysts formed the crème of the trainers. They lectured on the political movements and parties and the growth of the Indian political system since independence. No one could miss the extra emphasis on the Communist movement, both international and domestic and the functioning methodologies of the Indian Communist parties. Next in priority came the Hindu and the Muslim communal parties, like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Jan Sangh, Hindu Mahasabha, Anand Marg, Jamat-e-Islami, the Muslim League and other assorted Islamic organisations. The study of Pan-Islamism formed a vital part of the course. But the trainers did not emphasise on the aspects of the emerging clashes between the Pan-Islamist forces and the non-Islamic civilisations like the Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism. Islam as an ideology of unique civilisational value, which tended to collapse within rather than expanding and assimilating, was not studied at that point of time, in correct perspective.

My training course was more engrossed with the hangover of the post independence trauma of Hindu and Muslim communalism. However, a few talks were directed at mapping the communal situation in the country and the linkages of the sub-continental Muslim forces with the Pan-Islamic forces of the Middle East and Africa. These talks were shallow and abstract.

Some pathetic efforts were made by a few desk analysts to apprise the class of the intricate international relations with China and Pakistan. I do not recall having been taught the intricate war of sabotage and subversion waged by Pakistan in the Indian North East, Kashmir and elsewhere in the country. The Naga and Mizo rebellions were painted as ethnic insurgencies in which the complicity of the Christian Church was highlighted. No effort was made to explain the damning fault lines that India had inherited from the British and failure of the government to repair those fault lines through administrative and political actions. I do not recall having been told about the complicity of the ISI and the State Security Bureau of China with the North East insurgents.

Manifestation of discontentment and agitation among other aboriginal tribals elsewhere in India was also ascribed to the Christian Church and machinations of the foreign missionaries. No one in the IB had bothered to study and project the underlying economic, political and social imbalances, which haunted the tribal people. That the less privileged tribals were being exploited by the advanced Hindu communities were never projected. A little later in my career I was surprised by the similarity of perception prevailing in the IB and in the RSS. To blame the Church for all the ills in the tribal entities, I thought, was as wild a logic as the flight of the crow and unexpected fall of a ripe coconut on the head of the farmer sleeping below the tree. These gaping fault lines were simply explained away as acts of conspiracy by the international Christian brotherhood. To me it appeared to be the height of Indian ingeniousness: find a bad dog, holler about it and invent a philosophy to support the faulty reasoning. Shooting of the imaginary bad dog was taken up as a political tool by certain segments of the Hindutwa protagonists after 1990.

The ruling Indian National Congress did not receive adequate attention of our trainers. The talks were rudimentary and an avid reader of the national history that I was, could discern that the analysts were reluctant to talk freely on the ruling party. The communists and communalists were the fiercest ghosts to the intelligence community and their political masters. The ruling party was treated as Caesar's Wife.

The country had just started experiencing the Chinese inspired Extremist Left Communist movement, the Naksalbari Movement, shortened as Naxal Movement. But our trainers did not have much to share with us except some oblique references to the Telengana Movement and general activities of sabotage and subversion by the Communists. The politicians had no time to study the root causes of the Naxal Movement and other agrarian movements in the country. It was generally treated as another Chinese thrust through an organised group of ideological saboteurs. That strange social

engineering experimentation had started from the grassroots level had escaped the attention of the IB analysts, state police authorities and the politicians in the federating states and the Union Government. It was not surprising that no one thought of acquainting the class with latest trends of the Left Extremist movement. It was treated as a law and order problem to be dealt with by the administration and the police. I was appalled by the brazen attitude towards the most important movement that aimed at transforming the social, economic and political contours of India. We are yet to witness a structured national response to the violent Left Extremist movement that has been waging a struggle for achieving social and economic justice.

Very little was taught about International Terrorism, ideological insurgency, and urban guerrilla warfare. The IB, way back in 1968, was simply not equipped to address these subjects. India's fascination with Palestinian movement and bonhomie with the Muslim regimes in the Middle East was anchored in the wharf of neutralism and third world diplomacy. International Terrorism was considered as an exportable item by the Soviet Union. Urban guerrilla movements in Europe were simply mentioned but no cogent explanation was given for the strange phenomena.

The anthology of violent movements in post-independent India is a long one. Ethnic violence in the North East did not result from disillusionment with democracy. But use of violence as a means to bring about social, economic and political changes had plagued the nation from day one. Political independence had not succeeded in fine-setting the rough edges of the linguistic, ethnic, tribal and parochial ambitions and aspirations. The economic performance did not match up to the expectations of the people and imbalance in economic developments in different parts of the country had left gaping seismic chasms.

The ruling elite had rather promoted the sense of caste alienation by failing to banish the old curse of fictitious *varnashram* (caste division) from the fractured Hindu society. They tended to perpetuate it by promoting and fortifying the caste barriers, merely for a few more votes. These iron-hot aspects of social engineering were not included in the curricula. I did not agree with the stuff I was taught, but was advised by my seniors to listen and forget. Protestation was an unpardonable crime in the Intelligence Bureau. Only 'yes sir' was the winning mantra. I detested the idea but having jumped into uncertain waters I had very little option but to swim along.

Another aspect that surprised me was the total neglect of 'economic intelligence' and intelligence related to mass movements arising out of poverty and conflict between the rural rich and poor. No mention was made about the bane of absence of land reforms and the need for studying the relevance between economic situation and unrest in the society.

Absence of another aspect of training also surprised me. I did not expect to receive CIA commando type individualised intensive training. But I was looking for personalised interaction between the trainers and the trainees. There was no personal touch. The trainers behaved as if they were spot-paid lecturers and their commitment ended after indifferent and perfunctory delivery of the talks they had mugged up. My attempts to develop personal friendship were frowned upon with the exception of C. L. Dhingra, who took personal interest in willing trainees. We remained friends throughout our career in the Intelligence Bureau.

However, the tradecraft stuff captured my imagination. The trainers, mostly from the promoted ranks, were much above the mediocre desk analysts. Their dissertations and demonstrations on the crafts of foot surveillance, secret writing, concealment, memory enhancement, agent recruitment and handling, secured communication etc, fascinated me. The tricks of the intelligence trade taught to us, now I understand, were not finely chiselled. The IB hadn't drawn upon the innovative tradecrafts in vogue in the USA, UK, USSR and other advanced intelligence communities. Nonetheless, I was

exposed to a fascinating world that had transformed my perception of the intelligence profession.

The lessons in foot (Fosur), mobile (Mosur), technical (Tesur) surveillances gave me deeper insight into the world of the spooks. I had taken these lessons seriously and had tried to extract as much as possible from the instructors. I must salute these nameless and faceless officers of the IB, who had helped the company running smoothly. They still do.

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Chaman Lal Dhingra, one of the instructors, had taught me in the course of lessons on agent running: Everyone has a price. His formula was very simple. To raise an agent in a target area the right and correct price must be paid. I would rather not like to drag my readers through the laborious process of agent priming, targeting, cultivation and penetration. These technical matters are as foxy as the scheming of marsh jackals. But the inner philosophy of the motto was crystal clear. Subversion of the target and evaluation of the price tag preferred by him were the most important aspects.

What about the targets fired by ideological fervour? Dhingra could not give a convincing reply. I had faced those moments of truth when I handled certain key ideologically committed targets. They too have a price, but not in monetary term. I had learnt much later in my career that the price for an ideologically fired target-agent is the elevation of the mental faculties of the handling officer to the level of the mental capability of the target, who was often very accomplished and sophisticated.

I did not appreciate Dhingra's pronouncement that an intelligence operator should shun the slough of sentiment and should be able to 'disengage' from his agent without any pang of conscience. He was, in his words, 'a kind of a whore', who traded information for the motive of gain. There was no place of sentiment in the trade off. I did not like that 'dictum' of the intelligence jargon. I never grew up to believe in the golden policy of 'heartless, bloodless and remorseless' disengagement from a vital human agent. I might have disagreed with him, but he offered me a rich bouquet of knowledge, especially the bouquet of deep insight into the world of Islam.

I hated the Muslims. They, I believed, were responsible for partition of the country and excesses committed against the Hindus. I would never forgive them for raping Manorama, my childhood companion back in East Pakistan, and uprooting us from our real motherland. I had very little idea at that time about the civilisational clashes between the Hindus and the Muslims and the crucial role played by the International Islamic Brotherhood.

Dhingra helped me to delve deep into the world of the Muslims and discover them afresh. It was a fascinating journey and I had started to understand the geopolitical compulsion of India being a multi-religious, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nation. It could never be turned to a Dar-ul-Islam or Hindu Rashtra. It never was, and it would never be. I am thankful to my trainers, especially Dhingra for opening up a new vista. I, however, differed with him on the issue of study of Islam and Muslims of the subcontinent as a security related subject. I still feel that the security perspective of the State should lay emphasis on the attempts of the Islamists continuously trying to destabilise the delicate secular balance in the region.

By itself Islam was not subversive in nature. Their faith taught tolerance in as much as Hinduism (if there is a religion like that) taught to its followers. But the geopolitical compulsions of the Muslims in South and South East Asia were different from those inhabiting the Persian Gulf region, Arab Peninsula, North and Central Africa and Central Asia. In India particularly, the Muslims had reigned for over 800 years before being subjugated by the British. The Muslim community once ruled by the Muslim monarchs could not live in peace with themselves with the idea of living under political

suzerainty of the Hindus. In South Asia, Hindu Muslim cleavage had taken the shape of civilisational conflict, which was fanned by the Wahabi and Deobandi Sunnis, and the British Home Office.

This aspect of civilisational conflict, still persisting in a large section of the South Asian Muslims, was not emphasised by the IB trainers. To them it was another façade of ‘communal tension.’ They were wrong in understanding and prescribing the underlying ailment.

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However, the spooky boys of the super secret Technical Laboratory failed to impress me. I possessed a vast library on the various facades of technical intelligence. I was amused to see the rudimentary wireless sets (some manufactured by the IB technicians at mount joy), clandestine cameras, miniature radio transmitters and a few bugging tools flaunted by the so-called experts as the main tools of technical intelligence. These gadgets were shown to us like the magicians pulling out an occasional rabbit from their hats. I don’t think anyone emerged out of the classrooms much wiser about the application of electronic gadgets for generating intelligence. Our conducted visit to the Technical Laboratory was equally frustrating. The IB was simply not oriented to the needs of acquiring sophisticated gadgets to the aid of intelligence generation.

The leisurely rhythm of operations was broken much later T. V. Rajeshwar, and the process received a boost from M. K. Narayanan. He gave a quantum push to the concepts of satellite communication, computer application and use of sophisticated electronic gadgets. I had the rare opportunity of heading the technical wing of the IB under him, though under queer circumstances. I was the first and perhaps the last IPS officer to practically head that fascinating wing of intelligence generation.

Later as a field officer I realised that the IB had made the cardinal mistake by totally segregating the general intelligence officers from the technical officers, who were also trained in police and intelligence subjects and segregated later from the human intelligence (HumInt) generating cadre. They functioned in isolation, even when located under the same roof at a remote border post. They owed allegiance to different bosses. The general intelligence officers followed their own hierarchy and the technical boys lined up behind their spiral formation of leadership, which hinged on the wisdom and foolishness of the top man.

This anomaly continues even today. The technical wing has been made to suffer by the generalists simply because they have been denied the opportunity of experiencing the glamorous world of HumInt generation. They still remain behind the shadows. Only a few enterprising senior officers of the IB draw upon their tremendous potential in generating and denying intelligence. They simply come to the ‘aid’ of the generalists. They are not encouraged to delve into the realm of R&D and make innovative contribution to the intelligence fraternity. IB continues to follow the Jurassic policies of technical intelligence generation.

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The basic training was a mixed bag; mostly mundane but some aspects were really world class. The training had helped me in overcoming the policeman’s hangover that I carried to Delhi from the police training college. It dawned upon me that I was supposed to deal with human assets, break them down to raw clay and reformat them as intelligence agents. That required expertise in human psychology, deep knowledge of a given target situation and balanced application of the skills of diplomacy,

bribing, corrupting, blackmailing and exploitation. Only intimate knowledge of the people, the terrain, the socio-economic peculiarities, and the dreams and frustrations of the people could arm an intelligence operative with superior weapons. Application of the golden rule that everybody has a price appeared to be fallacious as some human assets were not sale. I understood this truth a little later in my intelligence career.

However, I felt that the concept of intensive training on a group of targeted people in a target location was not imparted at the Anand Parvat facility. Threadbare analysis of the people of Manipur, for instance, was never explained to me when I was suddenly called upon to take charge of the Manipur unit of the IB soon after completion of my training. All that I faced was the stony face of K.N. Prasad and the babbling wordplay of my desk in charge, V. K. Kaul. I was only armed with bookish knowledge, hope, and my charming wife, who did not hesitate to accompany me to the wilderness of Manipur.

I strongly felt that after an officer is earmarked for posting to a new territory he should be made to undergo a rigorous training on all conceivable aspects of that area. These were never taught at the Anand Parvat facility and these aspects are not taken care of even today. An officer is catapulted to a new location and is supposed to educate himself through avalanches of failure and rare pinnacle of success. However, education nuggets are more in abundance outside the factory of knowledge, the classrooms and wise advisories of the senior officers. I knew that Anand Parvat was just the beginning of my thirst; I would require more exposé to the wonderful world of intelligence amidst kicking and pulsating people.

At the end of the penultimate day of my training at Anand Parvat I was ordered to report to Mr. K.N. Prasad for understudying the branch that handled the Indian North East. If I exactly recall I had entered the portico of the massive palace with great trepidation. I was advised by some of my seniors that Mr. Prasad was a man-eater and he had the capability of demolishing me in two seconds. His reputation for curt conversation, use of unpolished language and his addiction to work had travelled far and wide in the organisation. I knew that my days of innocence were over and I had to pass through the eye of a very difficult needle.

K. N. Prasad wasn't the person who could put a visitor at ease by a disarming smile. His scheming eyeballs rotated in synchronisation with the turns and twists of his facial muscles that could hardly be described as a piece of smile.

His eyeballs licked me up and his right palm stretched slightly to convey his order to take a seat.

"So, you are the hero of Naksalbari!"

"I'm no hero sir. I happen to be trained there and did a stint of policing duty that had almost exploded on my face."

I replied as soberly as I could.

"And that explosion has thrown you on to my lap. Isn't it?"

"I'm not sure sir. But I enjoyed what I did."

"Let me see," he pressed a bell and ordered his duty constable, "Inform Kaul *sahab* to come in."

Mr. Kaul, I mean Vinod Kumar Kaul, a rotund Kashmiri, rushed in like a gravel yard mini-whirlwind with a bunch of paper loosely hanging from his hand. The *pan* (betel leaf) stuffed in his mouth scattered a shifting aroma of scented tobacco.

"So Mr. Kaul you have a pseudo Kashmiri here. He is a Dhar but is a Bengali."

"Glad to meet you."

Kaul extended his free palm; I feel it was the left one, to greet me. The handshake was warm but his eyes glinted with a naughty smile.

“Now train him in tribal affairs. Teach him everything about the Jharkhandis (protagonists of a new Jharkhand State) and the North Eastern tribal groups.”

“It would be my pleasure.” Kaul spoke as if he was a classroom pundit and his tongue was a cane.

The brief meeting was over in five minutes and I followed V.K.Kaul to his cubicle. I didn't have a desk to myself. Kaul dumped a lot of official notes and summaries on the Jharkhand movement, which had started rocking the states of Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa. I was supposed to read and digest the history of the Santhal, Munda, Oraon, and Ho tribal people of the most backward region of India and prepare a summary of the movement. The other task assigned to me was to prepare a digest on the subversive activities of the Church in the tribal belts.

Kaul had no time to brief me. He was a man in hurry. He talked incessantly like monsoon torpor, which was often laced with choicest slang, abuses and caustic comments about individuals and issues.

He often darted to the quarter inch wall map of Nagaland, Mizo Hills, Manipur and the adjoining areas of East Pakistan, Burma and China. He carried in his pocket and ear crevices a couple of coloured pencils, which he used to mark the location of the latest violent incident, caused by the Naga and Mizo rebels. He was fond of drawing a hand sketch on the raw field report before he processed and put it up to his Deputy Director, K.N.Prasad. Besides the Nagas and Mizos, he was preoccupied with two other subjects close to his heart, homeopathy and lawsuits.

My tango with the Chhotanagpur tribal was frequently disturbed by the fond and slang-enriched requests from Kaul to brew some coffee. We had a couple of coffee breaks during which Kaul regaled us with choicest vocabulary. We often had tumultuous luncheon breaks and the Deputy Directors graced the Saturday luncheon gathering too. That offered a fine opportunity to exchange views, to gather vital information about the happenings in the Company, and to have very rare peeps into the cooking pots of some hated and a few loved officers.

I didn't learn much under the tutelage of Prasad and Kaul. They were described as giants in their fields of specialisation. However, they were selfish giants and had very little time to train a green pigeon like me. In fact, I came to know that the concept of on-job training did not exist. A new comer was released into the troubled water like a scared fry. He was supposed to learn the tricks of survival in the hardest way and work his way up partly through his work, partly by pandering to the seniors and greatly by the grace of the law of universal uncertainty.

When posted at the analysis desk a raw officer was supposed to follow the previous reporting patterns, mimic the IB brand of the English language and go by the advice of the junior drafters and idiosyncrasies of the seniors who took extreme pains in putting commas, semicolons, dotting the Is and cutting the Ts. A draft report to the government was corrected and re-corrected till someone at the top was satisfied that his brand of English would be comprehensible to the consumers.

At that vital point of time of my likely allocation to an analysis desk someone at the top hinted that R. N. Kao, the head of the recently created R&AW, wanted to see me and evaluate if I was the correct material for posting to Dacca. I believe P. N. Banerjee, the senior IB officer in Calcutta, had suggested my name. The Kashmiri with piercing eyes and razor sharp mind talked to me rather informally for over an hour. I was given a hint that I should prepare to join his outfit and get ready to move to Dacca.

It was difficult to suppress such electrifying news. The reigning chief of the IB and the chief of Indira Gandhi's external intelligence chief did not enjoy the best vibes. Moreover, after the creation of R&AW certain IB officers were allocated to the new organisation. There was a sort of gold rush amongst the young IB officers from the IPS and non-IPS pool to rush to the new organisation. It

offered the lure of foreign posting and the glamour associated to it. Only the blue-eyed boys and the wards of the relatives and associates were given preference. I was the only unknown commodity who was almost falling through the roof on the platter of the R&AW. Several eyes were squinted and lips squirmed over the 'magic' pulled out by a greenhorn like me.

That had probably sealed my fate. On a fateful Saturday luncheon gathering K.N. Prasad declared that I was selected for posting to the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau at Imphal, the capital of the former princely state of Manipur. I was given only seven days to wind up my Delhi establishment and proceed to Imphal, initially for a look see visit and to take over the remotest outpost of the IB by the first week of January 1969.

We did not know how to react to the new twist of event. I made some vain effort to ascertain the status of my possible posting to Dacca. M. I. S Iyer advised me that I should better proceed to Imphal. The boss man was not happy over my meeting R. N. Kao and I should forget the matter as a non-event.

It wasn't a normal practice with the IB to post out a newcomer to a sensitive and troubled outpost. The officers were allowed to grow some roots in Delhi before they were given independent charge of a heavy station. I explored the feasibility of getting my posting to Imphal scuttled and even thought of approaching Triguna Sen, my wife's grandfather, and Ashok Sen, whom I got to know through his father in law, Justice S. R. Das. Sunanda advised me correctly and said that I should accept the posting gracefully. The coming events should not be opposed without understanding the contours of the future that lay hidden in the womb of time.

I fretted and fumed for a while and finally asked V.K. Kaul to give me some study materials on Manipur, Nagaland and the rest of the North East. He was generous and I transferred my focus from the tribals of Chhotanagpur and the '*subversive Christian Missionaries*' to the tribals of the North East. That shifting of focus had later become a love for the region and the troubled people of the North East. My love affair with the North East had further deepened as I started growing with the people and their problems.

I was banished from Delhi, for no fault of mine, and I could get a posting back to the IB headquarter only after a decade. I did not dare meeting R. N. Kao thereafter on my own initiative, though he invited me to discuss certain events in the Punjab much later in my career.

FIVE

TO THE LAND OF JEWELL

*You're an epitome of great energy; only the brave dare seeking you,
You're a collage of piety and harshness;
You're both woman and man.
You rattle man's life with unbearable struggle.
From your right hand you pour nectar,
You smash the goblet by your left;
Resonant challenge reverberate your playground,
You bless the lives of the brave, who are entitled to greater things of life, With insurmountable
struggle. (Unauthorised free translation)*

Ode to Earth (Patraput).

Rabindra Nath Tagore

We left Delhi on the 19th December, 1968, just a little over 5 months after reporting to the IB. Sunanda stayed back in Calcutta with her parents as she was in the family way. I took a shaky and bumpy DC3 flight to Imphal, which made two intermediate halts at Agartala and Silchar.

The reception at Tulihal airport was a low-key affair so also the briefing I received from R.N. Sanyal, the Assistant Director, whom I was supposed to relieve. I was neither introduced to any intelligence asset nor was I given a chance to call on the top bureaucrats and key politicians. The atmosphere in the office, especially the attitude of J.N.Topa, the Deputy Central Intelligence Officer, dampened my spirit. The mud and tin building in the heart of the administrative area of the state was enough to dampen the spirit of a budding intelligence officer. The look-see visit was a frustrating experience. I ended up gathering an impression that the Intelligence Bureau wasn't running its shop professionally. The myth of excellence, at that point of time, hanged in my mind by a very tenuous thread.

On my return to Delhi on the 27, December, I was relieved immediately and directed to take charge at Imphal after availing of only 7 day's joining time. I finally landed at Imphal on January 3, 1969, with the fond hope of taking over charge from Sanyal after a brief overlapping period.

Sanyal had by that time left Imphal on posting to Calcutta. There was no one to hand over charge and brief me about the human assets and intelligence operations. I was thrown at the sea without a life jacket. The only solace that I gathered was the knowledge that one of my cousin sisters and her family lived in Imphal. That was a big consolation, at least for soothing my frayed emotions. I needed that crucial support.

Manipur, battered by Naga and Mizo insurgencies and other militant movements, was on the verge of exploding with astounding ferocity. Delhi had just directed me to walk down the crater and fathom the magma that was about to hit the perceived placid shores of the Loktok lake, the biggest fresh water body that shone like a piece of emerald amidst the paddy greens of the valley and the husky browns of the distant hills.

Manipur, to me, was not a vibrant jewel, as the third scion of the Pandava clan of Mahabharata

fame discovered it. I had to work hard to discover the beauty of the land and its people. By the time I left Manipur in 1972, I knew I had discovered its soul, the jewel of Manipur.

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Manipur was the cradle of my birth as an intelligence operator. I ceased cursing K. N. Prasad and V. K. Kaul and thanked my destiny for pushing a raw ingot into the blazing furnace of Manipur. I realised that fire of adversity alone could not shape me up. The challenge before me was to match the ferocity of the fire in which I was thrown in. Genetically I was not engineered to throwing up hands and wailing for help. Like a field termite I was adept in sizing up the grains of the rock before me and attack it with renewed vigour. I decided, ably encouraged by Sunanda, to take up the challenges and prove that gold could be minted out of the empty mines of King Solomon.

But Manipur of 1968-69 was not an empty mine. The state was infested by Naga and Mizo insurgency and scattered armed struggle by other tribal groups. The Kuki National Assembly, Hmar National Volunteers, Paite Liberation Front fluttered the flags of defiance in the non-Naga hill tracts of Churachandpur, Tengnoupal, Karong, Senapati, and Sugnu areas.

The self-styled Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the contingents of the underground Naga Army operated in the districts (old) of Ukhrul, Mao, Teamenglong, parts of Tengnoupal and Karong. The level of violence was pretty high. The Naga insurgents ran a parallel government in area of influence and the Mizos in the non-Naga tribal pockets.

The Imphal valley, basically inhabited by the Meitei Vashnavites, a stream of Hinduism, had also embarked upon agitational activities. The initial thrust provided by the Manipur Red Guard of Hijam Irabot Singh, a Muscovite Communist and the Meitei State Committee had gathered momentum under the tutelage of the Pan Mongolian Movement and the United National Liberation Front engineered by Arambam Somorendra Singh. Around that time Oinam Sudhir Kumar had formed the Coordination Committee of Manipur under which was established the Revolutionary Government of Manipur (RGM). N. Biseshwar Singh had emerged as the most potent leader of the RGM and a group of about 200 Hindu Meitei youths were allured by the Pakistani Establishment (the ISI) for training in the Sylhet district of East Pakistan.

The fractured political edifices in the Union Territory supplemented the subterranean movement among the Mieties. The Territory was put under a Chief Commissioner in the person of Baleshwar Prasad, a retired member of the Indian Administrative Service, and a person with intricate and intimate connections with a few top bureaucrats from his home province and other acolytes of Indira Gandhi. The Territorial legislative assembly worked under Prasad's patriarchal regime, which was basically aided by mainland Indian bureaucrats with a sprinkling of local elements.

The Manipuris smarted under an impression that Delhi had granted statehood to Nagaland, reorganised the State of Punjab and was about to grant the status to Meghalaya but refused to elevate the status of the former princely state which had maintained its independence, in some form or other, even under the British monarchy. A series of popular agitation for statehood rocked the placid eastern frontier of India. Delhi had turned a deaf ear and relied on the police, para-military, and the Army for meeting the catastrophic explosion of terrorism.

I, designated as the Joint Assistant Director, with the total service length of little over four years, was put in charge of the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIB) Imphal. Presumably the junior most officer around, I was supposed to deal directly with the Chief Commissioner, Chief Secretary, the Inspector General of Police and the Army Generals and the Brigadiers, besides the Chief Minister

and his cabinet colleagues.

The first thing I did was to take a stock of the arsenal that Delhi had provided for meeting the challenges. I think I should make an honest effort to acquaint my readers with the infrastructure I inherited.

The 'eyes and ears' of the Union Government, as I was supposed to be, was assisted by a Deputy Central Intelligence Officer, a Kashmiri gentleman, who was totally ignorant of the Meitei language. He did not raise any intelligence asset, and if I'm correct, he claimed every month a sizeable amount from the secret service fund. I did not ask, why? In those days it was a fashion to think that every Kashmiri was related to the Nehrus.

I inherited Mani Singh, a resourceful Assistant Central Intelligence Officer, grade I (ACIO I) who generated a few peripheral Meitei agents. He honestly scrounged through the Meitei language dailies and produced 'agent reports' in English. I did not object to this. At least I had the advantage of receiving every evening a bunch of papers that reflected the daily press reports on open political activities and some elements of secret report, which could not be covered by the mainland Hindi-speaking officers. They simply did not have access to the Meitei society and the valley Hindus had started abusing any visible mainland Indian as '*mayangs*' (outsiders).

It's not that I was totally devoid of officially appointed intelligence operators. I was amazed by the reach of N. K. Singh, a Vishnupriya Manipuri (a different Vaishnava sect, which spoke a mixed Meitei, Assamese and Bengali language). He generated meaningful assets amongst the valley Hindus and a few Zeliang and Rongmei Naga tribals. Devkishore Sharma, a constable, who normally started drinking bouts at seven a.m., was the most priceless intelligence operator. The puritan Brahmin Kashmiri DCIO suppressed him. I gave him a free hand. The only unconventional price that I paid him, besides the secret service fund, was liberal supply of bottles of rum, which I procured from the Army canteen at subsidised rate. I treated him more as an agent.

The fat Thai looking junior officer Soibam Yaima Singh had opened up for me the closed door to the Meitei society, by bringing me closure to Maharaj Kumar Priyabrata Singh, Rajkumar Madhuryajit Singh, Leishram Lokendra and the chief priests of the Palace temple and the temples at Bishenpur, Thoubal and Moirang.

My driver Mani Singh too had risen to the occasion helping me in generating assets close to Arambam Somorendra and the CONSCOM of Oinam Sudhir.

The most important assets in the Revolutionary Government of Manipur were brought closure to me by Devkishore Sharma, the constable. I did not like his drinking bouts but I understood that brewed alcohol was the only fuel that could propel the Meitei Brahmin.

I must mention that my efforts had inspired Navrang Sharma, a lower division clerk. He had helped in raising very sensitive agents amongst the Meitei underground movements. Even my orderly constable Ibomcha Singh had pitched in.

Within a short period of five months the SIB could boast of having in its honour roll a number of assets from the valley. I opened a new 'Asset Register' to replace the blank old one left by my predecessor.

I received a funny enquiry from my Deputy Director at Kohima, my controlling officer, asking me the necessity of raising all these assets and defraying so much from the secret service fund. I had to put up a lengthy paper to describe the scorched earth that I had inherited and the immediate need for focussing on the emerging Meitei insurgent movement. V. V. Chaubal, the regional boss at Shillong, supported me.

The length and breadth of the valley, about 7000 sq km, was given intelligence coverage from the main station at Imphal with a few Border Check Posts (BCP) and Internal Intelligence Posts (IIP).

The roads were primitive and the transport system almost non-existent. The officers of the SIB scarcely ventured out of Imphal. My Kashmiri DCIO too deserted me and managed a transfer to Delhi when he found that the work termite would not allow him to sleep on piles of unacceptable excuses. He was a paper pusher and had good connectivity with the elites of the ruling ethnic group in Delhi.

I did not miss much, rather I was happy to see that a non-functioning pinion had been removed and I was given the liberty to set up a fresh work-speed. I drew up a roster of about eight available officers, four of them mainland Indians and assigned them territorial responsibilities in the valley. Some of them demurred and a few expressed their concern for physical security. I could not blame the mainland officers either. They were not provided with government accommodation in the safer administrative areas and were forced to rent out homes inside the Meitei localities. Finally I succeeded in locating a big brick and cement house in a nearby locality and five officers and their families were accommodated there. Once free from anxiety of the safety of their families the young '*mayang*' officers did not dither and they walked alongside the full length of the troubled ways in the valley and hill tracts of Manipur.

Delhi's lack of imagination was reflected in the practice of deputing mainland Indians to Manipur on first posting, without equipping them with working knowledge of the language, custom and cultural attributes of the people of the territory. They were supposed to complete three years' mandatory border posting before being pulled out to greener pastures. This was an unproductive practice, a sheer wastage of manpower. But I was left with no other choice but to depend on the young lot, some displayed exemplary courage and determination.

A little bit of research into the history of the Meitei people and their historical relations with the neighbouring Assamese, Bengalis and the British Empire builders gave me to understand that my coreligionists in the valley were more like the Thai people. They were a friendly lot. But they were highly suspicious of all outsiders. Their troubled relationship with the Burmese, steady inflow of the Nagas, Kukis, Chins and other assorted tribals from the Kabow Valley and the Chin Hills area of Burma had made them suspicious of the intentions of the successive governments in Delhi, especially the Governors in Assam and the Political Agents at Imphal.

The spread of Hindu Vaishnavism at the cost of the traditional worship of *Sanamahi* and the *Kangla* had not completely wiped out their ties with the distant Thai lineages. The legends of Arjuna, the third Pandava, and Chintrangada, the enchantingly beautiful and heroic princess of Manipur, had not been able to bring about total assimilation. The sense of alienation was exacerbated by the colonial type administration from Delhi and its British clones, the large contingent of mainland Indian officers. They ruled like colonial masters and paid little attention to the aspirations of the people who had tied the knot with India only in 1949.

The Meiteis suffered from several disabilities. Way back in 1969 they did not have quality educational institutions, professional colleges and infrastructure to generate employment. They were tribal Hindus but were denied the reservation facilities. The Naga and non-Naga youths could afford to get into the All India Services with ease taking advantage of reservation policy. However, the cleverer Meitei boys could hardly compete with the better-equipped youths of mainland India.

Land was in short supply. The hill tribals were allowed to purchase land in the valley. But the valley Hindus were not allowed to acquire landed property in the hills. Pressure on land alienated the

farmers. Unemployment among the rural youth mounted. The urban Hindu youths were not better off either. Denied of the facilities of good education they were neglected in the recruitment of simple white-collar jobs. Most of the government jobs were auctioned to the highest bidders and in most such matters the Indian officers enjoyed the privilege of casting the decisive vote. The place reeked with corruption. Most of the ordinary Indian bureaucrat/technocrat came to Manipur with leaner pockets but went home with fatter ones. It was, for them, indeed a land of jewels.

There was no heavy and medium industry. The small-scale industries were confined to hand looms and a few power looms. A few Indians were encouraged to set up some nondescript industries. One of them was recommended for the Padma award by the Chief Commissioner for his achievement in running a Hume Pipe factory. That was the acme of industrialisation in Manipur.

The '*nupi*' (female) segment of the Meitei society always dominated the economic efforts in the valley, like their sisters in Burma and Thailand. But the sudden influx of '*Marwari*' business houses in the handloom sector had started complicating the market scenario. They made advances to the women weavers, monopolised the supply of yarns and dyes and enjoyed the exclusive rights of marketing the Manipuri products to the rest of India.

The Meitei, suffering from the illusion of past grandeur and a fabricated sense of being cheated into a merger with India could hardly find any other target, but India to blame for their woes. The situation was compounded by the ambience of insurgency in the Naga and Mizo inhabited areas. That violence alone could bend the knees of mighty Delhi was the inevitable lesson drawn by the disillusioned Meiteis. India, the theatre of the philosophy of peace and democracy propounded by Gandhi, had allowed violence to become an integral part of the quasi-democratic means of grievance redressal. The imperialist concept of treating the genuine grievances of the people simply as 'law and order' problems and inability of the system to respond to the peaceful and legal means of democratic agitation had firmly rooted in the minds of the people that the '*sarkars*' (governments) only understood the language of violence. The Nagas got a State only after they took up arms. The Khasis too were granted statehood after being threatened of Pakistan inspired insurgency. In independent India violence had become a part of civic expression. Most Indians had turned violence prone with the progressive failures of the post-independence administration. Anarchy ruled in the name of democracy. These messages were not lost on the Meiteis too.

The other irritating factor was the imperious style of functioning of the Chief Commissioner. He did not hesitate to treat the elected members of the legislative assembly as dirt. He shabbily treated the ministers, often the Chief Minister. He brazenly interfered in the functioning of the elected legislature and treated the powerful vernacular media as the mouthpieces of the valley rebels. Only the sycophants and a coterie of mainland Indian traders were happy with his performance. But Baleshwar Prasad was the blue-eyed boy of a section of the top bureaucracy and a few top cats in the intelligence fraternity. In Manipur he was feared by all and hated by many. I was not supposed to report on the style of functioning of the Chief Commissioner. This was firmly conveyed to me by my Deputy Director at Kohima though the regional boss at Shillong often evinced keen interest in the impact of the working style of Delhi's top man at Imphal. Later I happened to gather that his inquisitiveness was prompted by his not so happy relationship with his colleague back in Delhi, Mr. K.N.Prasad, who was related to the Chief Commissioner.

Whatever it is, I used my understanding of the hapless Meitei society to my advantage for creating penetrating intelligence assets. By August 1969 the SIB had gained some breather and I had gained access to certain inner cores of the gathering cloud over the placid vale of Imphal.

The health of the SIB in the insurgency infested hill tracts was not good either. I inherited a few established posts connected by road and wireless at Ukhrul, Chassad (Burma border) Churachandpur, (Burma border) Mao (Nagaland border) and Moreh, (Burma border). The posts at Jiribam (Assam border), Thanlon (Mizoram border), and Tamenglong (N C Hills border) were not connected by motor-able road but were linked to Imphal by HF wireless. The vital intelligence posts in the insurgency-infested areas were manned by one officer, more often an ACIO II or a Junior Intelligence Officer I and at best of times three constables. The ACIO II in charge of the wireless station did not assist in intelligence generation. He and his counterpart on the general intelligence side lived in watertight domains. They often indulged in turf war, whatever turf they had in the remote and primitive locations.

Naga insurgency was at its peak when I was thrown into the ring to lead a truncated corps of intelligence ‘officers’, primitive communication facilities, restricted mobility and absolute empty bag of technical, electronic, signals, photo and other aids of generating intelligence. The facilities of FAX and Internet were not in vogue and a photocopier was considered a Martian concept. The telephone system was primitive and for a long distance call one had to resort to the imperious ‘important and lightening’ priority. The Telex connection to Delhi was routed through Kohima and very often, especially during the extended monsoon season, the link remained dead. Armed with all these assets and burdens the SIB was supposed to generate intelligence, both tactical and strategic, covering the activities of the Naga and Mizo insurgents and the valley volcano, which was showing tectonic characteristics of an imminent cataclysmic blow up.

Delhi was mainly concerned with the Naga and Mizo bugs. They as well as the Chief Commissioner at Imphal were not prepared to believe that the Meiteis too could wake up and start protesting against their genuine plights and grievances. They rated the Meities much below the Assamese, who were described as ‘*lahe lahe*’ (take it easy) people. It had become rather impossible to convince Delhi that the placid surfaces were rumbling with the bodings of imminent conflagration.

In a battered, singed and threatened society the thin film between genuine and perceived grievances often get obliterated due to continuous neglect and lack of action by the state authorities. The Meiteis suffered from an impression that their king was tricked into signing an agreement with India. They were fearful of the consequences of insurgency in the Naga and Mizo Hills. They loathed the demand for a greater Nagaland. They were deprived of all the benefits of merging with India. The neo-imperial masters, the Chief Commissioner and his band of officers, did not consider the Meities worth of a genuine democratic administration and rapid economic development. Their behavioural patterns were lifted out of the books and diaries of the British political agents and their occupation forces. Continuous neglect often metamorphoses into confrontation and failure to remove the elements that strengthen the ambience of confrontation generally lead to violence. Manipur was not required to copy the tactics of gaining concession through violence from Bengal and Bihar. The next door Nagas, Mizos, Khasis and Garos had already embarked upon the path of violence and as usual the democratic institutions of India had started buckling down under the intense heat of military engagement.

Manipur is a unique example of Indian expertise in allowing the simple democratic aspirations of the people for better political dispensation, economic advancement and cultural assimilation to degenerate into a cult of violence. Assam emulated the Meiteis after about two decades.

In fact, the post independence Indian political and bureaucratic rulers had succeeded in enshrining the cult of violence as a semi-statutory means of grievance redressal. They allowed the genuine

aspirations of the people to be trampled and ignored and subsequently handling the violent venting of the accumulated frustration as a law and order problem. The state governments and the Union ministry of internal affairs had perfected the battle order of deputing police and paramilitary forces to fighting the violent segment of the people, who were, at the first instance, were allowed to choose violent means to express their genuine and perceived grievances over peaceful constitutional means. Somewhere some vested interests in the political and bureaucratic edifices of the country worked assiduously to bury the concepts of constitutional grievance redressing mechanics and promoted the cult of violence. They blindly followed the British attitude in dealing with the post-independent Indians who had assumedly given themselves an elaborate constitution and several layers of legal guarantees. The politicians and bureaucrats simply looted the public exchequer in the name of maintaining law and order. They were neither interested nor capable of addressing the grievances of the people.

This is the widest of the innumerable fault lines of the Indian polity.

SIX

TALE OF THE SHATTERED JEWEL

Hope springs eternal in human breast.

Alexander Pope

My access to the Hindu Meitei society was facilitated by a couple of factors. I belonged to a Bengali Vaishnava family and could sing well some of the traditional ‘*kirtan*’ songs in praise of Lord Krishna and Mahaprabhu Gauranga, around whom the Gaudiya (the tract of Gaud-Bengal) format of Vaishnavism had flourished. The Meities were converted to the Gaudiya format of Vaishnavism. I was given free access to the palace temple and play the ‘*khol*’ (a special percussion drum) that had become an integral part of the *kirtan* format of spiritual songs and the unique format of Manipuri dance.

I used my Vaishnava credential fully to cultivate the elders like Maharajkumar Priyabrata, Rajkumar Madhuryajit, Leisram Joychandra Singh, and M. Deveshwar Dev Sharma, some of the stalwarts of the traditional Meitei society.

Tackling the younger lot was both a fun and fearful experience. They had been contaminated by the ambience of insurgency in neighbouring Nagaland and Lushai Hills. Independence struggle of the neighbouring Chin, Shan, Kachin and White and Red Flag Communists of Myanmar allured them. They were inspired more by the exploits of the Marxist-Leninist Extremists of Bengal and the allegorical exploits of Prince Bir Tikendrajit and the communist revolutionary H. Irabot Singh. They were also inspired by the Meitei revivalist movement, which denounced the merger of Manipur with India. They strived for the revival of the *Sanamahi* worship, restoration of the *Kangla*, the mythological site of the Meitei deities and replacement of the Bengali script with the ancient Meitei script.

It wasn’t an easy job to penetrate the Meitei youths. They were suspicious and fearful of the Indian officials and gradually started hating all the Indians, the *mayangs*, as they liked to call the outsiders. They nursed a grudge that the Bengalis of Assam and the governmental authorities in Gwahati and Delhi had encouraged the Vishnupriya Manipuris (The Meiteis living in Cachar and East Pakistan) as the genuine representatives of the Meitei people.

The cultural conflict was strengthened by the sordid state of affairs of the economy. Manipur, way back in 1968, had very little to boast of its economy. With a high percentage of literacy the youths were denied the opportunity of higher education in general and specialised streams. The affluent sent their children to Shillong, Gwahati and Calcutta for higher education. Scholarships were limited and were distributed to the court jesters of the Chief Commissioner and the wards of the elite.

I was given to understand by certain delicate sources that the caste system among the Meiteis could be exploited easily. The clan of Rajkumars, and Singhs were more obdurate type. They considered themselves having descended from the Thai lineage. The Sharmas, all Brahmins, were considered as Indians of mixed Aryan-Thai stock.

It was difficult to penetrate the ideologically fired Meitei youths. The revolutionary outfits like the United National Liberation Front and the Revolutionary Government of Manipur had been exposed to

the Naga, the Mizo insurgents, and the agents of the Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan, the Pakistan Intelligence Bureau, and the Directorate of Military Intelligence of Pakistan cultivated them.

By the time I settled down, I was greeted by a series of reports from the outpost at Jiribam and assorted reports from my friends in the Zeliagroung Naga and Paite and Hmar tribal communities that the ISI had set up camps for the Meitei youths somewhere in Sylhet. The deal between the Meiteis and the Pakistani intelligence agencies was cemented by Z.Ramyo, a Tangkhul Naga rebel leader, and Thinousille Angami, a self styled Brigadier of the outlawed Naga army. Oinam Sudhir, Arambam Somorendra and N. Bisheshwar were in contact with the Pakistani operators. I was told that 150 Meitei youths had left for East Pakistan for undergoing training.

My reports to Delhi were treated as over reaction of a greenhorn. They as well as the Chief Commissioner and his entourage were not ready to accept my views on the formation of the Revolutionary Government of Manipur and its cadre being trained in East Pakistan. The Inspector General of Police, Madan Gopal Singh, promoted from the ranks, treated my reports as jokes and the Chief Secretary D.G. Bhawe, an IAS Officer from Madhya Pradesh, thought that a greenhorn with only about four years experience was trying to act smart. They dismissed me right away and the Chief Commissioner pulled me up for acting under panic reaction

My immediate boss at Kohima, Mr. M. N. Gadgil, was a good soul. But I must say that he was far from suitable for the job of an intelligence technocrat, that too at a highly sensitive station like Kohima. He was overshadowed by my efficient colleague J.N.Roy and was fortunately assisted by a dedicated band of intelligence operators. The efficient system of the Intelligence Bureau stood between Gadgil and intelligence blackout.

My position was further vindicated by the advance SIB reports about commission of a series of bank robbery and snatching of police weapons by the Meitei ultras.

A daring bank robbery, as forewarned by the SIB, was committed by the RGM youths when I happened to be in Shillong. Mr. V.V.Chaubal, the senior Deputy Director at Shillong, was the supervisory head of all the SIBs in Northeast India. I was in the midst of a meeting with the regional boss when Madan Gopal Singh, the Inspector General of Manipur, happened to call Chaubal. The conversation did not amuse my boss. He called me to a corner and congratulated me for the accurate reports on the activities of the RGM. Nevertheless, he warned about the lurking suspicion of Madan Gopal Singh about my clandestine linkages with the Meitei outlaws. He advised me to scrupulously follow the tradecraft techniques of agent contacting and movements in the valley and in the hills.

“Do you suspect me?”

I asked.

“No. Madan Gopal is basically an inspector of police. He suffers from the wounds of his limitations. An inspector follows a handler if he can't follow the agent. He may compromise your agents.”

“That's reasonable,” I replied, “More than he the Chief Commissioner is very keen to throw me out of Manipur.”

“Why?”

“That's a long story. I hope I'd survive to tell you the story at a later date.”

*

My penetration into the Meitei society was not complete. But my exploration of the fault lines of that society followed unconventional contours. Rishang Keishing, K. Envy, both Tangkhul political

leaders, and K.Kakuthon, president of the Zelangroung Naga Union, rendered valuable services. In me they found a sympathetic shoulder to lean on. In those days of political naiveté the simple tribal politicians treated the SIB chief as the direct representative of the Central Government. The situation has now reversed. The state politicians these days carry fatter suitcases for Delhi politicians and bureaucrats than the paltry amount the SIB reps could pay them way back in sixties and seventies.

A condemned Tangkhul Naga officer, L.Hungyo, suddenly sprang into action and started delivering precious intelligence inputs. I must express my gratitude to a young Hmar tribal youth, Dinglien Sanate, who just passed out of college and spearheaded the Hmar National Volunteer Force. Local officers like Soithang Hmar and Thangkaling Paite assisted Dinglien.

My exploration of the fault lines of the Meitei society paid rewarding dividends. A few top functionaries of the RGM and the UNLF were recruited as paid agents of the Intelligence Bureau. One of them was deputed to East Pakistan with a definitive brief. He returned with conclusive celluloid evidence of training camps run by the ISI at Srimangal and Kulaura in the district of Sylhet. One of the meetings between Oinam Sudhir and an ISI agent called Hashim Chaudhry (surprisingly most of them introduce themselves to Indian agents as Chaudhry) was recorded on tape and delivered to me.

Another top functionary of the RGM, a handsome Brahmin Meitei boy provided me with running commentaries on the policy and strategic formulations of the self-styled government he represented. He was a very sensitive young person. Our meetings normally took place in the outskirts of Imphal town. For such clandestine meetings I did not use my official car. Devkishore Sharma used to escort me to the distant foothills to the east, marshy villages around the Loktak Lake and often to the paddy fields around Kakching, Thoubal and Bishenpur.

Clever though was my unique RGM asset, he was highly ebullient and buoyant and violent in nature. Very often he would resort to prolong drinking binge and in Devkishore he found an open-air bar mate. I had tried to educate both Devkishore and the agent about the ill effects of over indulgence. But I had no illusion in my mind that the frustrated Meitei youths had taken to alcohol and drugs of cannabis origin for escaping to the realm of fantasy. I pitied with them. But I was no messiah. I had a job to do. And as an intelligence operative I had no better weapon than flooding the gullets of the Meitei youths with IMFL, Indian made foreign liquor. As an Indian I rue the option I had taken. I would've not resorted to such tactics if I weren't compelled by the circumstances and my tradecraft had not propelled me to that line of operation..

However, no opportunity to explain the historical imperatives of Manipur being a part of India and the Manipuris playing a greater role in shaping the destiny of the nation was left unexplored. I think I succeeded in puncturing the ideological diaphragm of some of the frustrated and rebellious youths. But I had nothing else to offer to them except some cash and intoxicants. Neither the government in Imphal nor the one in Delhi had adopted definitive programme to walk even a few steps towards meeting the aspirations of the Meiteis, who suffered from a feeling that Delhi customarily responded to violence. It was the best language they understood, in the absence of any other mechanism for grievance redressal.

Coming back to the story of the top RGM functionary and Devkishore Sharma I must admit that Madan Gopal, the redoubtable IGP, certainly succeeded in cornering me. The inspector had a hearty laugh when his old tactics outsmarted me.

It was precisely on July 13, my birthday; I was summoned by Baleswar Prasad to the confines of his sprawling Raj Niwas. He did not believe in the niceties of social etiquette, at least not with his juniors.

“I believe that you're mixed up with the terrorists.”

He charged me like a bull.

“What gives you that impression?”

“How else do you manage to get advance information about their activities?”

“You should feel proud of that,” I replied, “I’m at your disposal. I’m helping your machinery.”

“Introduce some of them to Madan Gopal and R.K. Mohanty.”

The later personality he spoke of was a junior officer of the Intelligence Bureau who helped the Chief Commissioner in administrative matters of the Village Volunteer Force (VVF), a kind of Naga militia raised by the IB and the SSB for fighting the Naga rebels.

“I can’t do that sir.”

“Why?”

“Intelligence assets cannot be shared.”

“They can be snatched away, isn’t it?”

Baleswar Prasad dismissed me with a huge scowl on his face.

That night my birthday party was disturbed by two phone calls. The first one was from Delhi. Mr. K. N. Prasad, the most powerful Deputy Director, reprimanded me for my obduracy and not cooperating with the chief administrator of the territory.

The second call was from S. C. Vaish, the Deputy Commissioner of Manipur Central district.

“Dhar you’re in a jam.”

“What happened sir?”

“Two of your guys are in police custody. They have produced them before me seeking remand order. Come to my place.”

S.C.Vaish, four years senior to me was a perfect gentleman. He was fond of his friends and drinks. I walked down to the next-door residence of Vaish. I was aghast to see my top RGM agent and Devkishore in police custody. Vaish had already downed his usual ounces of Scotch. But he was ever sober. He made the police party wait in an adjacent room. He greeted me with a cigarette and shared the information that Madan Gopal had put a surveillance ring around Devkishore and trapped them in a paddy field when the top RGM functionary was sharing a piece of sensitive information about the intended journey of another 50 Meitei youths to East Pakistan.

“What do I do?”

Baffled as I was I asked Vaish.

“Talk to your man first.”

He asked me to hide behind the curtains and directed one of the police officers to produce Devkishore first.

Devkishore horrendously smelt of stale Sekmai (a local brew). His brief account rattled me. The police had compromised the top RGM agent and they contemplated to register a couple of cases of robbery and a case of murder against him.

A compromised agent was a dead agent. For all professional matters he was lost to me. I was more worried about unscrupulous Madan Gopal. No one could prevent him from spreading the word about the infiltration of the RGM, the UNLF and the Pan Mongolian Movement by the Intelligence Bureau. He could even stoop down to the abyss of treachery by disclosing my identity to the rebel Meitei youths. That would lead to serious security hazard to Sunanda and me and security of the other operations of the IB.

I requested Vaish to release Devkishore and direct police not to press any charge against him. Regarding the RGM youth I requested him to be lenient. He arranged my exclusive meeting with the agent during which I promised all helps to him, including financial assistance to his mother.

This small gesture won a reprieve for Sunanda and me. From the confines of Imphal jail he smuggled out a letter, which advised me to meet two important individuals of the RGM and PMM. They, he said, would cooperate with me and remove all possible misgivings. For reasons of security and propriety I don't want to name those two individuals, who later climbed to high political positions. They were indeed helpful. The Meitei insurgent outfit did not target Sunanda and me and we continued to have access to the Meitei society.

That night I skipped my birthday party and spent three hours in drafting a cipher to Delhi and Kohima about my meeting with the Chief Commissioner and the neutralisation of a top asset of the IB by Manipur police and compromise of one of the IB officers. They advised me to be tactful. I received the benign advices gracefully but failed to understand how I could be tactful with a crude police officer.

Perfection in intelligence tradecraft is a chimera. Even the slyest spymaster often leaves behind unrefined fissures that can be exploited by his adversaries. There is no near perfect mechanism for agent meeting. Such meetings often take place between the agent and his handling officer. Very often a cut out is used for establishing physical contact with the agent. Meetings are conditioned by the geographical features, population complex, and availability of secured meeting places. I took adequate measures to ensure safety of my agent meetings and that of my officers.

I did not develop personal hostility towards Baleswar Prasad, who, I was later informed by reliable friends, was a close relative of K. N. Prasad. Sunanda advised me to eat the fire and adopt a conciliatory approach. Her views were simple. I could not afford a fight with a cruel crock while sharing the waters with him.

I went by her advice and called D. G. Bhawe, the Chief Secretary, S.C.Vaish and K.S.Baidwan, an IAS officer and my service contemporary. Bhawe guzzled a couple of bottles of beer and finally opined that too smart a central intelligence officer was unsuitable for too dumb an Inspector General of Police and too bossy a Chief Commissioner.

"What is your advice? Don't you think the central IB and the state police can't afford to cross swords?"

"I agree," Bhawe opined after emptying his fifth bottle of beer, "In government service a junior cannot afford to be smarter than his senior. Place your machinery at the disposal of Madan Gopal."

Vaish winked at me and whispered that the beer inside Bhawe's stomach had the better of his judgement. Baidwan too chipped in and acclaimed Bhawe's decision.

"Come to my office tomorrow," Bhawe pronounced, "I'll draw up a proposal for better coordination between the IB and the state police."

I did not follow up his advice, because I knew he would either forget the evening's proceedings or piss it out at some point of his numerous visits to the loo.

Manipur police was not hostile to me. T.J.Quinn, an Anglo-Indian police officer from Madhya Pradesh, balanced out the crafty personality of Madan Gopal. Our operational vibes in the hill districts of Manipur were excellent and we forded many a sticky situation together. His prescription was nothing extraordinary. He just wanted me to share the operational intelligence with him, followed by a written communication to the IGP and the Chief Commissioner. It worked perfectly. Madan Gopal hardly took interest in hill insurgency. He was busy in raising tantrums that IB did not cooperate with him.

I did not face any hostility from the political breed. Rather they were eager to keep the 'eyes and ears of the Centre' i.e. me in good humour.

The situation was vastly different way back in 1968-69. The politicians and the bureaucrats hadn't yet found the open sesame mantra into the national treasury. Most of them depended on the lowly SIB representatives for monetary help, tactical support and for building bridges with the political bosses and the top bureaucrats in Delhi. The situation has now reversed. The local political bosses like their counterparts in Delhi and elsewhere in India, have found the open sesame keys and are in a position to shame some of the millionaire barons of industry. Now, I understand, they are not required to pamper the local SIB station chief. They can shop around in Delhi, right from the top political to the chick bureaucratic shopping mall and spend as much as they like. They arrive in Delhi with suitcases and go back with political support and plan and non-plan budgetary grants and aids. Most of these allocations, even a blind person can perceive, travel straight to the private coffers of the adventurers and fortune hunters. That's how the development activities are implemented in India to remove poverty and to bring the people up to civilised standard of living!

Whatever it is, our new strategy of penetrating the state administration worked fine. We started inviting almost all the key officials and selected politicians over for drinks and dinner. It helped us in winning over a large number of friends and sympathisers that counterbalanced the weighty manoeuvres of the IGP. Picking up from there I succeeded in rebuilding assets in and around the police HQ and several key departments of the government of Manipur. Thereafter, I did not starve for advance warning from my 'friends' in the administration and the police force. The expenses were borne from the secret service funds of the IB. The spirit and liquor came cheap from the Army canteens and way back in Manipur of 1968-69 things were dirt-cheap.

Though shameful, I must admit that perforce I had to create human assets inside Manipur administration with two objectives: to warn me about the motives of the IGP and to gather information about linkages between some government officers and the hill and valley insurgents. The gamble paid off handsomely.

I strongly believe that generation of some such assets even in the context of present day security operations is absolutely necessary, especially in the age of coalition and quick changing governments. The IB should not stop its hunt for the mafia in the back alleys of Mumbai and Delhi, but also inside the political infrastructure just next to the chairs of the President and the Prime Minister. Many such mafia turned political operators like to operate from under the shadow of the lamp itself. Most of them and their bureaucratic aides prefer to operate under the protection of the constitutional system and legal framework.

This is, however, a sad commentary on the state of cooperation and coordination between the state and the central intelligence agencies. We were deprived of the opportunity of forming a common axis. The system continues to suffer from such defects in spite of formation of the National Security Council and multi-agency intelligence sharing efforts.

In fact, the legal brains, bureaucratic pundits and the saner political elements should initiate process of achieving better coordination between the Central>Central and Central>State intelligence organisations. Most of the Intelligence and Security organisations, including those of the Armed Forces work in isolation and the intelligence fraternity guards their secrets like a *baniya* (trader) guards his black assets. The present exchange and coordination mechanism is eyewash. The issue can only be resolved through proper legislation by the Parliament making these organisations accountable to the nation and its people. Otherwise we have to face many Purulias, Kargils and Hill insurgencies. This cannot be achieved by establishing Committees.

The corrupt and scared minds often imagine enemies knocking their souls. Such fears arise out of guilt consciousness. They often generate insurmountable difficulties for perceived enemies if they happen to hold positions of power. My tango with the Territorial government did not end with the RGM episode. The atmosphere of confrontation continued to dog me. Such ghost-enemy seekers generated the heat over two major incidents.

The Village Volunteer Force (VVF), a kind of militia raised by the IB and the Special Security Bureau (SSB), was bank rolled from the secret service fund of the Intelligence Bureau. The Chief Commissioner (CC) controlled the purse and defrayed all expenses through the skeletal administration that functioned under his strict personal control. I received a monthly cheque from the IB that I encashed and handed over the money to the CC. He maintained the account and furnished a simple utilisation certificate that I forwarded to the IB headquarter.

A few nasty incidents of overrunning of the VVF camps by the Naga rebels in the districts of Ukhrul, Tamenglong and Mao and desertion of some VVF volunteers raised an alarm. I was directed by Delhi to enquire into the matter independently and submit a report directly to the Joint Director X.

My enquiry took me and Sunanda to the interiors of the insurgency infested Naga areas of Manipur. I was immensely helped by Rishang Keishing (former Chief Minister), K.Envy, Peter Tangkhul, Asoli Mao, K.Kakuthon, and Mono Moyal, the leading figures of the Naga community. We generally camped in the village schools and offered crates of rum to the '*khullakpas*' (village chiefs), contributed financial assistance to the village church and often joined the dance parties and other festivities. This helped us developing rapport with the villagers and creating strings of informers.

The village chief of Soraphung in Ukhrul showered a rare honour on Sunanda and me. He adopted us as his son and daughter-in-law. He wrapped us with the traditional Naga shawls and allowed us to sip *madhu* (rice beer) from the *khullakpa's* cups, curved out of juniper wood. Sunanda was offered the honour of cutting the rice cake cooked inside a fat bamboo stem. It tasted strange but we succeeded in controlling our facial muscles and managed to hang smiles on.

Over a period of month I gathered a bagful of data of mismanagement by the VVF officials. My report inexorably brought out the fact that there existed a sinister nexus between the Chief Commissioner and R.K. Mohanty, the IB officer on deputation to the VVF. Between them they were draining the VVF largesse deep down to their private coffers.

On my recommendation Delhi created a post of Security Commissioner who was supposed to look after the VVF matters and all other security operations. Mr. M. Ramunny, a former officer of the Royal Air Force, and an inducted officer to the IAS had joined the government of Manipur as the first Security Commissioner. Ramunny was a straightforward and no-nonsense army man. He shared with me plenty of concrete evidences of misdeeds and misappropriation of the secret service fund by the VVF authorities.

My reports to Delhi did not take time to reach the Chief Commissioner. He brought a counter charge against me that I had interfered with the border pillars between India and Burma in Churachandpur and Moreh sectors. The charges were vague and undefined.

The villagers inhabiting the territory on either side of the international border survived on '*jhoom*' (shifting) cultivation. They burnt portions of the forests and sowed rice, millet and maize. The village chiefs often selected the '*jhoom*' spots behind the back of the district administration. In the process they tampered with the border pillars and pushed those back and forth to suit their yearly cultivation

cycle. The SIB had taken cognisance of these reports and had kept Delhi informed. The Chief Commissioner too was kept into the picture.

But he did not mind stabbing me from the back.

I had negotiated the surrender of the entire command and personnel of the 9th and 10th battalions of the underground Naga Army, which operated in the districts of Ukhrul, Tengnoupal and parts of Churachandpur. The negotiations were done under difficult circumstances with help of a Naga lady who had fallen in love with one of my constables. She happened to be the sister of one of the commanders of the outlawed Naga army battalion. Sunanda helped me a lot in cultivating that lady. Saimi (not real name) had free access to our home and Sunanda did not hesitate to make her comfortable in our drawing and dining room.

After prolonged correspondence Delhi gave clearance to conclude the operation and make the Naga army units to surrender to the Chief Commissioner. I was in favour of their surrender to the GOC 8 Mountain Division located at Zakahma. General Zorawar Bakshi was sounded and he welcomed the idea. But Delhi was adamant on the surrender to be taken by the Chief Commissioner. I ritually reported to the local boss and informed him that the surrender ceremony would be organised on 14th August, a day before the Independence Day celebrations at Chapkikarong, a foothills village.

I was woken up from sleep on the night of August 13 by the constable who married Saimi. He had a strange story to tell. A large contingent of the VVF and Manipur Rifles had surrounded the camping ground of the 9th and 10th battalions of the Naga Army and took them by surprise. They arrested the commanding officers and a few soldiers along with their armoury. The armoury inventory was impressive. It consisted of 5 Light machine Guns, 6 rocket launchers, 20 carbines and 25 assorted rifles. Could I help, he asked? I could not help as Delhi turned a deaf ear to my pleadings to intervene and put appropriate words to the Chief Commissioner.

Sunanda and I were shocked by the turn of events. For the first time I found her swinging between faith and fate. She even suggested that I should seek reversion to my state cadre, West Bengal. With little more than four years service behind me I too felt confused. To fight against a Marxist minister was an act of tactless impudence. To face Prasad was simply an act of hara-kiri. His scimitars were reputedly sharper than normal departmental disciplinary action and he happened to be a relative of the Chief Commissioner.

I had no doubt in the professional expertise of Prasad. I only hoped that his stay with the CC would not vitiate his judgement. I believe he had a series of meetings with the IGP, the Chief Secretary and a few other officials. The Chief Minister of the Union Territory of Manipur did not leave the opportunity to call on the direct representative of Delhi.

K .N. Prasad visited my humble office. He interrogated me for over two hours and pumped out all that he wanted to hear. He also interrogated a few junior officers over the allegations of the Chief Commissioner. Finally he expressed a desire to see my wife at my residence just across the road.

Sunanda was aware that Prasad was trained in the same course as her father was. She did not leave any gap in making the terse social visit a cordial one. Finally she asked him to grace us by attending a dinner at our residence.

“How can I have dinner with you young lady when I’m supposed to conduct an enquiry against your husband?”

Prasad replied in his inimitable bullish style.

“How is it that you are a house guest of a person who is a party to the controversy?”

Sunanda spoke out in her usual spirited way. I was surprised by her reply and the choice of words.

“Aren’t you the daughter of Satyen?”

Prasad asked Sunanda about her father.

“Yes. But it has nothing to do with my request. We’ll be glad if you have dinner with us.”

Prasad rolled his big eyeballs for a while and broke into a roaring laughter. That was the first and last time I saw him laughing so loudly.

“Fine, young lady. I’d be honoured to be your house guest.”

Later, before boarding the flight for Calcutta Prasad called me to a corner and talked in a measured tone.

“Look, this man has good connections with the top home ministry officials and a couple of ministers. Delhi is a melting pot. We in the IB are not sure about the attitude of the Prime Minister. She is visiting the North East next month. Cooperate silently with the CC. I hope the storm would subside soon.”

“You can send me back to my state if the IB feels that I’m in the wrong.”

“Shut up. You’re doing an excellent job. Keep it up.”

Prasad left me more confused. As a greenhorn in the service I was yet to leave past my world of accountability, which was painted in black and white. I had just started learning the tricks of filtering the events around me through the prism that brought out several hues of colours. In that world there was no event horizon between one colour and the other. It took me several years to understand the complicated colouration of human character. Manipur, in effect, taught me to start pursuing my ‘personal agenda’ in matters related to promotion of my professional edges and to look forward to my political moorings. The Intelligence Bureau had failed to notice this transformation in a key field operator.

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With the bizarre enquiry behind us we decided to cool off a little bit at the lonely *dak bungalow* (rest house) at Mao, situated under the Zapfu Hills, the tallest peak in the vicinity of the village of Angami Zaphu Phizo, the Naga leader.

Mao fascinated me for a number of reasons. Sunanda and I enjoyed the privilege of taking a leisurely walk up the hills towards the Zapfu and down the hills to Ruvunamei, Kalinamei village clusters and sit down below Mao Songsong church and see the village belles working terraced paddy fields. We were not afraid of the Naga rebels. In those golden days the Naga rebels, so also the Meitei militants observed strict codes of warfare. They did not attack the civilians and hardly disturbed a lady. An Indian traveller, alone or with a lady companion was more secure in the highly disturbed Naga areas than he was in the streets of Calcutta.

Over and above I had earned the faith of the Mao people through N. Asholi, a teacher turned school inspector and another gentlemen from Ruvunamei, who was the *Midanpeyu* (governor) of the Naga Federal Government. Our friendship transcended professional brief. My understanding that the Nagas are socially more gentle and courteous and a village guest is often treated with Biblical courtesy had instilled a unique confidence in me.

For the two blissful days the village dance group and a mammoth feast in the Kalinamei church compound relaxed us. Sunanda was asked by the village chief to prepare a Bengali style fish curry, which he said, he had tasted long back when he volunteered as a porter to the advancing Indian National Army. Chief Npfrumo (not real name) cherished his memory of the days he worked for the Indian liberation forces. He produced a huge quantity of rainbow trout and between Sunanda and me we managed to dish out a fish curry laced with strong mustard sauce.

A surprise gift came next morning when Ms. Ngaperimi (not real name) walked up to the *dak bungalow* and handed over a letter from a self-styled Colonel of the 13th Battalion Naga Army. The Colonel thanked us for the fish curry and expressed that the ‘curry street’ should be the better way for resolving the Naga tussle. I was foxed. I had no idea that the dreaded Naga Army Colonel too was present in the feast.

We were physically and spiritually relaxed. But the charm of the forested hills and the primitive villages was broken early next morning when a messenger from Kohima knocked at our door. He carried the order for my immediate return to Imphal and attend the security briefing meeting at the Raj Niwas, in which a senior officer from IB headquarter was to take part. The most important occasion was the proposed visit of Indira Gandhi to Imphal on September 23, 1969.

SEVEN

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*Hypocrisy can afford to be magnificent in its promises; for never intending to go beyond promises,
it costs nothing.*
Edmund Burke

There was nothing to be happy about the security scenario. Both the Imphal Valley and the surrounding hills were on fire.

The Meitei had not only unfurled the flag of revolt under the banners of the Pan Mongolian Movement, the Revolutionary Government of Manipur and the United National Liberation Front, they had also embarked upon a series of peaceful and democratic agitation over the demand of Statehood status for Manipur. Merged with India in 1949 the former princely state was still administered as a Union Territory by a Chief Commissioner, in the same style as the British agents did in the thirties and forties. A section of the Meitei people was yet to accept the merger. Their arguments were woven around the facts that the king of Manipur was coerced to sign the merger agreement at Shillong under duress, that he was a constitutional head and had no right to sign away the sovereignty of the state and that there was no subsequent ratification of the agreement by the state assembly and the council of Ministers.

The ministry formed by the Praja Shanti Sabha was dissolved and a Chief Commissioner was imposed on Manipur rather brutally. Manipur's interests were ignored and it was relegated to a Part C State.

The neighbouring Nagas were treated differently. The Naga Hills and Tuensang Area was inaugurated by the President of India as the 16th State of the Union of India on December 1, 1963. The developments in Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills too sent out messages that Delhi was preparing to create another state out of the existing political geography of Assam. That status was finally accorded in 1972. Himachal Pradesh and Haryana too were carved out of united Punjab after 1965 war with Pakistan, leaving a truncated a Punjabi Suba to the sulking Sikhs.

The Meiteis were hurt when the States Reorganisation Commission ignored their pleas and the proud kingdom was assigned the Union Territory status with Territorial Council, which, in fact, was made to work as doormat of the Chief Commissioners.

The agitation for statehood had grown virulent over years and to it were added some fresh revolutionary tinges by the Meitei militant groups and the ambience of violence prevailing in the neighbouring Nagaland, Naga areas of Manipur and the Mizo Hills.

Indira Gandhi was the second Prime Minister to visit Manipur. Her father visited the Part C State way back in 1950 along with the Burmese prime minister U Nu, during which an agreement was signed to cede the Kabow Valley to Burma, which was in de facto Burmese possession but on which Manipur had a de jure historical claim. The Meiteis had a historical and sentimental attachment to the valley that ran deep into the fertile plains of Burmese Chin hills.

Indira was a suspect in their eyes. They had learnt to hate her representative at Imphal Raj Niwas.

The Congress Party government headed by M. Koireng Singh too was in trouble. He had failed to distance himself from the Raj Niwas ruler and his coterie of officers. Koireng Singh, a former associate of the Indian National Army, believed that he was built with the same stuff as P. S. Kairon in Punjab and B. C. Roy in West Bengal was made of. He, however, did not fail to assess the mood of the people. The All Manipur Students Union, a powerful youth body, had already given him notice. A few ministerial colleagues and a couple of legislators were on the verge of revolting against his leadership. They wanted a change.

Politically Manipur suffered from chronic instability, since the days of Manipur Territorial Council. Though Haryana had earned the dubious reputation of a state of *ayarams and gayarams* (chronic defectors), it's Manipur, which suffered most for the hungry political jackals. They switched beds at the spin of coins and the very scent of the spoils of office.

The tenuous majority Congress government formed by M. Koireng Singh after several rounds of horse-trading stood on the foundation of treachery and betrayal. Another round of defection rocked the fragile ministry and the opposition headed by Y. Yaima Singh tabled a no confidence motion, which was admitted for discussion on September 24, 1969.

The mood in the valley was dark. The statehood agitation had entered a crucial stage. The ranks of the All Manipur Students Union (AMSU), the All Party Statehood Demand Committee and other organisations were infiltrated by the elements of the Meitei State Committee, CONSOCOM, UNLF, RGM, Pan Mongolian Movement, the Pan Mongolian Youth League and all reckonable major and minor political forces.

The valley revolutionaries were not prepared to mount physical assault on the PM. But they were determined to exploit the statehood agitation to the fullest extent. My agents could not ferret out any intelligence to support that there was a conspiracy to assassinate Indira Gandhi. Such later claims were concocted around the events of September 23. The discordant notes, however, produced a unified symphony. Indira Gandhi wasn't welcome to Manipur, until she decided on the statehood issue.

The hills were already bleeding despite sustained military and para-military operations. The ambience of insurgency was buttressed by the demand of creation of a greater Nagaland with the merger of the Naga inhabited areas of Manipur and Assam. The Manipuri elements in the NNC, NFG and the Naga Federal Army made it clear that Indira Gandhi's proposed visit to Ukhrul was not welcome. The underground followers of A.Z.Phizo were determined to stage an impressive show.

The IB representative, Sudhin Gupta, a senior Deputy Director, landed at Imphal as a single person advance security liaison officer to study the security arrangements made for the visit of Indira Gandhi to Imphal and Ukhrul. Gupta presented a detached look, not really interested in the intricate security requirements for the high profile visit. I found him unfit for the job.

I was kept out of the formal security liaison meetings. But the copies of my teleprinter messages to Delhi and those of my written dispatches on the possible law and order situation were shared with the IGP, the Chief Secretary, the Security Commissioner, M. Ramunny, and DIG T.J. Quinn as well as the commanders of the 57th and 59th Brigade at Churachandpur and Leimakhong respectively.

My efforts were rewarded by a terse call from the Chief Commissioner's office to attend a meeting at his office on September 11. I was fully armed with a detailed assessment on the political situation, tenuous position of the government and threats posed by the valley militants and agitators and the Naga insurgents. The all-important meeting was attended by the top government officials and Brigadier S.K.Sinha, commander of the 56th Mountain Brigade (presently Governor of J&K).

The Inspector and the Deputy Inspector General of Police expressed satisfaction with the police,

paramilitary and military preparations for the VIP visit. Brigadier Sinha briefed the meeting about strengthening of the security parameters in the hill districts of Churachandpur and Ukhrul, where the PM was supposed to pay flying visits.

The Chief Commissioner then took up the notes submitted by me and disagreed with almost all the observations. In fact, he should have not discussed the IB reports in an open meeting. Perhaps the idea of ridiculing me floated at the topmost strata of his mind rather than observing the traditional rule of listening to the spy in total isolation. He blew his top when it came to my objection to the venue of the meeting at Polo Ground, next to the congested market and the Johnston High School. I had pointed out that the only entry to the meeting ground was narrow and there was no clear demarcated exit route to evacuate the PM in the event of an emergency. I had suggested that the public meeting should be organised at the abandoned Koirangei airstrip site.

The dialogue went on something like this:

“You’re interfering into the matters of the state.”

“There’s no interference. I have made a set of suggestions. It’s up to you and Delhi not to accept those.”

“You’re a panic monger. Your reports are paranoiac.”

“I’ve nothing to comment sir.”

“You don’t teach me security with your precious four year service behind you.”

“I agree sir. But length of service does not determine the capability for generating intelligence.”

He dismissed me curtly. I walked out of the Raj Niwas with a resolve to convey verbatim the last evening’s proceedings to K.N. Prasad and Gopal Dutta, the IB Joint Director responsible for the Prime Minister’s security.

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September 23 dawned on the verdant Vale of Imphal with a glorious sun. But the serene rural ambience was disturbed by the milling crowd that had started gathering around the Raj Niwas. They came from all conceivable directions shouting slogans in support of the demand for statehood. By 9 a.m. they clogged all the roads that connected the Raj Niwas to the airport and the meeting ground, next to the Chief Commissioner’s official residence.

The Prime Ministerial cavalcade was received with the usual pomp and ceremony. Gopal Dutta jumped into my van and grilled me on each and every bit of intelligence that I had catered to Delhi.

He was inclined to swim along with the reports of the Manipur government and gave me to understand that the Director Intelligence Bureau too had rated my reports as alarming.

“I hope the events would prove me correct.”

That’s all I could reply to the veteran sleuth, who happened to be a senior of Sunanda’s father.

The truth hit us in the form of stones and assorted non-lethal missiles, just outside the Tulihal airport. The milling crowd, mostly women and youths, tried to obstruct the VIP cavalcade and a small group surged forward ostensibly to submit a memorandum. The PM’s party was escorted out of the confusion and taken to the safety of the Raj Niwas with the use of minor force.

“Things appear to be bad.”

Gopal Dutta commented.

“I suggest you take a round and survey the meeting venue.”

He agreed. I took him out on foot and pointed out that the bamboo barricade installed at the meeting ground was not strong enough to withstand the pressure of the hostile crowd. The lane that the

PM was supposed to take to visit the State Museum and the meeting rostrum was clogged by the agitating mob. The meeting ground was surrounded by a school and business establishment. There was no safe escape route that could be used to evacuate the PM in the event of an emergency. The rostrum faced a couple of four storey buildings barely three hundred yards to the north.

“You’re correct. The venue is not suitable for the PM’s meeting.”

Dutta walked back into the Raj Niwas and sat with the reports I had submitted.

“What about the visit to Ukhrul?”

“She should not go there. According to the latest intelligence input the Naga Army had inducted three new units to the Tangkhul inhabited district to present a show of strength.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’ve no doubt,” I replied with a confident voice, “There is another problem. The Koireng Singh ministry is likely to be toppled in tomorrow’s trial of strength.”

“But the CC says that the situation is under control.”

“I don’t agree.”

I shared with him the information that I had received from my political and professional friends. The opposition was in majority. They were determined to topple Koireng Singh. The PM, I concluded, should have not chosen such a politically volatile time to visit the state.

She too had plenty of political trouble to reckon with in Delhi. The Syndicate’s candidate for the Presidential election, Dr. Sanjeeva Reddy, was defeated by a very narrow margin by Indira’s nominee V.V.Giri. But her battle against the organisational coterie was far from over. The ouster of Morarji Desai, bank nationalisation and other politically oriented fiscal measures that were aimed at giving a pro-poor image to Indira were yet to strengthen her political base. The Kashmiri coterie that had surrounded her was not a universally admired and loved band of kitchen assistants.

Back to Manipur, a few of the rebel Congress leaders and opposition stalwarts were in touch with Nijalingappa, Morarji Desai, and Atulya Ghosh, leaders of the syndicate. The Manipur Congress rebels had gathered the cue from them as well as Indira’s own slogan of ‘conscience voting.’ They were determined to oust Koireng Singh.

Gopal Dutta accepted my assessment and walked into the room where the PM was busy confabulating with the Chief Minister and the Chief Commissioner. He came out in a couple of minutes and told me that the PM was determined to address the public meeting. I opposed the idea. She could only be taken to the Polo Ground with use of force and the frenzied mob wouldn’t take that kindly. They could even harm the PM. But Indira Gandhi was an inimitable person. And nobody had the courage to counsel her to the contrary.

The combined force of the police and the Central Reserve Police opened baton charge and cleared the short stretch of the lane that connected the Raj Niwas with the Polo Ground. Draped in a saffron *sari* she climbed the rostrum and started addressing the gathering in her usual shrill voice. The crowd surged forward demanding statehood. The bamboo barricaded wilted. Gopal Singh, the Superintendent of Police, and the IGP Madan Gopal stood like frozen logs. The police force started falling back in panic.

Gopal Dutta dragged me, went down to the IGP and the SP, and implored them to direct the police to use force for deterring the mob from storming the rostrum. Gopal Singh, a Manipuri officer, looked lost. Gopal Dutta asked him and Madan Gopal to regroup the police contingent and charge back the advancing mob. In the meantime he climbed the rostrum and helped Indira’s security officer to evacuate her to the safety of the Raj Niwas after R.D.Kapur, a young IAS officer, dispersed the hostile mob with another round of baton charge. Police fired from their muskets and the crowd

retaliated by burning the jeep of the IGP and killing a CRPF sepoy. The pandemonium continued for hours together. The situation could be controlled only by imposition of curfew and by deploying the Army, which carried out flag march in the capital town and the adjacent localities.

I returned home well after 10 p.m. and straight away went to my office after a quick dinner. In the midst of preparation of crash teleprinter and cipher messages to Delhi, Kohima and Shillong Sunanda came rushing to my office room to convey that Gopal Dutta wanted me immediately in the Raj Niwas. I escorted her back to our next-door residential home and boarded the van for negotiating the short stretch of road to the Raj Niwas. I was stopped by another jeep, from which alighted Holkhomang Haokip, a young Kuki leader from Henglep, and Arthur, a slightly built Tangkhul. Arthur worked for the government of Nagaland but acted as the political assistant to Rishang Keishing.

They added two fresh inputs: The United Front Legislature Party (the dissidents) had elected Md. Alimuddin as its leader and its strength had swelled to 20, in a house of 32.

Arthur had a different story to tell. The Naga Federal Government (NFG) had deputed three special task forces to Ukhrul to disturb the Prime Minister's meeting and they were armed with Light Anti Aircraft Guns (LAAG). It would not be safe for the PM to fly into Ukhrul. He also gave me to understand that several ambushes were set up around the serpentine Imphal Ukhrul road. I thanked them and rushed to the Raj Niwas.

I was ushered in by Gopal Dutta into a room where Indira Gandhi was seated with a big scowl on her face.

She looked up and asked if I was the person who had originated the reports she was leafing through. I nodded silently in affirmation.

“Did you share these with the local authorities?”

“Yes ma'am.”

“What else do you have to add?”

I looked at Gopal Dutta and narrated the latest inputs I had received from Holkhomang Haokip and Arthur. She noted down the details in a scrapbook and spoke slowly.

“See me in Delhi. I'd like to discuss something. Call up Dhawan. He would arrange it.”

Dutta escorted me out and spoke in a whisper.

“Thanks my dear boy. You've saved the day for the Intelligence Bureau.”

“Are you taking her to Ukhrul?”

“I don't think she would like to go there after what you've shared with her.”

“Should I see her in Delhi?”

“Come over. I'd discuss the matter with the DIB and let you know.”

I returned home well after two a.m. and landed before the anxious eyes of Sunanda. It was a day and night of disaster and triumph. My credentials as an intelligence officer were partially redeemed. It was a moment of victory in a way. I was propelled by the desire to learn the techniques of gathering intelligence, basically HumInt, (Human intelligence), and refining the tradecraft that I happened to learn at Anand Parvat School of the IB.

Perfection had always been a dream and a thing of beauty and inspiration to me. My obsession with perfection often landed me in trouble. Only much later in life I realised that there was nothing called perfection. To a Neolithic man a rough-hewn stone arrowhead was a perfect tool. The USA and USSR thought that thermonuclear bombs are the perfect killers. Perfection was a state of mind, a matter of perception, a make believe confluence of time, space, mind and matter.

That night I pumped some air of ego inside my troubled mind and suckled a vain satisfaction that I had achieved some degree of perfection. My passionate attachment to my skill had outsmarted the

blind beliefs of a bunch of men drunk with power and corrupted to the hilt. I liked to believe that I was destined to be a successful intelligence operator.

The satisfaction had buoyed up my spirits and I woke up early and spent some time in the office to scribble a cipher to Delhi, Kohima and Shillong about the events of the last 24 hours and the strange encounter with the PM, minus her gracious invitation.

I walked into the wireless room and activated the channel to Ukhrul. There was plenty of bad news. The officer at Ukhrul presented a horrible picture. Our agents inside the Naga underground outfits had given ample indications that self-styled Colonel Peter (name changed) had planned an elaborate arrangement to exhibit Naga muscles to the Indian PM.

I rushed down to the Raj Niwas and briefed Gopal Dutta. He took me to a side and said that the PM had cancelled her Ukhrul engagement and was instead flying to Kohima.

As we stood on the stairs to the front lawns of the Raj Niwas news came that the convoy in which M. Ramunny, the Security Commissioner and T .J. Quinn the DIG were travelling back to Imphal had been ambushed by the Naga insurgents and that both of them were injured. Someone rushed to inform the PM, who was getting ready to board the helicopter from the nearby Assam Rifles compound.

We saw off the PM who, before boarding the chopper told the journalists that the attack on her was 'premeditated.' She refused to elaborate but conveyed that she had enough information to support her comment.

That very day the Congress government suffered a defeat on the floor of the legislative council on a no-confidence motion moved by Salam Gambhir Singh. The Union Territory was brought under the President's rule on October 16, 1969.

It's not that my hurt ego has prompted me to record the detailed account of the incidents. I have done so to record the pathetic state of affairs of VIP security arrangements and how idiosyncrasies of small time bureaucrats can endanger the lives of important personalities. That terrorists and assassins can pass through the eyes of the needles was proved irrevocably at the cost of the nation: assassination of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. Very important functionaries around them were callous. The event, I believe, had prompted the security managers of IB to review the security rules and drills for the Prime Minister and other VIPs.

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The Chief Commissioner and his coterie were not too pleased to see me emerging unscathed out of a series of nasty incidents that had sent Manipur into a spin. I took the initiative to restore normal relationship by periodically sharing unsigned reports with the IGP on law and order situation. I regretted my inability to share signed reports with him. I had lost confidence in this veteran inspector of Punjab police. The Chief Commissioner, lacking in behavioural grace, did not derive the correct lesson from the September fiasco. We had a couple of more brushes, rather nasty ones.

The tension of cohabiting with untrustworthy senior executives had some adverse effects on my health. We decided to cool it out at Moreh, the small smuggling hamlet on Indo-Burma border. It was a business cum pleasure trip.

India did not enjoy happy diplomatic relationship with the Ne Win regime in Burma. The Naga rebel groups under self-styled general Kaito Sema and later under Mowu Angami had developed bases in Burma Naga areas and they used the Tsawlaw, Hkamti, and Laksangwang route to Xianguang province of China. Besides using a part of the Second World War vintage Stillwell Road, they often used an alternative route through Hkamti, Shaduzup, and Auche above Mytkina and entered China

through Shibe in the Baoshan administrative unit of Xiangnan province. Much later they developed easier routes through the Naga, Wanchao inhabited areas of Arunachal Pradesh and the Heimi Naga areas in Burma to the Yunnan province of China. The Burmese Army either did not have the resources or they lacked the will to intercept the Naga rebel groups invited to China for training and supply of arms and ammunition.

The Naga groups had also developed working relationship with the Shan, Kachin rebels of Burma, and they received tacit help from the Burmese Communist parties; Red and White Flag. Some left over elements of the Kuomintang regime also traded weapons with the Indian Nagas in exchange of cash. However, the Kuomintang element operating in the Chinese tribal areas had started large scale dealing in opium and opium derivatives.

The Nagas were not alone to use the Burmese territory. The Mizo rebels, besides being hosted in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of East Pakistan often camped at Darling, Falam and other Kuki and Chin inhabited villages in the Monywa Division of Burma. They were noticed traversing to the Chinese administrative sub-unit of Luxi in the Xiangnan province through Kalewa, Chatkyi, Sikaw and Mong Yu areas in the Chindwin and Irrawaddy valleys.

The Kuki and Chin population of Burma living in the administrative units under Singu, Sekshi, Pantha, Kuzet and Thygon often assisted the Mizo rebels. They too wanted to migrate to India. A nascent move was made by them demanding merger of the Burmese Kuki and Chin areas with India.

It was a dangerous move. The Kukis and other allied tribes had originally migrated to Manipur from Burma at a point of time when hegemony of the Manipur kings often stretched up to the Kabaw valley and the banks of Chindwin. Jawaharlal Nehru had formally ceded the Kabaw valley to Burma. The Meiteis of Manipur still consider it as an integral part of their territory.

As the central intelligence officer in Manipur I was not directly concerned with the Naga and Mizo traffic to China. But the nagging Naga insurgency in Manipur hills and the spill over of the Mizo insurgency required my attention. I had set up a few temporary intelligence posts to monitor these developments and also to keep vigil on the activities of the Burmese Kukis and Chins.

I was accidentally introduced to Col. Aung Than (name changed), the Burmese Army officer located at Tamu, during one of my sightseeing visits to the dusty Burmese town. It turned out that his wife Suyi had her schooling in Calcutta and she had developed a liking for the music composed by Rabindra Nath Tagore. That helped us in exploiting the accidental meeting to a lasting friendship. On our Christmas Eve trip to Moreh Sunanda packed two Benarasi saris and a few records of Tagore's songs. I packed a carton of Dunhill for the Colonel. He loved smoking the American brand.

We spent the Xmas eve night at village Khunthak Khullen, where the former commander of the 10th battalion Naga Army had organised a reception for us. The festivities culminated in colourful Naga dances and excellently cooked Naga food. We were flooded with heaps of Naga shawls, the Anal, Maring, Moyal and Tangkhul shawls. In return we presented a case of XXX rum to the village elders and an amount of rupees three hundred to the village church. I must say that the gifts were parts of IB's secret service expenditure. Such occasions and exchange of gifts helped in generating intelligence worth millions of rupees.

We visited Tamu next day and renewed our contacts with the Burmese officer and his wife. We reached an informal agreement that my officer at Moreh would exchange information with him pertaining to the Naga and Mizo rebel groups. We exchanged data on the Kuki and Chin movements in Burma and assured, as I was told by Delhi, that India had no intention whatsoever to encourage these migratory populations. I couldn't invite Col. Aung over to the Indian side, as I was aware of restrictions imposed on him by the military regime in Rangoon.

The other reason that compelled me to visit Moreh was to conduct an informal enquiry into the allegations of smuggling activities of the IB post in charge Nambiar (name changed). He worked for a cartel of gem dealers in Madras and often carried the smuggled goods to Calcutta, where the agents of the Madras dealers took delivery against cash.

I had brought his undesirable activities to the notice of my superior at Kohima. He did not agree to take disciplinary action. Much later I came to notice that the wife of a particular senior officer used the services of Nambiar to acquire gold ornaments from Tamu. A few pieces of high carat ruby, I was told, were presented to certain senior officers in Delhi too. The disease was not unique to Nambiar. The vast majority of the Indian officers posted to Manipur, irrespective of their service affiliation, indulged in smuggling of gold and precious stones. Some of them smuggled in valuable teak and agar wood from Burma for building plush homes back in their home turfs. The agar wood was sold at a high premium to the traders in Delhi, who exported the prized commodity to the foreign perfume manufacturers.

Before I walk over to another turf I should complete the Nambiar episode. His blatant smuggling activities encouraged by a few senior officers of the IB exasperated me. I was bent upon taking firm action to unravel his malpractices. Finally I acted on a complaint from one of my junior staff. He informed me that Namibia's unchecked activities had turned the SIB unit as a smuggling den. His compliant was fortified by a letter from P.N. Banerjee, the regional head of the Research & Analysis Wing at Calcutta. At that point of time I was supervising both the IB and the R&AW posts in Manipur. He wrote about his information about Namibia's objectionable activities.

I pursued a specific lead and arranged his compromise and detention by the Manipur police. A consignment of ruby was recovered from his baggage while he was travelling to Imphal by bus. The IB did not suspend the notorious officer. I was asked to carry out a departmental enquiry which was buried somewhere in the greased alleyway of the IB. Namibia, I was told, had flourished in the southern region of the IB in his later career.

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Manipur had in the meantime a welcome change. Baleshwar Prasad was kicked up by his benefactors and was appointed India's ambassador to Burma. A suave, civilised and tactful Lieutenant Governor, D.R. Kohl, replaced him. A member of the Indian Civil Service, Kohl brought along with him a whiff of fresh air.

He had before him multifaceted challenges. The agitation for statehood had started gathering steam. The announcement of grant of statehood to Himachal propelled the agitation to higher acceleration, which had not only captured the imagination of the Manipuris, but also the entire opposition and even a section of the ruling party.

I had conveyed to Delhi in several despatches that the Centre was adding fuel to fire in Manipur by denying the legitimate demand of the people. Early decision on statehood, perhaps way back in 1968-69 and granting of a sympathetic economic package would have lured away the Meitei youths from the path of insurgency/terrorism. I shared similar views with Kohl and even used my ground knowledge to work out a composite blueprint for development in the agricultural, power, industrial and communication sectors. I had reasons to believe that the Lt. Governor accepted these suggestions seriously. But Delhi was still unresponsive to the explosive situation.

Indira Gandhi and her ruling party had very little time for Manipur. The situation, however, continued to deteriorate inside the frontier state. A fairly large contingent of the Meitei youths had

already reached East Pakistan and was being trained by the ISI. At least two sizeable Naga insurgent gangs traversed through the hostile terrain of Manipur and N.C. Hills and had reached Sylhet. They were hosted by the ISI and were supplied with sophisticated weapons. Pakistan had undertaken a deliberate game by arming the Naga, Mizo and Meitei insurgents with a view to increase pressure on India's North East.

Amidst these developments Indira Gandhi declared on September 3, 1971, that her government had decided on principle to grant statehood to Manipur. On the eve of India's Bangladesh war this was accepted as a tactical announcement. Nevertheless, it was a right decision. The Re-organisation of the North-East India Act was passed in the Parliament in 1972, and Indira Gandhi made another visit to Imphal to inaugurate the state on January 21, 1972.

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I must mention at this stage that I had made a rare trip to Delhi in February 1970. I met Gopal Dutta and asked him if it would be prudent to contact R. K. Dawn. Dutta agreed and arranged a meeting with the key man in PMO.

I was ushered into Dawn's smoke filled room. Dawn was dressed in an off white safari suite and a cigarette hanged from his lips. He was disappointed to see a Dhar with dark skin.

"Aren't you a Kashmiri?"

"No. I'm a Bengali."

"How come? Dhars are from Kashmir."

I explained that there were Dhars in Bengal and Assam too and I was not really aware what made them different than the colour of the skin, language and caste.

I was deeply impressed by the sharpness of the man. His eyes sparkled. His demeanour announced his efficiency. He handled a couple of phones at a time and received and saw off a few visiting VIPs with great élan and ease. He rushed into the inner chambers on a couple of occasions and finally told me that the ma'am was ready to receive me.

He escorted me to the inner chambers and there she was in front of me, the residue of the living legend of India's independence struggle.

She stood up with a correct motion to reciprocate my salutations. Nathu entered the room with tea and crisp *samosas* (salted savoury). She talked about her visit to Manipur and opined that the welfare of the state was uppermost in her mind.

Did I have anything to suggest?

I managed to mention that besides a political settlement of the Statehood issue Manipur required an immediate economic package and a programme that could meet the serious economic problems of the people. She gave an affirmative nod and asked me to remain in touch. That was the signal for me to stand up, salute and return to Dhawan's room.

"Can I do anything for you brother?"

Dhawan asked in his characteristic manner.

I must say that I had developed an instant liking for Dhawan and I was won over by the charismatic smile and the small mercies of Indira Gandhi. I returned to Imphal with the enchanted idea that I'd chanced to meet a piece of history that linked India's past with the present. It was, in a way, a foolish and romantic interpretation of a non-event.

Soon after my return to Imphal I was inundated by the increased belligerence of the Naga and the Meitei insurgent groups. I had, however, a miraculous breakthrough with the only active underground

Mizo Army unit in Manipur, the 10th battalion headed by self-styled colonel Lalzika Sailo.

Paokai, a prominent leader of the Kuki National Assembly, acted as a bridge. The 10th battalion Mizo Army had an effective strength of 80 men and 4 officers and arms holding of about 8 Light Machine Guns, 40 rifles and an equal number of small weapons. The most deadly weapon in their armoury included a couple of RPG Rifles (rocket propelled grenade firing rifles) and three 2" mortars.

Lalzika had become disillusioned with the MNA top bosses and desired to *bargain* insurance for his family and himself from the government of Manipur and from the political leaders in Delhi.

Lalzika controlled a vast non-Naga dominated territory between the Zeliang and Rongmei areas of Manipur and North Cachar Hills. His mandate was almost absolute on the Manipur Mizoram bordering areas and some parts of adjoining Cachar district of Assam.

I sent a top-secret despatch to Delhi detailing the operational aspects of the intelligence initiative and pre-empted them by saying that I did not intend to keep the Manipur government informed at the initial stage. Delhi's approval came through a cipher message that enjoined upon me the conditionality of keeping the Lt. Governor informed and to take care of my personal safety. D.R. Kohli was amused to hear my daring approach and directed his secretary and Development Commissioner T. S. Murthy, IAS, to coordinate with T.J.Quinn, the DIG in charge of operations. Murthy was a wonderfully suave person and possessed an excellent analytical mind. His Canadian wife had added a unique charm to the contrived social ambience of Imphal.

I had no difficulty with Quinn, a gem of an officer and a devout Christian. The childless couple had their home filled with pet animals of different kinds. We liked the devoted Christian couple. We reached a gentleman's agreement that the Lt. Governor would take the formal surrender and Quinn would help me with security cover whenever I called for it, even over the wireless.

The Mizos were rated as more diabolic than the chivalrous Naga fighters. Even the Meitei youngsters were not rated as merciless as the Mizos were perceived to be.

Paokai waited for me at a roadside village near Sekmai on Imphal Kohima road. I picked him up at around 8a.m. and drove straight to the Kangpokpi post of the Intelligence Bureau. Sharma, a bright Assistant Intelligence Officer, was surprised to see me. We shared a cup of coffee and asked him to occupy the back seat of the jeep. Driver Madhu Singh piloted the jeep along the uncharted mud road for about an hour when Haokip directed him to stop under a huge spruce just ahead of village Thanglang Kuki.

We alighted from the jeep only to be surrounded by a posse of armed Mizo youths. One of them flaunted the badge insignia of a captain over his shoulder pips. Some of the armed men snatched away the key from Madhu Singh and tied him with a tree. The captain ordered us to follow to a remote hut that was lodged on top of a small hillock. Two LMGs were mounted behind natural boulders guarding the main approaches and another group of armed men crouched behind the bushes.

We were ushered in, Paokai taking the lead.

Lalzika Sailo was seated on a platform by the side of a simmering fire. Some chicken and green leafy vegetables were being cooked in an aluminium container. He looked up at me and talked in a shrill voice.

"I'd told you not to carry a weapon. I find that you're carrying one."

I took out the Belgian .9 mm automatic from my waistband and two spare magazines from my waist clip and placed them on a wooden board.

"Here is the deadly weapon. However, I find you have mobilised an entire army to greet us. Would you please free my driver and offer him some tea?"

“I cannot take chances with my men. You Indians can betray us any moment.”

“The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade on your right hand,” I quoted from a Biblical Psalm to humour his known weakness for his religion, “What are you afraid of?”

“Well said Bangali *babu*,” Lalzika’s facial muscles tensed again, “We trust in the Lord. But we cannot trust the Indians.”

“In that case Paokai,” I addressed the Kuki leader, “Let’s go back.”

“Wait,” Paokai pulled me down to a chair and made Sharma to sit on a plank, “Well Lalzika. I’ve brought the best person you can negotiate with. This one Bengali *babu* is reliable.”

Some lady entered the room. She served the steaming hot chicken and vegetable broth in wooden bowls and made a few wooden spoons available for our convenience.

We savoured the tasty but pungent broth and exchanged cigarettes. The hot broth inside helped cooling down of temperature and Lalzika opened up. We discussed the modalities of future talks and the package that he expected from the government of India.

As we boarded the jeep I noticed a column of 31 Mahar marching down from a ridge above. I rushed back to the hut and alerted Lalzika to take guard and melt into the thick jungles above Molbung. He appreciated the gesture and scurried down to a deep gorge that drained the waters from the Zapfu ranges. We encountered the Mahar column, headed by Lieutenant Angad (name changed), a young Sikh officer, and two kilometres down the ridge. He stopped us to inform that his patrol was assigned to intercept a Mizo gang loitering in the area. He offered me a sip of whisky from his canteen, and we left after wishing good luck to each other. Angad, as I knew him was a fine officer. The Naga and Mizo insurgents feared him. He had the uncanny knack of sniffing out the underground hideouts, which he described as gifts from the battalion *tantrik* (member of an esoteric cult). That wizard of the mystic world claimed to have divine visions, which provided him rare insight into the hideouts of the insurgents. Angad believed in dreams and almost blindly followed the battalion clairvoyant.

Lalzika operation fructified after a prolonged negotiation and some degree of understanding displayed by the Lt. Governor. He had persuaded Delhi to agree on a generous package that included induction of the suitable boys to the Manipur Rifles and settlement of Lalzika and his family with adequate compensation. He took the formal surrender on July 20, 1970 at Imphal. T.J.Quinn performed the task of the frontal high priest and I, as my profession demanded, receded to the background.

I received a rare satisfaction when appreciation letters from the DIB and the Union Home Secretary greeted my performance. That was the highest honour one could expect, which fell short of the Police Medal for bravery. I had no godfather in Delhi and my desk chief in Delhi was not particularly happy with me over my encounters with Baleswar Prasad. One had to pay a price for keeping his flag fluttering uncompromisingly.

The sweetness of the success in the conclusive eradication of Mizo insurgency from Manipur was rendered sweeter when we were blessed by the birth of our first son on September 9, 1970. Sunanda was doubly enthralled by the twist of good luck as her first conception was medically terminated in 1969 for certain health complications. It was a spell of bliss. By all account Manipur turned out to be a lucky place.

EIGHT

THE PARTING PANGS

Whenever two people meet there are really six people present. There is each man as he sees himself, each man as the other person sees him, and each man as he really is.

William James

The spell of bliss was suddenly disturbed by a sad incident. Jyotish Gogoi, a bright Ahom youth, had joined the same course of Indian Police Service with me. Allotted to the Union Territory cadre he felt homesick and always pined to be nearer to his mother. Jyotish, a jolly good fellow, was given to the pleasure of drinking a little bit more than he could stand.

To avoid a posting to remote Andamans he obtained a stint of deputation to the Manipur Rifles as a battalion commandant. He lived alone in a sprawling bungalow on Kohima Road. I was aware that he liked his drinks but did not know that his drinking bouts had assumed rather serious proportions and he had a couple of escapades with attractive women.

Indu Shekhar Sharma, also an IPS officer of 1962 seniority and son of an illustrious Manipuri Brhmhin Dwijamani Dev Sharma assisted him in his pursuits of pleasure. The elderly Dwijamani Dev Sharma had been the first chief minister of Manipur. The lifestyle of his IPS son and the terrorist linkages of his younger son Bobby Sharma pained a pure patriotic Indian Dwijamani. I owe a lot to this pious soul, who helped me considerably in combating Meitei extremism.

Jyotish Gogoi trusted me and had kept a window open for me. He would often drop in and talk about his frustrations. He had, in fact, fallen in love with a Christian girl and wanted to take her as life partner. His family had objected to the match.

Blackmailed by Indu Sharma and the Meitei girl Jyotish Gogoi committed suicide. On tour to Thanlon, a remote post on Mizoram border, I was informed over wireless that Gogoi was killed by a self-styled Tangkhul Colonel of Naga Army for molesting his girlfriend.

On my return DIG Quinn narrated a different story. Gogoi had committed suicide by firing a single shot through his head. He had chosen an isolated location on Kohima Road and had driven up alone to the spot of occurrence.

I happened to accost Indushekhar Sharma in an exclusive meeting. He denied the story and produced some letters written by the poor Meitei girl in support of his claim that Gogoi was responsible for the dastardly act of impregnating the young lady NCC officer.

Gogoi's death was splashed in the local media and finally the blame came to rest on the Naga insurgents. Sunanda consoled me that in his death my friend was painted with the brush of martyrdom. Well! I never thought that a coat of paint alone could replace the truth. I left Manipur with the regret that I could not bring Indushekhar Sharma to the books.

*

I received a discreet message from a self-styled Col. Stephen Phunchang (name changed) through L. Hungyo that the Nagas were not responsible for Gogoi's death. He requested for a discreet meeting at

a village near Tusum Khullen. I should add here that my tryst with the Naga people did not end with Manipur. But I had developed a healthy relationship with the Naga society and that tie continued even after my tour of duty to the North East was over.

There was no defined road to Tusum. I took to the steering, drove past the lesser Andro Hills, and took a dirt road along the Iring River.

I stopped for a while to light a cigarette and Hungyo too rushed behind a bush to take a few quick puffs. His old world etiquette and our sense of perverted hierarchical formality prevented him smoking in front of me. I too, rather wilfully, did not encourage my subordinates to break the rules of the game taught to us by our social system.

The steely cracking sound came from the left. I could feel a whiff of hot air rushing past my right ear. I took cover behind a boulder and drew my pistol. Hungyo, as I noticed, crawled on his elbows and took position behind a huge piece of jagged rock.

It must be an ambush!

I waited with bated breath for the firing to continue.

“I’ve seen them sir,” Hungyo whispered, “Look at your right. They have occupied the gully.”

“Is it an ambush?”

Hungyo did not reply. He crawled past the boulder and positioned himself next to me, a loaded Colt firmly in his grip.

“Yes. But they are not Tangkhuls.”

“How do you know?”

“I know sir. They are Angamis.”

“This is not the operational area of the Angami battalion. You’re talking shit.”

“No sir. I’m correct. Follow me. Don’t raise your head.”

Hungyo crawled towards a small hill feature that tapered down to the bed of the Iring. I followed him. Our movements were greeted by another volley of rapid firing from a Light Machine Gun. By that time we had managed to hide behind a shoal in the riverbed that was hidden from the views of the ambushing party. We decided not to open fire as that would give away our position and we were vastly outmanned and outgunned by our enemy.

One person in jungle fatigue lumbered out of the gully and fired a few more rounds at the jeep. He shouted out in Nagamese (lingua franca of Nagaland, a queer mixture of Assamese and Bengali).

“They’re not Tangkhuls, I’m sure. We don’t talk in Nagamese. We talk either in Tangkhul or Meitei tongue.”

His words as well as the bullets fired from the upper gully convinced me that the ambush party was new to the area. The Tangkhuls would have surprised us from the rear after negotiating a low hump that separated our shoal from the upper gully. Moreover, this wasn’t the style of Stephen Phunchang. I had known and cultivated him for over 18 months and we had developed some rapport that, I knew, as a member of the Revivalist Church, he wouldn’t like to betray.

“How far is Tusum?”

“Another three kilometres. But we can’t go now. The track passes through that gully.”

We waited for an agonising hour when we noticed a column of about twenty Village Volunteer Force boys doubling up to the ambush site. They opened up from 2” mortar followed by rifle fired grenades and LMG. The Naga contingent fired indeterminately and melted away into the forest as the VVF contingent outnumbered them.

I stood up and shouted in Hindi that I was an Indian officer and that the Naga Army had ambushed my jeep. The VVF platoon commander, a Tangkhul, wasn’t sure if I was to be trusted.

“Hey Rawling,” Hungyo shouted at the boy, “This is Hungyo uncle here. My *sahab* is with me. Escort us to Tusum Khullen.”

The boy recognised Hungyo’s voice and approached us cautiously. His VVF contingent was attracted to the ambush site after being alerted by a nearby Assam Rifles post. Rawling, a loveable boy from Soraphung escorted us to the outskirts of Tusum and marched back to their camp location.

The village head and Mathew Karakkal, the pastor, greeted us. The latter one was a member of the 16th tribe of Nagaland, a Malayalee. A large number of teachers and pastors from Kerala had succeeded in ingratiating with the tribals, especially the Nagas. Very often operators like me used these Indian talents for penetrating the remote village clusters.

We met Stephen Phunchang late in the night inside the village church. He had a fascinating story to tell. The Oking, imaginary headquarter of the Naga Federal Government, had received two emissaries from Pakistan. They were harboured somewhere in the Yimchunger area for consultations with the President of the NFG Mr. Zashie Huire and important *Kilonsars* (ministers), *Tatars* (MPs) and Army Generals. The ISI had urged the NFG to send fresh gangs to the training camps in East Pakistan and to lift fresh supply of Chinese weapons. Brigadier Thinousille Angami and Col. Surozolie were scheduled to lead two separate gangs to East Pakistan next month. They would take the Angami, Zeliang, North Cachar Hills and Silchar route to enter Pakistan. Two other gangs under Vesalho and Vedai Chakesang were being readied for a long march to China.

The NFG had directed the *Midan Peyus* (regional governors), *Raja Peyus* (sub-regional chiefs) and *Runa Peyus* (village council chiefs) to recruit new talents from the villages and also to collect fresh national defence taxes.

“What prompts Pakistan to go for such a crash drive?”

“You would know better. I presume Pakistan wants to escalate fighting in the North East. They and the Chinese would like the Indian Army to get bogged down in this region. They are having immense trouble in East Pakistan and they resent the blatant Indian intervention.”

“Why have you inducted the Angamis in your area? They had fired on my jeep.”

“Sorry for the event. They have come to accelerate the recruitment drive. Z. Ramyo (a kilonsar-minister and former chairman of the *Tatar Hoho*-lower house of the National Assembly) was overseeing the Manipur operations. But he has fallen sick. They have deputed Col. Razanou Angami for assisting my team.”

I discussed the possibility of ambushing Razanou. Stephen opposed the idea on the plea of his own security. He reminded me of my promise. I had promised him a seat in one of the medical colleges in the southern peninsula after he successfully collaborated with me in curbing the underground threat in Ukhrul. I reassured him.

We had a fine beef, pork, fowl and venison dinner. The crate of rum that I carried in my jeep helped in warming up the ambience and next morning I was escorted to the foothills of Andro, east of Imphal town.

Stephen had extracted a promise from me before I left that I would help him in arranging medical treatment of Z. Ramyo, who had developed a heart ailment and suffered from diabetes.

The meeting with Stephen wasn’t tactical in nature. He had shared with me tonnes of strategic intelligence. I spent five hours at a stretch with my staff officers to study the security scenario in the Indian subcontinent and the possible routes that could be taken by the Naga Army for infiltration into Pakistan and for their return journey. We marked the routes on quarter inch maps and made some tactical changes in our ground spread.

The SIB was very thinly spread on the ground. For the entire district of Tamenglong we had two

intelligence posts and the Kohima outfit had only three outposts in the Zeliang areas of Nagaland. The SIB set up in Assam had very little intelligence spread in the North Cachar Hills. We had very little technical tools at our disposal except the routine HF communication sets. We required all terrain vehicles and backpack HF and VHF sets for mobility and speedy communication. Delhi, I was told, could supply three backpack HF sets with VT (voice transmission) faculty. After some dogged *bargaining* I managed to procure two VHF monitoring sets, which I thought would help me in following the radio conversations of the Naga contingents.

Our HumInt output was appallingly poor. I did some urgent consultations with my Zeliang, Rongmei and Tangkhul friends and some reliable associates in Jiribam area of Manipur that touched the borders of Mizoram and N.C.Hills.

Having done my groundwork I visited Kohima and discussed the strategic importance of two gangs being despatched to China. My colleague J.N.Roy was a matured intelligence operator and I have reasons to believe that he had taken necessary steps to thwart the Naga underground's move. He informed me that my intelligence was most probably flawed as they had in possession some written letters from A. Z. Phizo to Zashie Huire that advised the NFG and the NNC to maintain neutrality during any future Indo-Pakistan war. I was foxed by Roy's revelations. But I refused to relax my guard. Much later, when I succeeded Roy at Kohima I happened to unearth the mystery of the communications between Phizo and Huire and other underground Naga leaders.

I had no doubt in mind that the subcontinent was heading towards a serious conflict situation. After the March 25, 1971 military crackdown in East Pakistan the East Pakistan Police, the EPR, the Ansars and the East Bengal Regiments had unfurled the banner of revolt. India and the USSR had already trained a large number of Bengali East Pakistanis and supplied them with small and medium weapons. Some elements of the Indian Army regulars and the Para-Military forces had also joined the Bengali revolutionary forces. On April 11, 1971 these forces were given a formal shape under the name of Mukti Bahini (Freedom Force) with Colonel M.A.G. Osmani (Retd) as the chief.

In our sector, I knew that certain elements of the 8th Mountain Division were inducted to impart training to the Bengali liberation forces. Brigadier Shahbeg Singh, whom I knew as an enterprising officer of the Army Division at Jakhama had emerged as a legend. He had later earned notoriety as a collaborator of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the Sikh saint turned rebel.

On a sensitive operation I chanced to visit a few such India-operated camps on Cachar-East Pakistan border. My brief stay with the Bengali Mukti Bahini elements left no doubt that Pakistan had exhausted all its political and diplomatic leverages on the Bengalis and Bangladesh was a virtual gift to the Bengalis of East Pakistan by the Punjabi and Sindhi rulers of West Pakistan. The Muslims of West Pakistan were not ready to share the fruits of the new Muslim nation with their Bengali brethren. The two-nation concept crafted on the soils of East Bengal in 1905-06 as a British engineered tool to divide the Indians on religious lines had started crumbling down.

It was natural for Pakistan to seek out the North Eastern insurgent groups and generate adequate problems within India. I could not agree with my Kohima colleagues that Phizo had developed a soft corner for India. I went ahead with my preparations. The officers of the SIB Imphal had succeeded in following the Naga gangs from hilltop to hilltop and from valley to valley. They traversed the inhospitable terrain on jeep and often on mule pack with their mobile wireless sets and VHF interceptors. We could provide almost a running commentary on the outgoing and incoming movements of the three contingents of Naga Army totalling about 500 that picked up sophisticated weapons from Pakistan. Some contingents of the Naga Army headed by Brigadier Thinnousille Angami, later promoted to a General, were left in Dacca. The Indian Army had intercepted the

Pakistan hosted Naga group during its victorious march into the city.

My assessed view on the Naga—Pakistan connectivity and Pakistan's strategic intervention to destabilise the North East was vindicated. R.P. Joshi had in the meantime replaced M.N. Gadgil. He was an earthly person but was new to the intelligence fraternity. He valued my input and recommended me to Delhi for a special award. I think that my officers L. Hungyo, Lakhinder Singh, Mani Singh and a few other young and daredevil junior officers deserved the kudos. A couple of officer from the Technical Unit of the IB too deserved special mention. The VHF interception sets supplied by IB's technical division were exploited to the maximum advantage in intercepting radio communications of the Naga gangs.

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I did not know that one of these sets would come to some other dubious use. One fine afternoon my officer at post MS 44, half way between Imphal and Tamenglong, walked into my office with two audiotapes in his pocket. He had chanced to intercept the VHF conversations between the HQ formations of the 31 Mahar and its patrol parties as well as with 59 Mountain Brigade at Leimakhong.

We must revert back to young Angad for a short while. His battalion priest claimed to possess *tantrik* powers. He had occasionally led some of the patrol parties to successful interception of the militants and recovery of some weapons. He adopted a unique *modus operandi* to penetrate the world of jinns and goblins. He normally sat in his worship room and spoke into a microphone under assumed trance. He guided the Mahar patrol parties through VHF communication to near and distant villages in pursuit of the rebels.

On that particular day Angad took out a patrol and was guided by the *tantrik* to the residence of a suspected militant. The priest asserted that his goddess had given him sure vision of existence of an arms cache in the residence of the militant. Angad stretched the operation literally too far by hanging the villager upside down and finally killing him in the process of domineering third degree treatment. Angad panicked. The headquarter formation of the 31 Mahar too panicked. They burned the body of the villager and dumped his bones in a nearby river.

Replay of the tapes sent shivers of fear and anxiety. A flow of pity ran through my mind for poor Angad. I reported the matter to the IB and decided to play it cool. I did not like the idea of embarrassing Brigadier S. K. Sinha for whom I had developed a healthy respect. His intellectual bent of mind often fascinated me.

But the village elders had something different in their minds. They approached the Chief Minister Md. Alimuddin and the Lt Governor D.R. Kohli. T.S. Murthy summoned me for a meeting in the Raj Niwas. My professional integrity hindered my earlier decision to play cool. I shared the real information with him and conveyed that the tapes were still with me. The Lt. Governor deputed DIG Quinn and T.S. Murthy to my office to listen to the tapes and take out transcription. I obliged them after consultations with Kohima. The results were devastating.

Brigadier Sinha drove down to my residence and requested for the copies of the tapes. I parted with copies of the tapes after obtaining clearance from Delhi.

I was later informed that the Commanding Officer, his number two and Angad were cashiered from service. Angad had to undergo a stint of imprisonment. The 31 Mahar was disbanded.

I must admit that Brigadier Sinha had not pressured me at any point of time to distort the evidence. He played a fair game and the Lt. Governor also played according to civil rules. He later paid a visit to the affected village to express condolences to the bereaved family.

I cannot probably leave my Manipuri Naga friends without brief references to a couple of important personalities. Some of them are still around and I have no hesitation to equate them with our top mainland nationalists and freedom fighters. They have and some of them still are waging their own kind of war against the forces of disintegration and protecting the freedom of our country.

My acquaintance with Abraham (not real name), an important member of a minor Naga tribe inhabiting the southern district of Tengnoupal (now Chandel) had come about accidentally.

Madhu Singh was driving the antiquated office van at a breakneck speed along the national highway from Karong to Imphal on a wintry night of January 1970. I had walked about 18 kilometres that evening to keep a rendezvous with the Midan Peyu of Manipur North, which encompassed the Mao, Maram, Zeliang and Tangkhul inhabitant areas with strong pockets of Kuki presence. I was dog tired and had asked Hungyo to keep his eyes open when I tried to take a catnap.

“Sir, wake up,” Hungyo pushed me rather jerkily; “There are people on the road. They could be Naga hostiles.”

I looked out with an uncertain speculation. Three human figures waved hands and signalled for stopping the vehicle. Well! They were not Naga hostiles. I was sure about that. In those chivalrous days of insurgency the Nagas did not attack civilian vehicles and they did not loot the innocent passers by. The criminals had not yet taken refuge in the insurgent outfits. The area was generally crime free. However, I gripped the automatic pistol and asked Madhu to stop near the verge.

A weary face approached me and narrated his problem. His uncle, he said, was hurt in an accidental shooting while hunting spotted deer in the nearby forest. Could I help him to drop the injured man at his nearby village home?

Hungyo took over and after conversing in Manipuri he conveyed that Abraham was a respected elder of a minor Naga community and lived nearby with his wife, a nurse in the sub-divisional hospital. We dropped him at his wooded home and were greeted by Mrs. Abraham with hot tea and some cakes.

After a couple of days of the incident I received intimation from Kohima to mobilise my agents for covering an important meeting of the *Tatar Hoho* (lower house of the underground Naga parliament) scheduled to take place at Oking. Oking did not exist. The name was assigned to the roving capital of the Naga underground government. Till that point of time the IB set up in the North East did not have direct access to any member of the *Tatar Hoho*.

I approached my Midan Peyu friend hoping that he would be a special invitee to the Hoho meeting. He did not reply through the emissary and expressed wish to meet me below the forest of Ruvunamei village at 4 a.m. The rendezvous suggested was odd. The forested patch he indicated was within the range of rifle shots from the Sikh Light Infantry unit at Mao Songsong. Nevertheless, I was assured that the assigned time was the best for a cat-paw powwow, as the security forces did not venture out before seven a.m.

I was guided to the spot by my officer C. K. .P. Sinha. Npfrumo (not real name), my friend the Midan Peyu, was seated there in expectation of the bottle of Cutty Shark that I normally carried for him. He welcomed the bottle at any point of day and night.

After narrating the importance of the ensuing *Tatar Hoho* meeting he whispered into my ears to approach Abraham to cover the meeting. He was one of the ten Hoho members from Manipur.

“Are you serious? He lives over ground.”

“That’s the best cover. Go after him. Treat him gently. He is an old sepyo of the INA.”

“How come?”

“That’s an old story. As a student in Calcutta he had come in touch with Subhash Bose. He had walked down to Mandalay to join his dream hero when the INA broke through the British lines.”

He spoke in a steady voice while munching a piece of smoked meat.

By 5 a.m. Npfrumo had finished the bottle and was ready to melt into the verdant forest. We adopted a different route and reached the *dak bungalow* after a tortuous hour-long march.

Back to Imphal I requested Hungyo to arrange a meeting with Abraham. The aged couple did not hesitate to receive and offer me nice fruitcakes, and flavoured tea.

Abraham did not protest when I whispered that I knew his real status in the underground Naga outfit. Rather he lapsed back to his Calcutta days and his smart stint of love affair with a Bengali girl. We had a hearty laugh and finally stood under a portrait of Subhash Chandra Bose and agreed that we should fortify our friendship by frequent but discreet visits. He agreed to visit Dihoma, in the heart of the Angami country, to cover the *Tatar Hoho* meeting and requested me to defray an expenditure of rupees three hundred.

Kohima did not take my offer seriously and insisted that before sanctioning I should reveal the identity of the Hoho member. Delhi too reacted in the similar manner. I was not willing to disclose the identity of my new friend, as I was afraid of leakage from Kohima office, especially by an officer posted in Dimapur. I defrayed the expenditure from my pocket and launched Abraham with as good a briefing as I could give based on my limited knowledge of the Naga affairs.

Abraham returned after two weeks with an avalanche of intelligence on the affairs of the NNC, NFG and the Naga Army supported by authentic documents. It took me three days to sift through the materials and compile a 30-page report to Delhi and Kohima. I was given to understand that Abraham was the first Naga to offer a full coverage of any Hoho meeting in last ten years. Finally an amount of seven hundred was sanctioned for the operation which was followed by an appreciation letter from Delhi.

Our warm relationship, besides the professional tie, continued till I left Nagaland. Abraham contacted me again in October 1974 at Calcutta when he revisited his city of love for medical treatment. Sunanda accommodated him at our residence and we organised the best medical treatment for him at the Presidency General Hospital. He stayed with us for 15 days and enthralled us with stories of his glorious days with the INA. That was my last meeting with the old guard.

I must admit that Abraham, assisted by Kadunang Zeliang (not real name), the underground Naga Army chief of the Zeliangrground areas had rendered tremendous services in limiting the underground movement in Tamenglong district of Manipur and to some extent the fringe areas of the N.C.Hills. In Abraham I had found a staunch Indian nationalist, who was discarded by independent India, like many other freedom fighters in the North East. He had understood the futility of waging a war against the government of India. But he insisted that the Nagas, a proud people, should be helped to come out of the stranglehold of some of the Pakistan and China inspired leaders and the machination of the certain Church functionaries owing allegiance to the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society (ABFMS), which was headed by Billy Graham.

I must flout the norm laid down by the intelligence fraternity to acclaim the cardinal services rendered by certain Naga and non-Naga leaders.

Rishang Keishing, a born socialist turned congressman, K.Envy, Stephen Angkang, Arthur Luikham, all Tangkhul Naga leaders, had rendered exemplary services in containing the Naga separatist movement in Tangkhul area. Some of them had happened to taste the fruits of political

power. I am still in touch with some of them.

In the non-Naga areas nationalist leaders like N.Gouzagin, Holkhomang Haokip, Dinglien Sanate, Paokai Haokip, Mono Moyal and K. Kakuthon helped me in containing the Naga and the MNF thrust in the undivided district of Churachandpur and the bordering district of Tamenglong and Jiribam. They were not professional friends. They did not require the paltry secret service amount that IB could offer. They were motivated by the concerns of their own security. I had succeeded in erecting a seemingly granite wall between the Non-Naga tribals of Manipur and the Naga and Mizo insurgents. The hills of Churachandpur used to be safer than Mumbai's Chowpatti beach.

Alas! The subsequent representatives of the IB and the functionaries of the state government did not maintain the edifices that were built over years. It is no more a joke when one happens to hear that the NSCN (IM) has expanded its orbit of operation to Sugnu, Chandel and as far as the hills of Churachandpur and that the Meitei militants have rooted themselves in the hills around the valley. The heroic nationalists have started fading into the background making way for the political traders and greedy bureaucrats. World changes, but in the North East it has changed at faster paces and not for the better.

I should also make it clear that the mainstream of the Meitei society, though alienated, were wedded to the historical and cultural ties with India. Most of them had welcomed the merger with India. Only a few obscurantist and revivalists dreamt of returning to the golden days of Meitei kingdom.

Besides the stalwarts like Dwijamani Dev Sharma I had encountered staunch Indian nationalists in Moirang Koirang Singh, H.Nilomani Singh, R.K Ranabir Singh, R.K.Birachandra Singh and a couple of CPI leaders, amongst whom Meghachandra Singh deserves special mention. The redoubtable journalist L. Joychandra Singh too played a prominent role in spite of humiliation heaped upon him by Baleshwar Prasad.

R.K Madhuryajit Singh, an official with the Special Services Bureau, played a heroic role, though his sons R. K. Ronen and R.K. Meghen had drifted to the camps of the Meitei revolutionaries. R.K. Meghen (Sana Yaima) later became the general secretary of the United National Liberation Force and went to Burma in search of training and weapon. Madhuryajit had arranged my meetings with Meghen and Ronen and I tried my best to win them over to the mainstream. But they were already in touch with certain agents of the Pakistani ISI and the Chinese State Security Bureau. Th. Muivah too had cast a spell on them. They firmly believed in the possibility of attaining independence from India and setting up a socialist republic for the Northeastern tribal groups. Muivah, the self-styled later day Phizo, had initially brought the Meitei youths in touch with the Chinese. His vain claim of a greater Nagaland is being erroneously pampered by some ill-motivated bureaucrats and a few easy-shot-seeking politicians.

As intelligence professional I had succeeded in locating and motivating some Meitei youths, who had taken upon themselves the task of reconnecting the youths with the mainstream. Some of them later drifted into active politics. But their efforts were neutralised by the emergence of Chinese and Pakistani inspired outfits like the People's Liberation Army, People's Liberation Army of Kangleipak (PREPAK), Kangleipak Communist Party, Poirei Liberation Front, Kangleipak Socialist Army, the Red Army, Revolutionary People's Front and Indo Burma Revolutionary Front. The mainstream political forces in Manipur and the policy planners in Delhi had continued to treat the upsurge as law and order problems. More troops were inducted and less economic developments were carried out. Haunted by unemployment and lack of opportunity, the Meitei youths continued to swell the ranks of the terrorists. They were keenly observing the outcome of the negotiations between the NSCN (IM)

and the government of India.

During my later visits to Manipur I gathered impressions that the Meitei youths were fed up with the political skulduggery, all pervasive corruption and apathetic attitude of Delhi. Some of them had become disillusioned with the terrorist activities and simply did not know how to trace back their steps. Manipur, I found, was cliff hanging in the hope of constructive approaches from Delhi and better navigation of the state by its own political oarsmen. All that this tortured State requires is a genuine healing touch devoid of threat of dismemberment by the demand for greater Nagaland. Such touch should be pregnant with concrete programme for better communication, industry, and easy market approach in mainland India and abroad for its products, desiccation of the reign by corruption and absorption of the spirit of the far east of India in the mainstream political and social philosophy. The Indians must prove by their act that they are worth living with. The North East and other ethnically simmering areas must get a feeling that India is different from the forgotten Empire. A nation's geography and history are determined by its capability to protect and promote its citizen and not by its constitution, law, armed forces and moralistic and patriotic jargon.

Has post-independence India lived up to that universal truth of nationhood?

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I understand that I do not want to script down all that I experienced in Manipur and I must put an end to, albeit temporarily, the story of my tryst with Manipur. Let's get back to the murky side of the workings of the intelligence organisations. The '*I*' in this narration is not meant for self-glorification. It is a carrier of a definite message; the message of blatant misuse of the intelligence organisations by the rulers of the day. The Indian ruling class has continued to treat the agencies like the Intelligence Bureau as departments of the government, which are not controlled by any Act of the Parliament and are not accountable to any statutory body, except the Prime Minister and the Home Minister. The Indians have a right to know how the rulers and their game-tools spend their money in the name of securing the country through kitchen maids like the IB, R&AW, and CBI.

Manipur, my most favourite playground, was not destined to flourish in peace. The statehood movement had a roller-coaster ride, often violence taking precedence over democratic process. The looming war with Pakistan, however, compelled Indira Gandhi to declare on September 3, 1971, in the Lok Sabha that her government had accepted in principle the demand of the people of Manipur, well after 22 years of merger of the princely state with India. As I stated earlier the 21st state of India, Manipur, was inaugurated by Indira Gandhi on January 21, 1972. B. K. Nehru was appointed as the governor of the state, but D. R. Kohli was asked to stay put for a while.

However, behind the scene, the Congress party and the government of Indira Gandhi had left no stone unturned to install a Congress government in the state, even well before the inauguration of the new state.

This game was not new to the working philosophy of Indira Gandhi. As the President of the INC she had started this game with Kerala. Her major and minor political rivals had later emulated this new domino game, which subverted much of the Constitutional propriety of the intended federal structure of India.

I never thought that in a small state like Manipur the big players in Delhi would play such a wild game of political expediency. Manipur was at the vanguard of combating Naga insurgency and coping with the new thrust of militancy initiated by the frustrated and disillusioned youths of the Valley. It required sustained economic development and not political skulduggery.

The Congress party normally suffers from claustrophobia once it is denied power by the people. The same trend was noticed in Manipur. The president of the Indian National Congress and lesser party leaders frequented the state to explore the possibility of installing a party government through defection. Their foreplays were fortified by no less an official personality than the Union Home Minister.

On occasions I was summoned to the Raj Niwas to meet the queer houseguests of the Lt. Governor, some of them politicians and some public servants. In two such crucial meetings with Om Mehta and the Union Home Secretary I was asked to explore the feasibility of toppling the government headed by Mohammad Alimuddin.

I was believed in doggedly following my professional pursuits. Some of these professional operations had exceeded the limits of legal sanction. However, I never violated the constitutional and legal restraints put on a public servant. Those were the days when I enjoyed professional excellence and moral innocence. The weighty politicians and bureaucrats from Delhi had simply asked me get involved in an illegal activity. I consulted my superiors in Delhi and was 'guided' to a course of action that assured 'silent cooperation' with the minister and the secretary. I was utterly confused. The quarrelling squirrels in my conscience fought with each other for a while and the victorious one finally told me not to cooperate with Delhi's plan. I decided to seek reversion to my state cadre, made a trip to Calcutta, and approached the IGP, Ranjit Gupta, to take me back to the state. I met him at his official residence on two occasions and pressed for my reversion. I had no doubt that Ranjit Gupta had taken up my case with Delhi, but the Union Home Ministry and the IB had turned it down on the plea that I was an 'earmarked' officer and my services could not be spared for the state.

On my return to Imphal, around November 8, I found an emissary of Delhi (no name please) cooling his heels in the Raj Bhawan. I was closeted with him for a couple of hours during which we exchanged notes on the 'disgruntled' MLAs of the ruling combination. After analysing their political track record and individual propensities an assessment was made by the dignitary that it was possible to initiate the process of toppling Alimuddin and install a Congress led government.

One thing that surprised me was the use of the office of the Governor and the official representative of the President of India for petty political purposes. The Governors of the Indian States are political appointees and they are freely used by the rulers of the day to achieve their political agenda. They have treated this Constitutional position to promote political interests of the ruling elite. Most of these Governors are now being treated as contingency paid daily workers.

Another dignitary, who carried a couple of fat brief cases, followed the political functionary with whom I interacted intensely. That was my first encounter with the brief case culture. They evaluated the worth of each MLA and appropriate price tag was put on each head. Some of my professional friends in the Congress and opposition parties helped in carrying out the evaluation process. When asked to carry the brief cases to the concerned targets I refused and pointed out that some political points men should be used to accomplish that delicate task.

In the meantime the IB sounded me about the possibility of change of my station. They suggested that I should take over the Nagaland charge and relieve J.N.Roy, who was slated for assignment to a better pasture

While I battled with my personal establishment problems of shifting to Kohima a big gun arrived at Imphal and ordered that his 'high command' had decided to roll the toppling ball. I consulted Delhi again and was advised to complete the operation from Kohima. I handed over charge of the Imphal station to my successor, shifted to Kohima, and made flying trips to Imphal to help the big political and official guns from Delhi to initiate the toppling process.

I was required to personally contact the disgruntled members of the legislative assembly and interact with them along the guidelines received from the emissaries of Delhi.

Mohammad Alimuddin could not save his government and the Congress too could not cobble up the requisite majority. The fiasco ended in another spell of central rule. I understand that some of the members of the Assembly had backed out for two reasons. The carrier from Delhi did not pass on the exact number of briefcases to them. He, an official in the Home Ministry, had reportedly reserved some of the brief cases for his rainy days. The MLAs were pressured by the Meitei extremists not to wreck the Alimuddin government, of which Yangmasho Shaiza, a relative of A. Z. Phizo's niece was a prominent member. It is worthwhile to note that Rishang Keishing, a prominent Tangkhul Naga leader and a sworn competitor of the pro-Phizo Shaiza family, had spearheaded the move to topple Alimuddin.

Mohammad Alimuddin was justified to some extent to declare in a public meeting, that I was responsible for pulling down his government. He had led a delegation to Delhi for lodging a complaint against me. As it was expected, all these complaints were buried under cynical smiles.

Did I rue or relish the rape of my conscience? It's difficult to give a clear answer. Conscience more often triggers off painful chemicals than pleasant aroma. Conscience cannot float in a vacuum. It interacts constantly with the empirical world that surrounds an individual. Degree of reaction and the solid state of the amorphous feeling called conscience are determined by social and economic factors and the bondages one is placed in by the circumstances.

Standing now, where I am, I feel that I had witnessed a strange metamorphosis of my personality. My initiation to politics at a younger age had left an unquenched thirst for that coveted fruit. I was still latched to the RSS type politics. The partition blues were yet to heal and my Hindu identity was still a major factor in the making of my approach to politics.

But my meeting with R. K. Dhawan, Indira Gandhi and a couple of other important political leaders had strengthened my appreciation for Indira Gandhi. It was strengthened after the creation of Bangladesh and total defeat of the Pakistan Army. The memories of bitter migration from East Pakistan never stopped haunting me. I could agree less with Atal Bihari Vajpayee that Indira had emerged as the Goddess Durga. I suffered a split in my political perception. I did not like the 'dynastic' rule, yet I admired Indira Gandhi. I pined for the values of the RSS, yet I did not develop a faith that they could give a stable national government.

That I could pull down a government in Manipur, contain the hill insurgents and subdue the valley extremists had added a few layers of vainglory to my ego. However, my inner self suffered some abrasions. The seeds of anti-congressism, my latent sympathy with the Hindu causes and my preference for armed social revolution, as propounded by the Naksalbari head master Jagadananda Roy did not evaporate with my induction to the IPS and my association with the IB.

Short of hating myself I started making conscious compartments inside my mind, where I thought, I could stash away the conflicting cross currents and earn my bread, say my prayers and make my conscience sleep peacefully. That was an impossible balancing game. I had often failed in that wizardry. Conflicting currents, which swirled around and inside, very often overwhelmed my subterranean conscience. Often I bled in silence. That was perhaps the ultimate price an intelligence operator, who had not metamorphosed into a zombie, was required to pay.

I left Manipur with a mixed bag of feelings. Our son had completed his first year on his journey on the arrow of time. On the fifth year of our marriage we developed a divine bondage of love that transcended the religious rituals. Professionally I had strengthened the process of learning. Manipur was a unique theatre for learning.

For me it was a unique learning process. I experimented with a lot of techniques of creating HumInt assets deep inside the Naga, Mizo and Meitei underground movements. I chanced to locate some of the talents active in these organisations and won them over mostly by identifying myself with the causes they fought for. Such pseudo identification had enabled me to square up with their psychological strata and gain entry into their realm of fantasy and quasi-reality. I always tried to honour my commitment to my human agents. The Intelligence Bureau, I noticed with anguish, simply believed in the theory of paying the price and getting the job done. They did not teach the mechanism of psychological attrition and honouring the human commitments. They did not teach the technique of smooth separation from important HumInt assets. On a couple of occasion I was pushed to the abyss of danger by IB's policy of not claiming its sources, the proverbial 'lost baggage.'

It's not that I did not believe in the established policy of paying the correct price and getting the job done. There were several human assets, well entrenched in the political parties, print media, government servants and elements those loitered on the fringe of insurgency and terrorism. They were paid well either on piece basis or as regular retainers as long as they were useful. These were routine professional agents.

But most of the top leadership of the Naga and Mizo insurgents and the Meitei revolutionaries were not petty criminals. They had taken to arms for varying reasons. The Naga imbroglio was handed down as the legacy of the unfinished agenda of the departing empire. The Mizos had rebelled mostly because of mindless handling of the affairs of the Lushai Hills by the insensitive politicians and bureaucrats in Shillong and Delhi. Their failure to contain the mother of all the North Eastern insurgency had also added to the ambience of unrest in the Lushai Hills. Pakistan too did not dither in exploiting India's fault line in the blue hills of Mizoram.

Manipur was neglected for too long by Delhi and the Meitei Hindus were accepted as docile vashnavites, who were permanently wedded to the philosophy of non-violence. Introduction of vaishnavism had faded away the practice of *Sanamah*i religion. It had introduced a new script and had reoriented the philosophy of life of a troubled people. But the Meiteis had seen very little of peace during there interaction with the Burmese kings and the British colonialists. The Meitei is well known for his fighting mettle. He is wily, clever and tenacious.

Delhi and its representatives in Imphal had utterly neglected the genuine economic aspirations of the valley and the hill people. Statecraft was confined to rudimentary economic activities and much of the vista of social and economic transformation was neglected. The mandarins derived immense pleasure from the imperial game of divide and rule and fattening their own pockets. Corruption at all levels permeated the administrative and the political structure.

The Meitei insurgency was not caused by revivalism. Revivalism is the essence of cultural existence of people. Reconnecting with the roots of older civilisations and cultures often lead to renaissance. The early days of the growth of Indian nationalism had also witnessed such renaissance and reconnecting with the glorious past. Something went wrong in Manipur. The quest for the past had arisen out of frustration with the present political, economic and social circumstances. Delhi wasted time in recognising the right prescription for the ills of Manipur, as it did in the cases of all the states in the Northeast and other pockets of imbalance in the rest of the country.

The Meitei was pushed to the wall to believe that his voice would not be heard unless he too took up arms like the Nagas and the Mizos. Taking into consideration the exiting ambience of insurgency in the North East Delhi should have acted fast to strengthen the valley of peace, inhabited mostly by the Hindu Meiteis.

I, therefore, believe that Meitei resistance had arisen out of acute frustration and disillusionment.

The ambience of insurgency and Manipur's tryst with left extremism too had hardened the resolve of the young Meiteis. From amorphous romantic renegades they were transformed to ideological revolutionaries.

The same belief made me to treat the insurgent movements on a different footing other than the military approach adopted by the state administration, the armed forces and even the Intelligence Bureau. Way back in Imphal I realised that ideological unrest should not be treated as mere ethnic disturbance and that there was no military solution for that. To keep a people with the country the country should also convince the people that it was worth a paradise to live and die for. I still nurse this value. But Manipur was not the last horizon of India's imbalanced approach to its own people. I had chanced to face the similar crisis of faith in Punjab, Kashmir, Assam and other areas of internal conflict.

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The oscillation of events during 1970-71 had changed the political geography of the Indian sub-continent that was scripted by the British Empire and the leaders of the majority Hindu and the minority Muslim communities. But that did very little to change my worldview of the conflict of civilisations. The post-partition miseries had embedded in my thought process some elements of hatred; disliking and disdain for the civilisational forces that had enslaved India; the Christian and the Islamic civilisations. These feelings were strengthened in my adolescent mind by my association with the Hindu civilisation protagonists, the RSS. My simplistic black and white perceptions were further strengthened by what I was taught at the Anand Parvat training facility of the Intelligence Bureau. The curricula had a distinct pro-Hindu bias.

I was told in no uncertain terms that certain Christian Missionary forces were supportive of the Naga and the Mizo rebels. The indigenous Islamic forces and the forces of the broader Islamic world, I was given to understand, were at work for destabilising the Indian society and polity. The Muslims were simply not to be trusted. The study of communalism basically meant study of the Islamist forces and their linkages with the Rabita-Al-Alam-Al Islami and worldwide Tablighi Jamaat movements.

Having lived together, ill at ease as it were; the two alien civilisations had never blended meaningfully with India. The Indian soil and the Hindu way of life had absorbed many human waves in the past. Some of the major defined and undefined civilisations had emptied themselves into the sea of Indian humanity. However, the civilisational contrasts fortified by the religious aspects that emanated from the Mount of Sinai and the deserts of Arabia had assumed radical proselytising mechanism as the cornerstone of their advance to the different corners of the world.

There were, however, slight differences between the Christian and Islamic civilisational approaches. The conquistadors of the middle ages had undergone vast changes. While they carried the sword and the scripture with equal conviction they did not insist on total civilisational transformation of the conquered people. Over a period the church allowed civilisational peculiarities of the conquered countries to mingle freely with the prescription of the Book and the boots.

It is not that Islam did not allow any such elbowroom. Certain varieties of Islam did not hesitate in absorbing the flavours of the conquered soil. But some varieties always insisted on *khalis* (pure) Islam and total conformity to the Book they preached from and total acceptance of a new civilisation that basically suited the Arab Bedouins and assorted tribes in the Middle East. Both the streams existed in India in some form or other.

But the British had understood well that the civilisational edges of the Hindu and the Muslim

communities were never to be matched perfectly and that would leave scopes for tectonic fissures for few more millennia. They played their card well and a vast section of the Muslim community was trapped by the lure of a revived Muslim entity out of the ashes of the demolished Islamic Empire of Hindustan. That myth was shattered by the events of 1970-71. The two-nation theory so assiduously crafted by the civilisational wizards and wily empire builders had collapsed and a new ethnic nation, Bangladesh had emerged as a new geopolitical reality.

The views narrated above were, no doubt, my article of faith at some point of time. But to be honest to the Christian missionaries and the Christian populace of the North East I must admit that I did not find them harbouring and nurturing anti-Indian feelings. Christianity had exposed the neglected tribal population to better education and modern social system. I had found the ordinary Naga home more civilised and polished than any Hindu home even in cities like Delhi and Calcutta. The Church often stood up as the voice of the community, not as a religious force, to protest against social, economic and political injustices and often-brutal military and police operations. They performed the same obligations as are being done by the modern day human rights organisations and NGOs. The Church had acted and still acts as the focal beam of a mass of people who believe in a particular faith. Unfortunately for the Hindus there is no such focussed social machinery that can speak for the entire Hindu society, inclusive of the untouchables, depressed and oppressed low caste Hindus. The Arya Samaj and the RSS have failed in this crucial field of unifying the Hindu society.

In this connection I must narrate the story of Angi Luikham, a scintillatingly beautiful Tangkhul woman from Kharasom (Ukhrul). Angi was a simple Christian and never failed to attend the Sunday mass. Sometime in July 1971 I accompanied by my wife and son happened to traverse the insurgency-infested tract between Ukhrul, Koiri, Kharasom and Jessami with the intension of crossing to Phek in Nagaland and spend the night there. Our first stop was at Koiri, where the SIB had a small outpost. Well stocked with petrol, food and drink we started next morning for Kharasom and Jessami. The road was rough and it often traversed through thick undergrowth. We stopped at Kharasom for feeding the child and also have a drink of tea.

Our jeep revolted. It refused to start and driver Mani Singh informed that the carburettor had developed some defect and nothing could be done without replacing some parts of the fuel-injecting chamber. We deputed a runner to Koiri outpost hoping to procure the spare from the nearby Army detachment. L. Hungyo, who accompanied us, came back with more bad news. A group of Chakesang Naga insurgents were camping in the riverbed on Manipur-Nagaland border. They intended to capture and interrogate me.

It was indeed a bad news. We approached the Khullakpa (village headman) and sought his help. He turned his face away and told me that he would not like the idea of inviting the wrath of the Chakesang soldiers for the sake of three Indian lives. We sat down under the village church portico and arranged to send another runner to Jessami for help. I believe he was intercepted by the Naga insurgents and was not allowed to proceed to the Assam Rifles camp.

The fear of being caught by the rogue Naga elements did not worry me. I was more worried about the safety of Sunanda and our child. He did not bother about the gravity of the situation and ran down to a young Naga woman, who was watering the front flowerbeds of the Church.

She talked to Hungyo for a while and disappeared into the village. She returned soon at the head of a procession of the village women, numbering about 30. Angi, as her name was, told me in broken English that I had nothing to fear in her Christian village. She guided us to a peculiar Naga home with a central fireplace and made us seated on wooden planks. I was offered rice 'madhu' (beer) and Sunanda a cup of tea.

Angi disappeared for a while only to return with the village headman and about 20 traditionally armed Naga men. She harangued the crowd in Tangkhul tongue and exhorted them to protect the visitors to the village. I did not understand her exhortations but Hungyo informed me that Angi, wife of the village pastor, had mobilised women and men of the village for our protection. We should be at ease. Angi further assured that a contingent of Kharasom youth would see us off at Jessami.

We tried to express our heartfelt thanks to Angi. She simply crossed her heart and replied in a placid voice that no one could harm a visitor to a Christian home.

We spent the night at Kharasom and enjoyed a family dinner with Angi and her pastor husband Jason Luikham. Next morning we started for Jessami and our slow moving jeep was flanked by six Kharasom youths.

Angi and her husband had become an integral part of our life. We nursed the friendship well after our North East sojourn was over. Angi's beautiful daughter had later come down to Delhi to study medicine. We acted as her local guardian.

Sunanda, who had attended the Church regularly till she graduated out of school, could not repel the lurking doubts in my mind about the Christians. She was not a converted Christian but appreciated the teachings of the Christ and the social practices of the followers of the Christ appealed to her sensitive mind. I respected her views but did not allow her feelings to 'contaminate' my think-pod. But the Luikham family of Kharasom had helped me change my views on the Church and the Christians. I was able to come out of my cocoon of RSS bigotry and the teachings of the Intelligence Bureau. I knew we had enough space in India to live as good neighbours and respect each other's religious faith.

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I learnt another glorious lesson, almost at the cost of my life, which brought about slight changes in my deep embedded hatred for the Muslims.

I had learnt to hate them way back in 1946, when a Muslim mob had attacked our home in East Pakistan and forced my family to temporarily shift to Agartala. The hatred was transformed to anger after we were forced to migrate to 'another India' in sackcloth and ash. But Kusum Mian was the first Muslim to gently chisel away a couple of layers of the hatred that I nursed so carefully.

For visiting Gwahati and Shillong I normally avoided the national highway that traversed through Golaghat and Kaziranga. I preferred the unpaved forest road that took me to Nowgong via Diphu, Hojai and Kathiatoli and Jaggi Road. The road was not smooth and the terrain not very friendly. But I liked the forest and its unique flora and fauna.

On that fateful day of July 1972 I was summoned to Shillong to meet the Governor and my regional boss. I was directed to arm myself with all that I knew about the breakaway Revolutionary Government of Nagaland and the affairs of the Naga Federal Government, in the light of the last meeting of the *Tatar Hoho*.

Diphu was a small administrative centre with a few scattered buildings, Hojai, with its miserably small thatched market huts was still to emerge as an important centre of Islamic studies in North Eastern India and Kathiatoli was just one of the innumerable Bengali Muslim inhabited villages.

A huge tree trunk blocked the narrow metalled road near Kathiatoli. The Assam plains were free from insurgency and I had never encountered hostile elements. Quite often I stopped my car and conversed with the Bengali Muslim villagers who had migrated to Assam mostly from my home district Mymensingh. We Mymensinghians speak a distinct Bengali dialect. There are slight variations

between the dialect spoken in southern and northern Mymensingh. But the raw flavour of the language of the Meghna basin always fascinated me. This was the language of ‘Maimansingha Geetika’ (ballads of Mymensingh), wonderful storehouse of Bengali folk literature. This is the language of folk singer Abbasuddin and poet Jasimuddin. I am still fascinated by this uniquely flavoured Bengali dialect.

But that day my Mymensinghia Bengali did not satisfy a motley crowd of villagers who stood behind the barrier armed with machetes and spears.

“Are you a Ahomiya (Assamese)?”

Someone asked.

“Are you a Hindu Mymensinghia?”

“Yes,” I replied and asked, “Why are you blocking the traffic?”

“There is a Hindu-Muslim riot here. The Ahomias are trying to grab our land. They attacked two of our villages last night and killed three people.”

“Kill him,” Someone shouted, “This *shala* (an abuse) is a Hindu too.”

A mob of about 12 Muslim youths charged at my car and I was not even armed with a fruit knife. On this tract of journey I did not normally carry the Belgian .9 mm automatic, which had become a part of my life.

My driver, a Lotha Naga, deserted me and took shelter inside the standing jute crop.

Suddenly I noticed a middle aged Muslim, armed with sickles, rushing towards me. The thought of running towards the jute field had flashed past my mind. But I knew the exercise was futile. I wouldn’t survive for more than a few hours in the mud and slush.

“*Hey magir putera* (you sons of bitches),” My rescuer shouted out in pure Mymensinghia Bengali, “*Ya amago manuh, maimansingha bangali. Kichu kartai na ere.*”

Roughly speaking, he shouted at the mob by addressing them as sons of bitches and proclaimed that I was a Bengali from Mymensingh and they should not harm me.

The magic worked. The armed vandals stopped inches away from my neck.

My rescuer introduced himself as Kusum Mian, headman of the village, and a migrant Muslim from Kuliarchar, a village in the vicinity of our village Kamalpur. I followed Kusum Mian to his house and his wife Shiuli Khatoon, wearing a sari and Hindu style conch shell bangles and a spot of vermilion spot on the parting of her hair served us tea and *muri* (puffed rice). Kusum Mian’s men fished out the Lotha driver from the jute field mud and after about an hour of friendly bonhomie with my fellow village folks from Mymensingh I left for Nowgong.

I must mention that Kathiatoli was not far from Nellie and other Muslim inhabited villages, which had witnessed ghastly communal carnage, only a couple of years later. The land hungry Ahomiya crowd had massacred the Mymensinghians of a couple of villages. My enquiries about the welfare of Kusum and Shiuli indicated that they had migrated to Barpeta in lower Assam. I lost touch with him after 1994.

Kusum and Shiuli are typical Hindu names. Modern day Islamic Bengalis may find the idea of assigning Hindu names to their children as abominable as eating forbidden meat. However, there were times when the Muslim populace of Bengal freely borrowed from the Bengali storehouse rather than falling back on characteristic Arabic and Urdu names.

Crouching on my cold bed at Shillong that night I did not reflect on the tasking assigned by the Governor. I did not even bother to browse my scrapbook that contained instructions from my boss. I had closed my eyes and concentrated on Kusum Mian and Shiuli Khatoon. They did not only save my life, but they rekindled the fond memories of another Muslim, Rehman, who was a bonded labourer of

my family in East Pakistan and who saved our lives from the riotous mob way back in 1950. Their faces helped me thinning down my anger and diluting my hatred. The angels do not come with fanfare and when they come their wings do not carry the stamps of religion. I developed a serious doubt about my concept of civilisational enmity between the Muslims and me. It was further diluted when I happened to meet Mirza Hatem Suhrawardy in 1980, in a serpentine narrow alley behind Delhi's Jama Masjid.

NINE

A PEOPLE ON THE CROSS

“I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfil the scripture: ‘He who shares my bread has lifted his heel against me’.”

JOHN 12:18 (The Last Supper)

Jesus is the classic example of right thinking people being crucified for disagreeing with the Establishment, either for real or perceived faith in a cause. Jesus had run afoul of the Establishment of his time. He was killed cruelly. The Naga people had run into trouble because the British and Indian administrations did not really know what to do with an assorted people, who were different from rest of the Indians and who were not administered by any Establishment till the British overpowered them. The British did not hang them. They were happy to proselytise and pamper and often punish the unruly Nagas. The Indians, on the contrary, were not sure what to do with a people, who were so different from the rest of the Indians, and who were not acquainted with the norms of Indian Establishment. Caught in the euphoria of independence, after the British decided to escape from India, the mainstream Indians decided that independence carried the same connotation to each and every people of the geographical territory defined as India. In fact it did not. Independence to Punjabis and Bengalis meant a millennium of unsung exodus. To the Nagas it meant fear of the uncertain and domination by the people who were as stranger as Martian creatures.

To me independence meant uprooting from my home and seeking refuge in a strange place called ‘India’. To the Nagas independence brought in plenty of apprehension about their total incompatibility with the rest of India-culturally, linguistically and religion wise. India carried the connotation of a foreign land. It carried the meaning of ‘Hindustan’ and not ‘Bengal’ to me. In my case the fault line was repaired over years, as I was just like another Indian inhabiting its eastern wing. In case of the Nagas it took several years to repair to some extent the gaping fault line left by the escaping British. The edges are still dissimilar at several places of the land and minds.

Therefore, as a cog in the Establishment I had taken my posting to Kohima with lots of apprehension. I was apprehensive about my capability to ingratiate with strange people who had just started integrating themselves with the distant political and geographical entity called India. They still disagreed with the mammoth Indian Establishment but had started emulating certain aspects of the system that characterised the Indian fiscal and political ethos, not necessarily societal and moral ethos. They were not hanged. But the Nagas have suffered a lot because of their inability to embrace the Establishment overnight and their apprehensions about losing out to an overwhelmingly ancient and advanced civilisation.

We drove down to on February 02, 1972, in our brand new Fiat to take charge of my new assignment. The drive was short but the journey was long. I had an eerie feeling as I drove into the sleepy town covered in woolly fog and wearing a mask of deceptive peace.

The Naga problem was not new to me. But no one could claim to have known the problem till one lived with the Nagas. I knew very well that my brush with the fringe Naga affairs in Manipur wasn’t good enough to make me any wiser than a marine biologist trying to understand marine lives while

leisurely examining the fossils ashore. To get into the grooves of the intricate Naga society wasn't as easy as grappling with the slightly better defined Manipur affairs.

We did not have much difficulty in setting up our new home. I inherited the house that the IB had rented for my predecessor. It was a dark and dinghy house, next to a burial ground. Sunanda hated the place. Her problems were sorted out within 5 months of my reporting at Kohima, when Koramoa Jamir, the Public Works Department minister in Hokise Sema government, built a fine glasshouse for us atop a hill just below the Governor's palace. It stood just over the knoll from where the mighty Kohima hills rolled down the Zubza valley.

The funniest aspect about the new home was a query from Delhi: Who paid for it? How come you took a graft from the state government? It took a couple of months to convince Delhi that the house was a gift to the IB by the state government of Nagaland.

J.N. Roy introduced me to some of the leaders of the Naga Nationalist Organisation (NNO), a couple of ministers and a few helpful government officials, who were known to dwell in the shadow zone of divided loyalty. It is better to understand in the context of Nagaland that the smoky screen between the over ground Naga gentry and the underground rebel outfits was very thin. A strong faction in the NNO was supportive of the Naga National Council (NNC), the Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the Naga Army. The United Democratic Front (UDF), a motley collection of pro-Phizo politicians, acted as the float and sinker of the underground movement.

I stepped into a well-organised office and inherited a dedicated band of officers. It was unlike my wild crash-landing in Manipur, where I was denied the benefit of briefing by my predecessor and occupied an office that was hardly geared for tackling the complicated problems of the territory.

Most of the drawbacks of the new office were compensated by the presence of R.P. Joshi over my head. A fine human being and a balanced officer, Joshi had reposed intrinsic trust in me during my Imphal tenure. My resolve to work harder and strengthen his hand was fortified by his trust and faith in me. While Joshi offered me a congenial atmosphere in the office, his wife Tara *didi* (elder sister), who belonged to an illustrious family, took Sunanda and our son *Babu* under her indulgent wings and took care of our home front. That helped me in diving deep into the affairs of Nagaland, which was passing through a crucial stage.

The 1971 war and emergence of Bangladesh and Indira Gandhi's soaring popularity at home and abroad had generated conflicting reactions among the divided Naga underground movement. The predominant Sema group headed by Kukhato Sukhai, Kaito, and Scato Swu had broken away from the Angami dominated NNC/NFG and had floated the Council of Naga People. The event had later culminated in the formation of the Revolutionary Government of Nagaland (RGM) that challenged the hegemony of the NNC/NFG headed by G. Mehiasiu, the President of the NFG. Z. Ramyo, Home Minister, Mowu Angami, the Naga Army chief, Thinuselie Angami, and Thuingaleng Muivah and others ably supported him. Kevi Yallay, the elder brother of A.Z. Phizo, maintained a hawk eye on the performance of the Phizoites with able assistance from the over ground political leaders, sympathetic bureaucrats and a few church functionaries.

The Phizoite camp too had started developing some fault lines. Th. Muivah an accomplished Tangkhul Naga, was appointed the Naga Ambassador Plenipotentiary to China. He had led a Naga gang to China assisted by Thinuselie Angami in 1966. He returned in 1968 with huge quantities of Chinese arms and a cadre of indoctrinated fighters. However, General N.C. Rawlley of the 8 Mountain Division had engaged the gang at Jotsuma and inflicted heavy casualty.

This incident and the impact of the Sema revolt had sent chilling messages to the Naga underground leaders. The incompatibility between Z. Ramyo and Muivah, two Tangkhul personalities,

had come into the open. The two rebels fought for hegemony over the Tangkhul undergrounds, the tribe that provided important vertebrae to the movement.

The concept of 'Nagaland for Christ' suffered a jolt from the open bonhomie between the NFG and Communist China. The Naga people were aghast over the idea of surrendering to the atheist Chinese, who were opposed to the values imbibed from the Baptist Mission by the Naga people over decades. They did not like Muivah selling the Christian Nagas to the godless Chinese Communists. These developments had prompted some of the top underground leaders to start weighing the ideas about settling the festering problem with the government of India on honourable terms.

The over ground politics too had taken a murky turn. Hokishe Sema, the Chief Minister, was in favour of making a separate settlement with the breakaway Sema group. His moves had brought about fissure in the ruling party, the NNO. S.C. Jamir, a prominent Ao leader and a former deputy minister in Indira cabinet, spearheaded the breakaway movement. Chuba Toshi Jamir, also an Ao and a minister in Hokise cabinet, joined him. They were supported by the pro-NNC/NFG elements, which strengthened the pro-Phizo United Democratic Front.

But the expectation that the NNC/NFG had started wilting under the physical operations by the Indian Army, headed by General A.R. Dutt, and psychological pressure of losing its base in East Pakistan did not materialise. The Indian Army marked this interim period by the ding-dong scenario of return of Naga gangs from China and interception of several gangs on its own and with the help of the RGN.

The Chinese links and internal resilience of the underground movement had propped up the resolve of the Naga insurgents to carry on their struggle. Support from the breakaway NNO leaders and the UDF too had emboldened the rebel forces. New ties with the Burmese Nagas and Kachin rebels compensated for some of the lost ground in Nagaland-Manipur. New havens were created on the Burmese soil. The Phizoite group initiated a major strike back by ambushing the motorcade of Chief Minister Hokise Sema on national highway 39, just below Kohima, on August 8, 1972. This daring daytime attack had signalled a change in the underground movement.

Following this the Naga underground outfits were declared illegal by the government of India. Governor B.K. Nehru's broadcast on September 1, over the All India Radio Kohima, had made it clear that the individuals and institutions, which aided and abetted the underground, would be liable to arrest and prosecution. This temporary shock treatment did not deter the underground from escalating its jungle warfare. They responded by recruiting heavily to the ranks of the underground army. The Naga army exhibited its resolve to continue the war of attrition by staging ambushes nearer to Kohima during the evangelical crusade of Billy Graham, the famous US evangelist.

Th. Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu had in the meantime struck understanding with the Eastern Naga Revolutionary Council under the aegis of the Chinese mentors. A separate protocol was reached with the Kachin Independent Army, which later provided sanctuary to Muivah and Isak and facilitated their sojourns to China. The seeds of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) were sown during this period of bonhomie between Muivah, Isak and the Chinese policy planners. Peace took a back seat.

Nevertheless, Hokise Sema was not deterred by the unexpected developments. He was supported by worthy colleagues like J.B. Jasokie, Chingwang Konyak, and Koramoa Jamir and a band of dedicated officers headed by H. Zopianga, the Chief Secretary, and M. Ramunny, who had shifted to Nagaland from Manipur almost around the same time I was transferred out. S. C. Dev, the Commissioner played a central role in fashioning the government approaches to peace and war. In Hokise and Jasokie I found rare specimen of staunch Indian nationalists who were determined to put

Nagaland on the rails of peace and economic development. Jasokie, a Catholic in predominantly Baptist Nagaland, was more reserved in nature, but was equally committed to the integrity of the nation.

Here I must mention about a perverted perception of some of the policy planners in Delhi. They treated the Baptist Christians as lesser nationalist than the Catholics. They made some conscious efforts to strengthen the Catholic Missions in Nagaland by encouraging them to open more schools, hospitals and philanthropic organisations. I did not essentially subscribe to this view. The Church in Nagaland played a big role. But there was no tangible evidence that this institution was subversive in nature. Absence of political voice and distances between the vox populi and the ruling elite had facilitated the Church to speak up on behalf of the people. They filled in a gap that existed between the government and the people. However, as an intelligence operator I had to arrange for piercing coverage of the questionable activities of a section of the Church personalities.

In any case, I welcomed the accretion of Malayalee (Keralite) Christian priests and teachers who took advantage of the growth of the Catholic Church in Nagaland and Manipur. They were acceptable to the remotest Naga villages and they did not demur in assisting the security concerns of the country.

I had developed a healthy respect for Hokise Sema even before I joined the Kohima unit of the IB. It happened in September 1969, when the insurgents littered the minister's hills and other residential areas of Kohima town by mortar shells. I was seated with some colleagues. Hokise did not try to take cover. Instead he went on a whirling tour of the affected areas and some military areas. I witnessed a unique resolve in his face.

“Like the fun?”

He asked while chewing *tambul* (concoction of betel leaf, fermented areca nut and lime).

“Sure I do.”

“You're welcome. I must make these bloke heads to understand that they can't get independence. They've to settle down within India.”

He moved around the town like a military general and comforted the ordinary policemen shakily guarding the vulnerable areas of the town.

My second strange encounter with him was at the badminton court at the backyard of his official residence. Kohima did not offer any place for games and entertainment. One had to drive down to Imphal or Dimapur to see a movie. The Assam Rifles and the 8 Mountain Division offered some sporting facilities. Hokise's backyard, therefore, had become a sporting ground for me and some other officers.

That particular day Hokise warmly offered me a *tambul*, which I chewed merrily. I was not aware that *tambul* could have devastating effect on uninitiated connoisseurs. The fermented areca nut juice and the pylocarpin toxin immediately generated heat in my body and I fainted from choking.

Later I was told that Hokise had rushed into his house and came out with a fistful of sugar. He had pushed the sugar into my mouth and made me to sip water. I regained consciousness after about 10 anxious minutes. The knowledge I gathered was very important for survival in the North East. The people, rich and poor, are in the habit of chewing *tambul*, with fermented areca nut and a spat of raw lime. The concoction generated sufficient body heat that kept the villagers warm even in the height of winter. I was aghast to see the village folks loitering in scanty cloth amidst wet wintry climate. I had drawn a hasty conclusion that their scantily clad bodies were warmed up by heavy consumption of *madhu* (rice beer) and *ruhi* (fermented grain spirit with high alcohol content). I was wrong. But I never tried to generate heat by chewing *tambul* again. Only lion hearted people of the North East could manage that deadly concoction. I remained happy with the occasional Benarasi *pan* (betel leaf)

vended by odd Bihari entrepreneurs in the heart of the insurgency-infested territory.

*

I was immediately sucked into the vortex of the fast moving events. So immersed I was in my work that Sunanda had started expressing displeasure over my long hours in the office and long and risky tours to the interiors. The job load was tremendous. Besides the routine and operational intelligence generated by the IB operatives within the territorial jurisdiction assigned, I acted as the clearing desk for reports received from IB stations in Manipur, Dimapur, Mokakchung and Tuensang. There were too many reports to scan and too many despatches to prepare.

Generation of operational intelligence had always fascinated me. The Kohima post had offered immense opportunity to hone up the skill I had learnt in Manipur. I felt I was a fish in water waiting to display my aerobatics. I accepted the challenge and exploited the existing resources to the utmost benefit of the Army and Paramilitary forces. Some officers and a few freshly created human assets helped me breaking fresh grounds. General A.R.Dutt was fascinated by some of the accurate intelligence input, which was successfully executed by his troops. The end result was that Sunanda had to cook delicate Bengali dishes for the General at least three times a week. Brother of the legendary cine and theatre artist Utpal Dutt, the General used to regale us with the offbeat stories of his celebrity brother's exploits and his own experiences in the Army.

I don't think that it would be appropriate for me to delve deeper into the operational aspects. But the IB was credited with intelligence inputs that helped in thwarting and neutralising several Angami, Tangkhul and Chakesang insurgent groups. At least two gangs returning from China were intercepted in the Kheymungan territory bordering Burma and over two hundred rebels were induced to surrender before the authorities.

The operational pressure on the insurgents and occasional discreet applauses for the accurate intelligence that I catered did not satisfy me. I wanted to get into the groves of the psyche of the Naga people. All said and done A. Z. Phizo had succeeded in giving a "Pan Naga" image to the movement. Narrow tribalism was and continues to be the bane of the tribal society in the North East. Tribalism is confused with nationalism. The barriers of language, dialect, tribal rituals and pride vivisected the 15 major Naga tribes. The common bondage of the Church could not obliterate the age-old barriers of tribe and clan feuds. Nagamese, a hotchpotch mix of Assamese, Bengali and Nepali was the lingua franca. The Nagas living in the interior hilltop villages were not adequately conversed in the use of Nagamese.

The separatist movement launched by Phizo had blurred to some extent the tribal and clan barriers. The geo-national entity of the Nagas was yet to be defined conclusively, though they had forced the government of India almost at the gunpoint to grant them a geo-political identity. This ambiguity still haunts the Naga people and they still aspire to complete their ethnic geography by the creation of a 'Greater Nagaland', encompassing the Naga inhabited areas of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and perhaps Burma.

A little deviation on the issue of Greater Nagaland is necessary. The toughest barrier to the process of negotiated peace is this very demand by Muivah group.

This is a highly debatable point. The Tangkhuls and the Zeliang and Rongmeis, as also the Mao-Maram and other lesser Naga tribes of Manipur are distinctly different from the Nagas of present political geography called Nagaland. Apparently they did not migrate from the same trans-Pacific or Sino-Polynesian stock. They look different; they speak different languages and follow different social

customs. The Nagaland Nagas were given some Pan-Naga coherence by Phizo and the movement that followed him. The Manipur Nagas have always tried to maintain their separateness from the Nagaland Nagas. Over the centuries they had acquired a distinct Manipuri identity under the Meitei kings. No doubt they are now tied in the common bondage of Christianity, but most of them belong to different denominations. Conceding an enlarged political territory simply because they swear by the same Book would tantamount to falling prey to demands like the ones made by some Islamists; that religions commonality made a compact nation-Ummah.

I have a genuine feeling, which I am able to state with certain degree of certainty that the Nagaland Nagas would not welcome the Manipuri Nagas. The Tangkhuls are as domineering in nature as the Angamis, Aos and Semas are. It is a case like the desire of the Bengali people living in India and Bangladesh reuniting as one ethnic-nation. There is ethnic and linguistic uniformity amongst the Bengalis and Punjabis living on two sides of the international borders. But that does not prove a case for reunion. It's a dream, often a bad dream. Similarly the desire of the Naga people of Nagaland, Manipur and Burma uniting on the singular basis of a generalised nomenclature assigned to them by the Ahoms and the British is a chimera. It is like the nomenclature Hindu that carries the burden of some ethnological and philological peculiarities of certain people who could not pronounce 'S' and used 'H' instead. Everyone living in Hindustan is not a Hindu. In the stricter sense of interpretation of the word H (S) indu the people of Pakistan are better claimants to the nomenclature, as they are supposed to be the original Sindhuja (people of the River Sind) or Hindu. Would this be acceptable to our umbilical brothers in Pakistan? The word Hindu is a geopolitical description and not a religious marker.

The word Naga was used in pejorative sense to indicate that compared to the civilised people of Assam the people inhabiting the hills were *Nagna* (naked) as they were inadequately clothed. *Nagna* is the source word of the name Naga, like the word *Naga Sannysis* (naked saints) used by the Hindus to describe some of their holy men. The Jain faith has a *digambara* sect, which means the sect that shuns clothing.

I had gathered satisfactory knowledge about the Naga tribes of Manipur. They were distinct from each other not only by language, but also by their physical features and the social practices they performed. A section of the Zeliang and Rongmei Nagas under Rani Gaidinlieu refused to embrace Christianity. They liked to be described as Hindu Nagas. A small group in south Manipur claimed to be Jews. Still smaller groups liked to pass themselves as Hindus, though the Hindu organisations like the Ramkrishna Mission were not encouraged by the government of India to penetrate into those areas for fear of adverse reaction from the predominant Christianised Naga tribes. The RSS too did not venture beyond the urban area of Dimapur, Haflong. Their Hindutwa pretensions dried up before the Pakistani and Chinese bullets.

Nagaland, therefore, cannot be the home of the Nagas living anywhere in the general geographic area. A common given name and faith in a common religion cannot be the basis of creating a new geopolitical entity. It may not be acceptable to the Nagas living in Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. These people are Nagas in as much as Bangladeshi Bengalis and the Pakistani Punjabis are Bengalis and Punjabis.

Anyway, history does not care for individual perceptions. However, if any weak government in Delhi allows the wheel of history rolling in the direction of 'Naga unity in a common geo-political boundary inside the Indian Union' it will not strengthen the security scenario of North East India. It will lead to serious explosions in Assam, Arunachal, Manipur and other ethnic areas where ethnic geography is still undergoing tectonic convulsions.

I was, however, far away from the diaphragm of the mystic of the Nagaland Naga tribes. Before launching myself on the adventurous course of gaining entry into the Naga society I brushed up my knowledge of Nagamese with helps from the staff members like Vesalho Chakesang, and a young student friend Zaivito Sema (not real name). Gradually Sunanda and I were granted entry into the Naga homes of the enigmatic and feared Kohima Bara Basti (big village) and villages like Chedema, Phesama, Phek, and Jessami.

Sunanda detested the food cooked in Naga way, especially pork, beef, and various kinds of meat. But she enjoyed the simple chicken soup boiled with locally grown vegetables and ginger roots. Served with rice and roasted trout from the local rivers satisfied her palate. I too suffered from a disadvantage. I did not take any hard drink but managed to develop a taste for not so aromatic *madhu* and Naga tea. My dislike for hard liquor did not prevent me from carrying crates of rum, the virtual legal tender, whenever we visited the interior villages and homes of the important Naga leaders. Scotch replaced the rum whenever we visited the homes of the elite.

During one such visit to Khonoma village, where we were greeted by a dance performance by the village belles, a few armed people belonging to the underground accosted us. They questioned the purpose of the visit of an Indian intelligence officer to their village. My stock reply was: I was not on a mission of collecting intelligence. My wife and I were the village guests and we were more interested in learning the Naga way of life. I was not sure if they were impressed by my bold reply, but the dance performance was followed by a sumptuous dinner and presentation of a colourful Angami shawl to Sunanda. I presented an amount of 500 hundred to the village church.

Gradually the icy barriers started melting and wielding to *tambul* tinted broad grin. The process culminated in our reception at Jessami, in the heartland of hostile Chakesang territory and ritual killing of a *mithun* (hybrid ox) in our honour. This time the Naga Woman's Society, a body affiliated to the Naga Federal Government, presented me a Naga tie in addition to a beautiful Chakesang shawl to Sunanda and a scarf to our son. The presence of my family during my visits to the interior villages had opened up many a Naga heart. I was convinced in my assessment that the Nagas valued the family system as dearly as they valued their loyalty to their respective tribes. It was well understood that an invitation to our home meant invitation to an entire family of a Naga guest. Diplomatic stag parties mostly ended in exchange of formal views. A family get together often melted the barriers between the Nagas and the 'hated Indian Dogs.' My strategy of involving my family with my work paid high dividends. In those days of ideology based insurgency the civilians and women were not attacked by the Nagas. We moved freely and our carefree attitude bemused the Naga people.

TEN

AMIDST A LOVEABLE PEOPLE

It is only after time has been given for cool and deliberate reflection that the real voice of people can be known.

George Washington

Our visit to the Naga villages did not blind me to the requirement of my profession. The intelligence officer in me ticked away like the cosmic time machine. I had succeeded in generating a number of intelligence assets, which helped in gaining insight into the Naga psyche and inner functioning of the Naga underground apparatus. It offered me chances of generating very valuable operational intelligence too.

Reeling under the impact of the government ban and apprehensive of the contradiction of growing Chinese link and increased obduracy of Muivah and Isak some Phizoite Naga leaders had started thinking in terms of renewal of the peace process. I was aware that peace in Nagaland was a chimera and it could not be approached again unless Phizo blessed the process. I was aware too of the approaches being made by the MI Directorate through Rano Shaiza, a niece of Phizo, and her husband Lungshim, a Tangkhul Naga. Their marriage was a diplomatic bridge between the two domineering Naga tribes of Nagaland and Manipur-the Angamis and the Tangkhuls. Some Calcutta based operatives of the Research & Analysis Wing of the Cabinet Secretariat were also sounding out Reverend Longri Ao. On top of it S.C. Dev, the Commissioner of Nagaland, M. Ramunny, the advisor to the Governor, and M. L. Kampani, a Nagaland veteran and now a senior officer in the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, were making their own efforts to break the ice. I was too puny a figure to compete with them.

My luck and efforts brought a real breakthrough by a Khonoma based friend. I earned the distinction of the first Indian intelligence operative meeting Kevi Yallay, the elder brother of A. Z. Phizo, somewhere near Chedema just before the Christmas of 1972.

I was picked up from behind the Naga Bazaar by the Khonoma friend and walked up and down the low hill features for about one hour before we climbed up a shoulder to reach an unpaved road that led to Chedema. A jeep waited for us near a humped bend. We drove for about 30 minutes only to be stopped by three armed men. The friend asked me to get down and submit to the frisking carried out by a chap who managed to hang a piece of smile on his face as smoothly as he slung up the automatic rifle on his shoulder. The smile, I understood, was a part of his physical feature. Perhaps his face would beam the same muscular contortion even when he faced enemy bullets.

We passed through the eye of the needle only to walk another two kilometres and to be taken to a thatched hut with tin roof. The imposing figure wearing a robe like dress and an Angami shawl wrapped over his shoulder received me at the door. His long hair gave him the look of a brown Moses.

We were seated around a massive sawed off log table and served with normal English tea and crunchy biscuits. My attention was diverted to the Chinese letters on the biscuit packets.

“Welcome to the Darjeeling tea and Shanghai biscuits.”

Kevi Yallay spoke in his characteristic manners.

“Nice biscuits.”

I commented.

“Should be nice. May be bitter for you. These were brought from China by my friend Muivah.”

“I am fortunate indeed.”

“Indeed you are. You are the first Indian officer to meet me. I must offer you the best.”

“A Naga rice-cake would have been a better snack.”

“Well said Kolkatta (Calcutta) *babu*. I like it.”

The bantering continued for a while till I led Kevi Yallay to substantive points. We talked for over two hours and left as good friends. I presented Kevi a thin chain with a Jesus on the Cross pendant. He looked at it intently and broke into laughter.

“Clever indeed,” he spoke, “I believe you visit our villages with your wife and child.”

“Yes I do.”

“Keep it up. Try to understand the Naga people. You Indians are as far from us as the Eskimos are from New York. Tell your people that to make us Indian they have to prove that India is worth living for the Nagas.”

I decided not to reply to this comment of Kevi, because I had noticed a streak of conciliation in him during our discussions. A Naga was naturally suspicious and inquisitive of the Indians who suddenly descended on them after the transfer of power in 1947. The process of integration, I understood, would take more time than India is taking to shape up as Bharat.

On my return to Kohima I took two days to record the details of the discussions with the Naga leader. I am barred by the Official Secrets Act to share the details with my readers. But Delhi was stunned by the report. There was initial disbelief about the meeting itself. How could a kid in the service manage to hook a veteran Naga rebel like Kevi? But the analysis desk finally agreed with the contents of the report and I received a congratulatory letter from R. D. Pandey, who was considered as the lynchpin of the North Eastern operations of the IB. He was the police head of Nagaland when I was posted in Manipur. His congratulation was accompanied by a veiled warning: I should take care of my safety and that of my family.

The contents of my report on Kevi Yallay, I was told, had helped the government of India in formulating the peace talks later in 1974-75.

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A planned meeting with Z. Ramyo followed the meeting with Kevi. Ramyo was an enigmatic Tangkhul leader, who had piloted the drafting of the *Yehzabo* (constitution) of the parallel Naga government in 1967-68.

My contact with Ramyo was established at a time when he had come under suspicion of the Angami and Chakesang faction of the NNC/NFG. Another enigmatic Tangkhul, Thuingaleng Muivah thought very little of Ramyo. This was not surprising. The Tangkhuls are a jealous lot. They cannot tolerate a thriving fellow Tangkhul. That's why the Tangkhuls could not produce another towering political figure like Rishang Keishing and a balanced headed underground leader like Ramyo.

It gives pain to knowledgeable persons to see that the government of India thinks that Muivah is the key to the solution of the Naga problem. Muivah has very little following in his home district and his Tangkhul dominated armed group is not acceptable to the major Naga tribes of Nagaland. This Chinese and Pakistani protégé had succeeded in creating an illusion that his Tangkhul problem is the

problem of Nagaland. He is no Phizo, who was able to give a Pan-Naga identity to all the Naga tribes of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Arunachal and Burma. His dictate, unless Kalashnikov follows that, will not be acceptable to the villagers of Grihang (Ukhrul), Chandel (south Manipur) and Maram-Khullen (North Manipur). Strange are the ways of the ignorant politicians and the self-seeking bureaucrats, who continue to sell fake peace to the people of India!

My bridge to Ramyo was built by the old faithful, L. Hungyo. He made a few trips to the hideout of the Naga ideologue and spanned the planks of trust. Ramyo needed some urgent medical supplies and used Hungyo to procure the same from Imphal market. Once he was deputed to Gwahati to procure a particular life saving drug.

Hungyo cleverly used the services of Rashimi (not real name), a young Naga girl from Tolloi village, to carry the drugs to Ramyo. She used to come down to Hungyo's residence near Mantri Pokhri locality of Imphal to pick up the medicine and other supplies for the ailing Naga leader.

I accompanied Rashimi and Hungyo in a private jeep to the outskirts of Tolloi and waited for the nightfall to avoid army patrols. After nightfall the brave girl guided me to the village church. Hungyo stood guard outside. We were together for over two hours and discussed matters of mutual interest. I was surprised to notice that the much praised and maligned Naga leader possessed a child like simplicity and displayed deep faith in Christianity. He believed rather more on the mystic aspects of Christianity, though he did not carry the air of a mystique. He was a sort of Revivalist. His unabashed praise of the "Bengali baboos" and their understanding of the Naga problem had rather embarrassed me.

I managed to have three meetings with him, including one near Ghaspani, an intermediate post between Kohima and Dimapur. I was left with no doubt that Z. Ramyo was in favour of peace and supported an honourable settlement within the Indian Union. Our discussions covered the aspects of betrayal of Pakistan by the Chinese during the 1971 war and the persecution of the Christians in China. The march of history, I explained to him, was inexorably going to favour India and the Nagas should not live in the past of their ties with the British. The frontiers of India, he agreed with me, did not end at the imaginary 'Inner Line'. It extended to the Chinese and Burmese borders and China was not going to fight another war for resettling the political geography of the Nagas.

Ramyo was not an intelligence agent. We met as friends at personal level after sufficient trust was generated. Some of the reports of my discussions with Ramyo provided deep insight into the thinking process of some of the Phizoite Naga underground leaders and the over ground offshoots. Ramyo was later cheaply exploited by the military intelligence and was badly exposed. I felt sorry for him when Hungyo carried a message from him seeking immediate medical and financial help. I did what I could do under the circumstances to help him.

I must share with my readers here that in theatres like Nagaland the intelligence agencies and the executive arms of the government habitually crossed each other's path out of professional jealousy. A constant hide and seek game was played by the agencies to compromise each other's operations. Such initiatives came more from the FIU formations of the DMI and the field intelligence detachments of the Divisional headquarter. In this unfair competition of upping the ante I had to regulate my meetings with Ramyo. However, we continued to work together which culminated in the signing of the Shillong Accord after my departure from Nagaland.

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My efforts to cultivate the top underground Naga leaders did not stop with Ramyo. An important

Chakesang leader of the UDF, who happened to become the Chief Minister of Nagaland in 1992-'93, had prepared the ground for my meeting with Biseto Medom Keyho, the self styled Home Minister of the NFG. The initiative for the meeting came from Biseto. I was surprised when Veni Iralu (not real name), a tantalisingly beautiful Angami belle from Chumukdima, a foothills town ahead of Dimapur carried the request to my Kohima home. Veni studied medicine in a Calcutta college and her brother Jessiloeu Iralu (name changed) was perhaps the first Angami to be recruited by me as a security assistant in last two decades. I fondly called him Jessie.

The Angamis hated almost everything Indian, especially the Intelligence Bureau. A proud people as they are the Angamis carried around them an air of superiority and considered themselves as numero uno amongst the Naga tribes. Educationally more advanced Ao people thought very little of the Angamis and the upcoming Semas too were not ready to concede the assumed demand of superiority of the clan of A.Z Phizo. The Tangkhuls in Manipur are as assertive as the Angamis are.

Jessie was courageous enough to accept the assignment and I had to push aside the objections of my colleagues. Their prejudice against the Angamis was pathological. My gamble worked out and the daring young man succeeded in facilitating my approach to the rigid Angami community and its underground leaders.

I did not take IB's prior permission to meet Kevi Yallay and Z. Ramyo. In case of Biseto I considered it necessary to consult the IB as I was not sure of the ground and I did not have intrinsic faith on the UDF leader. Delhi approved the proposal and added a detailed questioner for debriefing the self styled Home Minister of the NFG.

I did not have to negotiate tough terrain in the heartland of the Angami country to meet the rebel leader. Our meeting was fixed at an insignificant hut in the midst of the Angami sector of Diphu Par village. Jessie guided me to the end of a mud road where the Chakesang leader joined me. We walked for about 30 minutes before two shawl wrapped persons took charge and guided us silently. Their bulging shawls indicated presence of automatic weapons on their persons. They peeled off at the gate of a hut and Veni greeted us. Her presence surprised me. I did not expect her at the rendezvous.

I was later told that Veni and Jessie were related to Biseto Medom and she had come down to Diphu Par to treat the underground leader suffering from a festering skin disease.

Biseto received us warmly but asked the UDF leader to stay out of the meeting. We were left alone after Veni served tea and snacks. Biseto and I talked for over one hour. His questions about the likely response from the government of India on a renewed peace talk surprised me. Till that point of time no one in Nagaland including Reverend Longri Ao was taking peace. The developing ties between the Naga insurgents and the Chinese had hardened the attitude of the Indira Gandhi government. A section of the Phizoite leaders and the church leaders were perturbed over Muivah's newfound friendship with the Chinese communists.

I would like to skip the details of our discussion in the first and subsequent meetings with Biseto. Some of the discussion points encompassed the possible Chinese threat to Christian Naga people and the possibility of limiting recruitment to the underground army and slowing down the process of armed conflict. All that I can assert that Biseto was not a close minded person. His conviction in the Naga cause was genuine. But he did not suffer from tunnel vision like Muivah and Isak. His flexible attitude had helped the peace initiatives at a later stage, which culminated in the Shillong Accord.

At a personal level Veni and Jessie helped me in maintaining a steady dialogue with Biseto and I often derived pleasure from the fact that my good friends Dr. A. K. Ghosh and Dr. C. Chakravarty of the Naga Hospital, Kohima, were able to render valuable medical assistance to this fine Naga leader. Biseto was a fine specimen of an ideological revolutionary who carried in his person a dignified

demeanour and a rare blend of human kindness. The Christian in him had overshadowed the revolutionary.

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My visits to Phek in the Chakesang territory were triggered off by some complaints against my post in charge by the deputy chief of the village committee. The young Bengali speaking officer had succeeded in raising a couple of useful human assets and his general area coverage was satisfactory. The complaint arose out of his alleged fascination for a village girl.

I wasn't unaware of this relationship. I had encouraged the officer to develop the girl's liking for him. I precisely knew who the girl was. Moreover, it was natural for a young man to be attracted to a cute Chakesang belle. The Chakesang Nagas bear sharper features unlike most of the Mongoloid looking Naga people. Their fair skin carried a rouge glow and their facial features reminded a keen observer of the people of the Pacific Rim. The unique physical features of the Chakesang people intrigued me.

On this occasion Sunanda and our son accompanied me. We carried a crate of rum for the village chief, a few cans of condensed milk, tea packets and some scents and cosmetics. We had chosen the non-alcoholic gifts with a purpose.

On arrival at Phek we were felicitated at the village church, which was followed by a midday meal. The local commander of the Assam Rifles wanted us to spend the night in his unit guesthouse. We opted for the government rest house, which was not really equipped for a lady and a child.

Next morning we left for the house of the girl Mary (not real name) for whom my officer was supposed to have developed tenderness. On the way a village official informed me that we were going to the village home of Zashie Huire, the self styled President of the NFG, and Mary (name changed) happened to be his daughter.

Zashie's home was not different from any other tin roofed and bamboo-thatch walled home of the village. It was a non-characteristic Naga home. The only Naga feature inside the single room home was the central fireplace, which was used both for cooking and heating purposes.

The lady of the house and the gem of a daughter of the Naga rebel leader cordially received us. We sat around the fire while Mary made tea and served a cup of milk to our son. We talked about war and peace and the drudgery of the common people. She complained of harassment by the Army patrols and frequent summons from the Assam Rifles camp. She did not mind visiting the camps but she positively resented the summons issued to her daughter.

We offered her the non-alcoholic gifts. She was excited over the condensed milk and Mary was surprised by the gifts of the cosmetics. That helped in melting of the ice and we spent over two hours together. I called the lady of the house to a corner in presence of Sunanda and asked her if she had any complaint about my officer. She did not have any, but commented that he should be more careful in visiting their home as the village elders did not appreciate the idea of an Indian getting mixed up with the daughter of the President of the NFG. I assured her of suitable action and left with promises of future meetings.

The visit flourished into a friendly relationship that finally fruited in my meeting with Zashie sometime in September 1973. We mostly met in the jungle hideouts of the rebel leader and on most of the occasions a well-meaning middle level Chakesang employee of the Nagaland government, acted as the cut out. I had five meetings with Zashie Huire during which we discussed the entire gamut of Indo-Naga relationship and the possibility of reaching a lasting peace agreement. He was the first

Naga leader to give me clear hints that the movement was slipping out of the hands of Phizo and the self-exiled leader in London was cut off from reality. There was a developing trend in the underground that opposed the growing ties with China. He was of the clear view that Muivah and Isak were pushing the Nagas to the Chinese lap and Phizo had not succeeded in reaching a formal political and military protocol with the Chinese leaders. He felt that Muivah and Isak were acting as geopolitical pawns of China and Pakistan. This could, he opined, lead to another fissure in the underground movement. He was not keen to invite the atheist Chinese Communists to the land of the Christ.

In Zashie I found an open-minded person who was not imprisoned behind ideological fences. A devout Christian, he believed in the basic values of human relationship and often referred to the bloody engagements with the armed forces as services to his Lord. He managed to speak a smattering of Bengali and he enjoyed my convoluted Nagamese pronunciation. We maintained a steady friendship and he appreciated that the Army had stopped harassing his wife and daughter after I took up the matter with M. Ramunny and S. C. Dev. Both of them appreciated my foray into the heart of the Naga movement, though I did not share with them the details of my discussions with Zashie.

ELEVEN

SWIMMING WITH THE PEOPLE

God must love the common man, he made so many of them.
Abraham Lincoln.

Professionally 1973 was a meaningful year.

My forays into the inner structure of the NNC, NFG and the Naga Army were motivated by the urges for generating impeccable sources of information as well as for understanding the Naga mind and the complicated ideological contours of history that were frozen inside Naga psyche. I believed that the process of continued interaction would help breaking that frozen images of history and upward and downward flow of ideas that had transcended the actions initiated by A. Z Phizo.

My efforts were naturally diverted to other chains of events that had divided the Naga movement. The Kukhato, Kaito, Scato and Zuheto Sema faction had broken away from the Phizoite group and had declared the formation of the Revolutionary Government of Nagaland (RGN).

The return of the Naga delegates from Delhi after meeting Indira Gandhi in October 1967 did not satisfy the Federal group. The agreement earlier arrived at had offered everything except independence. The *Tatar Hoho* blamed Kukhato Sukhai for selling out Naga interests. It passed a no-confidence motion against the Sema leader and he was removed from the post of *Ato Kilonsar* (Prime Minister). Earlier Kaito Sema, the chief of the Naga Army, was removed to make way for firebrand Angami Mowu. Around the same time Mehasieu Angami replaced Scato Swu, as the President of the Federal Government. Both Mowu and Mehasieu were from Khonoma, Phizo's village. Mehasieu appointed Z. Ramyo, a Tangkhul, as his Home Minister. Ramyo, a first class Law graduate and a keen footballer had cast his lot with Phizo in 1957. The Tangkhul influx was fortified by the appointment of Thuingaleng Muivah as the General Secretary of the NNC. A Master of Arts in political science Muivah was restless, ambitious and more ruthless than Ramyo. He was initially under the influence of Rano and Lungshim Shaiza. But, it is understood that he had used them to go past the excellent performance of Z. Ramyo. Muivah had always nursed personal ambition to project himself as the topmost Naga leader acceptable beyond his own tribe. There were reports in circulation that some high official of the MI Directorate cultivated Muivah till he was appointed NFG emissary to the Peoples Republic of China.

Events had taken a worse turn after the assassination of Kaito in Kohima town in 1968. The Semas retaliated by kidnapping Mehasieu and Ramyo. The Semas announced formation of a new political entity, Council of Naga People. Kukhato Sukhai was elected as President of the new party. Scato Swu was elected as the Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government. This was a breakthrough for the Nagaland government headed by Hokise Sema and the Union government in Delhi.

The Revolutionary group aligned itself with the Indian Army and the officials of the Indian government. Hokise, himself a Sema, wooed the Sema group and pressed for a settlement with them to the exclusion of the Federal group, which had in the meantime veered closer to Pakistan and China.

The Sema faction of the underground surrendered to the government of India on August 1973 at Zunheboto. The elation in Hokise camp was not shared by some of his ministerial colleagues and

NNO members. They aligned themselves with the UDF and the Federal group. Scato Swu was later nominated to the Rajya Sabha, in which the IB had played a big role. Zuheto took up an assignment with the Border Security Force.

The task of maintaining close liaison with Scato and Zuheto devolved upon me soon after I took over at Kohima. Scato was a fine human being with sincere commitment to the idea of aligning the Naga interest with India instead of China and Pakistan. A proud Sema as he was Scato resented the Angami, Chakesang and Tangkhul domination over the Naga movement. While he maintained steady contact with M. Ramunny, S. C. Dev on the civil side and the Divisional Commander of the 8th Mountain Division, Scato had virtually become my houseguest. He preferred to stay with us instead of the state guesthouse at the minister's hill. Sunanda had to cook chicken and pork dishes in Naga style with very little condiments. She liked Scato, who had adopted her as his sister and presented her with a traditional Sema dress.

The affairs of the Revolutionary Government kept me equally busy as I was assigned the task of fine-tuning the rough edges of the talks. The government of India had suddenly developed a miserly attitude and dithered from earlier commitments to set up an example by appropriately rehabilitating the ordinary cadre of the Revolutionary set up. Both Ramunny and Dev were in favour of giving the beleaguered and isolated Sema group a fair deal. Their efforts were not matched by Delhi. Often I was presented with awkward situation of being surrounded by the armed soldiers of Revolutionary Army and threatened for my alleged reneging from the promises made by certain officials in Delhi. I was aware that some of the top advisors of Indira Gandhi were not impressed by the coup staged by the Semas. They still basked in the glory of the Bangladesh events and had very little respect for the distant Nagas.

Scato, at one point of dark depression, toyed with the idea of patching up with the Federal group and had sent feelers to Mehasieu and Ramyo. I happened to get a scent of this from Ramyo and shared it with Delhi and requested R.P. Joshi to recommend to Delhi to immediately arrange for Scato's personal rehabilitation. His nomination to the Rajya Sabha averted a possible ugly situation.

Scato was not a nowhere man. The Sema revolt against the dominating attitude of the Angamis did not end in personal gains for a few self-seeking leaders. The event has become an integral part of the Naga history and its linkages with India. It would not be proper to claim that the events in Bangladesh, Sheikh Abdullah's return to the so-called mainstream, the merger of Sikkim and the Pokharan atomic implosion and the emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi had propelled the Naga leaders to come forward for another round of peace talks. The Sema schism in the Naga movement had weakened the underground edifices considerably though some people would like to sell the idea that the Sema purging had brought the Phizoites closer to the Chinese and Pakistani forces operating from within Bangladesh and several other foreign well wishers.

War alone was not rampaging in the verdant slopes of Nagaland. The experiment with an elected democratic government at Kohima and initiation of economic developments had started sprouting genuine desire for progress for which peace was a foremost requirement. The vast majority of the underground leaders and the government of India understood that peace should be given another try. Several NNO leaders and Church activists were active on this front. L.P. Singh, the veteran bureaucrat, who had taken over as the governor, understood well the imperatives of a peace offensive. M.L Kampani, R. P. Joshi, M. Ramunny, H. Zopianga, and S.C. Dev, grassroots experts in the Naga affairs, ably assisted him.

It would not be proper to highlight my role in these efforts that culminated in the Shillong Accord. But my silence should not be construed as my divorce from the history of Nagaland in the making. It is

better to lock away such details. All that I can assert that my subterranean occupational linkages with Ramyo, Biseto, Zashie and a couple of other important underground leaders of Nagaland and Manipur had helped the policy makers to understand the Naga mind better. I was extremely busy during the preparatory period running between the over ground and the underground. The best expression of this was from Zashie, who had later invited me to his daughter's marriage with a personal note of thanks. As an intelligence operator of the IB I did not expect an out of turn reward. I did my job to the satisfaction of the bosses and the political leaders. I am not in a position to disclose the exact utilisation of the assets of the IB for stabilising the peace talks that had culminated in the Shillong Accord.

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February 1974 brought in its wake a season of change, a major change in the political complexion of the state and in our personal lives.

The emergence of the United Democratic Front in July 1972 had come with the poser of offering an alternative to the NNO. The migration of T. N. Angami and few other stalwarts of the NNO to the UDF had bolstered the acceptability of the party to democratic minded and fence sitting sections of the Nagas. Hokise did a great job in containing armed underground activities. However, uninterrupted stint of power had blinded Hokise to the aspirations of the people other than fire fighting actions against the undergrounds. They wanted peace in as much as they wanted economic development and lessening of stinking corruption. They genuinely thought that change of faces in the over ground politics could probably change the ambience for better economic diagnosis and prognosis.

Another cruel reality was that the funds poured in by Delhi were going only to the pockets of the NNO leaders and their political opponents were yet to taste the smell of big money that had flooded the tiny state. It's not certain if democracy in India offers equal opportunity to its people. But it offers more than equal opportunity to the political class to share the booty amongst themselves at suitable intervals through the process of elected democracy. The emergence of the political class in independent India has defeated all classic definitions of class struggle.

Whatever it is, the victory of the UDF in February 1974 elections had left no one in doubt that it was simply not the emergence of a pro-underground power. It was indeed the emergence of a parallel political class that gave a glimmer of hope of better socialistic distribution of funds allocated by Delhi. No common Naga hoped that his stream would be flooded with honey and manna simply because another shade of political forced had occupied the ministers' hill. They suffered from no illusion that the UDF was capable of taking them to the dawn of 'independence.'

The sarcasm apart, in a closely contested election the NNO had bagged 23 seats against 25 by the UDF. Vizol, a moderate pro-underground leader, managed to garner support of seven independent MLAs and formed a new cabinet on February 26.

Beyond the humdrum of political developments and insurgency a very major happy incident on February 21 had filled up our home with happiness. Our second son Mainak was born at Naga Hospital, Kohima. I owe it to Dr. S. P. Ghosh of Naga Hospital and Tara *didi*, wife of boss R. P. Joshi for the smooth arrival of the child under very rudimentary and almost unhygienic conditions.

Mostly the Naga families visited the Naga Hospital. The 'Indians' visited the Assam Rifles or Army Hospital at Jakhama. We had decided to stay put with the Naga fate, simply because we believed in Dr. Ghosh and Tara *didi*. Busy as I was with the Naga insurgent groups and the state assembly election I could devote very little time to Sunanda. But the brave lady had enormous inner

strength to weather the storms both at home and outside. She too did not like to run to the elite Army hospital. That's how, even around the midnight of February 21, scores of Naga friends were present at Naga hospital to greet the newborn baby. Their kindness had overwhelmed us. We were not the VIPs of the day. But we had made lots of good friends and the pile of Naga shawls around Sunanda's maternity bed had strengthened that tender relationship. We fervently hoped that our son would be as tough, bold, honest, and creative as most of the Nagas were.

My work demanded hosting of frequent diplomatic style parties at home. Kohima did not offer the usual advantage of posh hotels and restaurants. We were left with no alternative but to entertain the politicians, bureaucrats and other professional friends at home. This involved strenuous involvement of the lady of the house. Sunanda excelled in throwing lavish parties and helping me to reach the heart of the professional targets through their stomach. The Nagas, as I said, love their families and they had not yet learnt the sophistication of attending home parties without their families. That made Sunanda's job more pleasant and complicated. We had prepared a ready reckoner and had listed the preferences of the wives and children of the different ministers, other political figures and the bureaucrats. This helped us in serving the correct drinks and food to the correct guests and procuring the correct Christmas gifts for the devout Christians that the Nagas are.

Soon after our second son's birth I requested Delhi for a transfer to Calcutta. We thought our home city would be the best place to educate the children and bring them up in the ambience of Bengali culture. Destiny, if there is some such amorphous entity, must have squirmed her lips in disapproval. I was not 'destined' to be in Bengal, though I had made several efforts to work and flourish on my own soil.

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The events after February '74 had generated panic reaction in Delhi. Adverse economic situation had forced Delhi to approach the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for loan, which was granted with rigid conditions. India was forced to put a break to its soviet type socialist economy. Unemployment and industrial unrest plagued the governance scenario. January '74 had witnessed the growth of the Nav Nirman movement in Gujarat, which led to the dissolution of the corrupt Chiman Bhai Patel ministry and imposition of President's rule. Indira hinted about foreign hands being responsible for the growing unrest. But that did not put a stop to the disenchantment of the people who mobilised around Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), the last of the visionaries, to build up a mass movement. The cadre of the Hindutwa protagonist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and charismatic socialist leaders like George Fernandez joined him. The IB rated him as a foreign spy, because of his linkages with the Socialist International and several surveillance measures were adopted to keep a tag on his activities. The government responded by harshly implementing the Maintenance of Internal of Security Act (MISA).

There is a perception that because of her domestic compulsions more than anything else had prompted Indira Gandhi to carry out nuclear implosion at Pokharan. This is not a correct perception. Lal Bahadur Shashtri was responsible for ordering weaponisation of India's nuclear programme. Scrounging of old records would prove this beyond any doubt. Indira Gandhi pursued the policy adopted by Nehru and Shashtri. Indira did sure render a cardinal service to the nation by going nuclear. It was a historical imperative for India to go nuclear in the face of Chinese nuclear capability and the growing axis between Washington, Islamabad, and Peking. However, the Rajasthan bang did not buoyed up public morale. They did not shun the path of agitation. The Pokharan bangs were

compounded by the sound and fury of Sanjay's marriage to Maneka Anand and his involvement in the Maruti, people's car controversy.

The developments in Sikkim, a protectorate, too caused serious concern. The Chogyal (king) and his American wife Hope Cook, it was alleged, had embarked on secessionist activities. Extremely dangerous political tussle between the Chogyal and the pro-democracy and pro-Indian forces headed by Kazi Lehndup Dorji Khangrapa rocked the Himalayan kingdom. It threatened India's security concerns. Protestations were voiced by Pakistan, Nepal and China and diplomatic demarches from other countries too expressed serious concerns about the fate of Sikkim. Finally the Indian Army moved into the capital town of Gangtok. A hastily called and questionably conducted referendum had endorsed the merger of Sikkim with India leaving many pertinent questions unanswered. The 333-year-old monarchy, unique to the Bhutia Lepcha tribes, came to an end.

Such were the domestic scenario when a renewed Naga peace move shakily lumbered to its feet. The Naga and Mizo dependence on China had also added to the concern of Delhi. Indira's advisors too opted for another tryst with peace. This was followed by an initiative by the Nagaland Baptist Church leaders to bring the feuding parties to the negotiation tables. Another Peace Council was formed sometime in May 1974. I was directed in June 1974, to assess the mood of the important Naga underground and over ground leaders. While I concentrated on the underground task Joshi took charge of the over ground leaders. I hurriedly consulted the leaders like Kevi Yallay, Zashie, Biseto, Ramyo and a few middle rung leaders of the underground army. My findings were encouraging. The major underground leaders were ready to give peace another try. I do not know if my association had in any way softened the attitude of the jungle fighters. Nonetheless, I derived a lot of satisfaction out of such contacts and considered it as a landmark in my intelligence career.

The Nagaland Peace Council (NPC) submitted a 4-point memorandum to the Governor L. P. Singh. Following this an All Naga Public Peace Conference (comprising Naga delegates from all tribes of Nagaland) was held at Kohima. The meeting endorsed the NPC call to the underground to hold fire and stop recruitment and tax collection drive.

I had the unique opportunity to go between the office of the governor and some of the important underground leaders that helped in preparing the minds of the Naga leaders to consider a peace formula that sought a political settlement within the Indian Constitution. Both M. Ramunny and S. C. Dev helped me immensely.

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I must admit here with a sense of guilt that I was called upon for the second time to subvert the loyalty of a section of the UDF members of the Nagaland legislature. My targets included a Sema and a few non-Angami MLAs. I did whatever I could do to 'motivate' them to defect to the NNO at the behest of the masters in Delhi.

That was my second tryst with blatant unlawful activities. By that time I had come to realise that intelligence machineries are blatantly used for promoting political interests. Agencies like IB are not mere tools of safeguarding the security of the country. They are required to serve the narrow political interest of the ruling elite.

I did not carry any briefcase for them. The psychological bombarding done by me was followed up by 'incentive package' from the Raj Bhawan. I was not intoxicated by the idea of changing democratically elected government by dubious means. As a small operator of the Intelligence machinery I was used for a limited purpose. I was not the first and the last intelligence station deputy

to be used/misused by the government to subvert the Constitutional process. This has become a part and parcel of the democratic value of the Indian polity. This political domino game had by then become a trademark of Indian democracy and the use of the intelligence organisations had become a routine affair. There was no law in the country; still there is none, which can call intelligence officers before any Committee of the Parliament to give accounts of their activities. The IB and the R&AW did not suffer; they still do not, from the 'bane of accountability' to the constitutionally formed machineries of the country.

This requires major system correction. The politicians should understand that as the fabric of the democracy weakens the intelligence machinery could be more ruthlessly used by power hungry political elites. Indira Gandhi did this blatantly when she deviated from the democratic norms and imposed internal emergency. In recent times, as I write this chapter, the democratic government in Gujarat, used the entire state machinery, especially the state intelligence to let loose communal carnage on the minority community. The central intelligence agency stood by as mute witness. The central government headed by the BJP whimpered and hiccupped till the higher judiciary stepped in to protect the rule of law.

The worst scenario can be— a rogue cabal of intelligence boss and ambitious Army officers can subvert the democratic process, especially when the political players are nose dipped in criminalisation of politics. The allurements are many and the opportunities are limitless. The political breed must understand that their pet toys like the IB, CBI and R&AW can misfire and injure them. The nation should be secured by Acts of the Parliament to rein in the intelligence and investigative fraternity. In the interest of our fragile democracy we cannot allow ISI like organisations to take root.

Reverting back to subversion of the constitutional process in Nagaland more than mine the efforts of M. Ramunmy and S. C. Dev played decisive results. These extra constitutional efforts that had become a trademark of Indian democracy finally resulted in the ouster of Vizol government and swearing of a NNO ministry under John Bosco Jasokie, a nationalist Catholic Angami leader. His ministry was, however, defeated on the floor of the assembly by the UDF and the impasse was followed by another round of President's rule.

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Around March 1974, information was received that the NFG was contemplating to send another big Naga gang to China under self styled Brigadier Vedai Chakesang. I was immensely helped by a Chakesang staff member and to some extent by a Tangkhul member of the Naga Army, whom I had succeeded in infiltrating in the Vedai gang. This educated boy from Soraphung village in Ukhrul district was given a 'cover appointment' in the IB and was trained in secret communication and other tradecrafts. He managed to send timely information about the proposed itinerary of the gang. I received another opportunity to try my Manipur tactic. Several mobile teams were deployed along the proposed route that the gang intended to take. The Indian Army too succeeded in engaging the gang a couple of times on the basis of intelligence provided by the IB. I was later given to understand that the gang could not sneak past the security net that we managed to cast along the route. However, a small gang had crossed over to the Burmese territory after the Shillong Accord was signed on November 10, 1975. By that time I had left Nagaland on transfer to Calcutta, a mirage of happiness that I thought waited in the oasis of my hometown.

The IB achieved a crowning breakthrough when my friends Abraham of Manipur and Vikose Sema (not real name), both members of the underground *Tatar Hoho* were persuaded to attend an important

Hoho meeting on August 14, somewhere in between Iganumi and Lasami in lower Sema area. The all-important session was held in the backdrop of preparations for the renewed peace talks and readiness of a large number of the underground leaders to have lasting peace in Nagaland.

We were left with no doubt about the horizontal and vertical division among the top Naga leaders, both over ground and underground. No one in Delhi and Kohima believed in the possibility of emergence of total unanimity over the proposed peace talks. But a major section of the Phizo group had come around to the point of having a negotiated settlement of the issue. That's what we were pitching for.

The Iganumi-Lasami *Tatar Hoho* meeting provided deep insight into the conflicts prevailing among the underground leaders. It also helped the IB to identify the real hardcore UDF leaders who were inclined to drag the insurgency on more for political benefits than for any well being of the Naga people.

Some documents supplied by 'friends' Abraham and Vikose had confirmed our earlier information that Th. Muivah was appointed as the 'Ambassador Plenipotentiary' of the Federal Government of Nagaland to the Peoples' Republic of China. He and Isak Chisi Swu disagreed with the peace formula. They were in constant touch with the ISI, the Pakistani intelligence agency, and the Chinese emissaries through KIA friends (there are authentic secret reports on this connectivity). They did not denounce Phizo but treated him as a moth eaten page of Naga history. Very few Naga observers were aware that the Nagaland imbroglio was heading for a new course, despite the Phizoite leaders agreeing to settle down within the Indian constitution.

The Director Intelligence Bureau and the Governor of Nagaland appreciated the coverage of the *Tatar Hoho* meeting. Murkot Ramunny, the evergreen Naga expert had taken me to the Governor L. P. Singh for briefing him on the *Tatar Hoho* meeting and the implications of fresh gangs preparing to leave for China.

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Around mid 1974 I had managed to get into another controversy. One of the sensitive channels managed by the IB claimed that it was in a position to intercept all communications between A. Z. Phizo and the important underground leaders. These were taken as ultimate Vedas of intelligence input on the top echelons of the Naga leadership. I had no reason to suspect this channel. But some of the communications to Phizo from Mehasieu, Ramyo, Biseto and Zashie as well as some of Phizo's to them had struck discordant notes. Most of the contents of these letters, which were supposedly carried by human carriers, reflected information contained in the daily summary of information that were prepared by my office. I observed this strange coincidence for over a period and came to a tentative conclusion that some fertile mind fabricated most of these letters for which the IB paid hefty amounts.

I discussed the matter with R. P. Joshi. He was a man of few words and it was difficult to get him committed to my ideas. But around the time Vedai Chakesang was preparing to take out a gang to China I noticed that the contents of our daily summary were being reflected in some of these letters exchanged between the top Naga leaders. A glaring piece of misinformation about Th. Muivah crossing over to Nagaland at that point of time under instructions from Phizo convinced me that someone was misleading us for the love of money. Phizo and Muivah were not in the best of terms around the time the Nagaland Peace Council initiated the process of a fresh peace accord. Most of the NNC/NFG leaders were inclined to go along with the peace initiative and Muivah and Isak were opposed to it. They were physically in China. Some delicate pro-Chinese channel operating from

Calcutta, Dhaka and London had conveyed the objection of the Chinese and the Pakistanis to the new peace accord. They indicated that Beijing and Islamabad would have no problem in betting on Muivah-Isak stallion instead of the tired Phizo horse.

I had no intention to unmask my colleague who was responsible for earning some fat bucks by manufacturing these letters. But for the sake of the organisation and the country I strongly pleaded with my boss to have a second look into the scam. I produced a comparative chart on the materials catered in our daily summary and the contents of some of the letters. I also drew his attention about the misinformation contained in some of the letters. Joshi handled the matter in his own characteristic way and we were able to plug that manufactured intelligence channel. It saved the IB from serious embarrassments. But a few top analysts in Delhi did not wholeheartedly support my initiative. I had to present myself before two of the Delhi analysts and explain the nuts and bolts of my findings. They were finally convinced and I believe this prized communication channel had dried up considerably after I left Nagaland. It was, in today's lingo 'a severe case of intelligence sexing up.'

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Around the time I happened to operate in Nagaland we as well as the Naga undergrounds suffered from communication problems. The facilities of fax, internet and cell phone were unknown and the Naga undergrounds did not have access to High Frequency radio communication. Their letters and messages were routed through Dhaka, Bangkok, Kathmandu and some safe accommodation addresses in Delhi, Calcutta, Gwahati and Mumbai. The Dhaka channel was active even after Bangladesh came into existence. A top Naga underground leader explained this circuitous communication process to me. I had no reason to disbelieve him.

We intercepted almost all the suspected postal mail at Kohima and other subsidiary stations. The most incriminating evidence that we could gather was the receipt of dollar bills and cheques from foreign donors by the church leaders. Some of the dollar bills were misappropriated by some of the IB operatives. Several complaints were received in this regard from the church leaders and H. Zopianga, the chief secretary. This had forced me to take some corrective measures to ensure that the dollar bills reached the correct addressees.

Another funny incident that had almost landed me in trouble was related to the use of serving and gifting of rum, whisky and other alcoholic drinks to our professional friends. This also involved a sharp escalation in the cash payments to the agents and friends from the secret service funds. Most of our field officers operated a large number of 'contacts' and paid them paltry sums like rupees 30 to 50. I had carried out a study of the intelligence input of such agents. In addition to cash payment from the secret service fund they were allowed to draw rum from the official quota for entertaining their friends. My study produced shocking results. Most of such reports were scrounged from the surface and our officers barely succeeded in penetrating even the outer most layer of the underground.

I made out a case supporting sharp increase in secret service payment to the deserving 'agents' and 'friends', provided our officers succeeded in penetrating the regional underground structure. This had brought in vast improvement in the coverage and helped the IB in curtailing wasteful expenditure.

Nonetheless, I was summoned to Delhi to explain the sharp increase in secret service fund expenditure and expenditure on drinks. The Joint Director responsible for supervising the sacred trust of SS funds interrogated me for over an hour. I explained that rum and whisky were the legal tenders in Nagaland and most of the Nagas liked their drinks as much as they liked their Christ. He was not amused. I was advised not to serve more than three pegs and to keep an account of how many pegs

were served to which guest. I tried to protest. But Joshi, a prudent officer, restrained me. He was correct. Protestation before a pigheaded person was useless. On the issue of SS expenditure I pointed out that the Nagas had gone past the primitive days of allurements by flashy trinkets. Most of them were rich and did not care for rupees thirty. Such amount, I told him, straight away went to the pockets of the IB officers. He did not agree with me.

I was not angered by this officer's argument. I believe he had never served in any field formation especially in a station like Nagaland and had spent most of his time in Delhi. This, I believe, could not be a valid excuse. This officer had simply closed his mind and believed that the Nagas still roamed the hill jungles in loin clothes and lived in the civilisation of hunter-gatherer. It was a fun to have him around, a specimen of anachronism, who ardently believed that counting the pennies and the alcoholic tots were the best tools for generating intelligence. I decided not to pelt stones on his glasshouse and pleaded with Joshi to cover up my ass. He did that admirably.

The absence of sophisticated technical gadgets often presented seemingly insurmountable problems. A simple Xerox machine was beyond imagination. Even in Delhi one had to fall back on the Technical Laboratory for taking out badly smeared photocopies of documents and often had to fall back on the old process of taking out manually operated stencilled copies on bad quality yellowish papers. One could not, however, depend on this archaic technology in field operation conditions. Certain documents produced by our agents during field meetings were to be returned within a couple of hours. I tried to solve the problem by taking photographs of such documents and developing the negatives in a makeshift darkroom. The arrangement did not prove satisfactory.

However, our technical boys came out with a box like contraption, which used a couple of electric bulbs and could capture the image of the documents on special thermal papers. These papers were later developed in a chemical solution. The process of taking a negative imprint and developing it required considerable time. Nevertheless, it offered a crude solution to our problems. We gained the capability of returning the original documents to our agents within a couple of hours. Much later, when I happened to head the technical wing of the IB I tried to solve this problem by acquiring a few miniature electronic copiers that could be carried by our field officers for making clandestine copies of documents during agent meetings. Some highly trained agents were also taught the technical intricacies of operating such hand-held contraptions that could be easily concealed on their person.

I was in desperate need of using miniature radio microphones to record and transmit room conversations of some of the subjects that were under intensive coverage of the IB. Initially Delhi was not ready to share such gadgets with a remote field formation. Someone over there simply did not appreciate the seriousness of recording the proceedings of meetings of some of the underground leaders in which they were supposed to discuss the plans for sending gangs to China. An important underground meeting, which was to discuss the fresh peace initiative in 1974, was required to be appropriately documented.

I was summoned to Delhi and advised to desist from the temptation of using such sophisticated gadgets at the drop of my hat. I had to virtually hackle with the director of the Technical Laboratory and convince him that I had the requisite knowledge of operating such equipments. He relented and after painful procrastination by the controlling bosses I was given access to the treasure cove of Aladdin. The intelligence analysts in Delhi later appreciated my performance but they had stuck to their guns on the principle of maintaining the holy cow status of the technical wing. Much later, around 1986-87 M. K. Narayanan, the dynamic Director of the IB, had succeeded freeing the organisation of the shackles of the technical spooks. I think that was the time when the technical intelligence operations were slightly integrated with the operational intelligence wings.

During the fag end of my tenure in Nagaland I realised the importance of Strategic Intelligence Estimate (SIE). SIE is an established system that helps a country in preparing its diplomatic initiative, defence preparedness, orientation of state policy and maintenance of internal security. The defence forces normally carry out such intelligence estimates both in the strategic and tactical fields. I understand that some key divisions of the Ministry of External Affairs too carry out such exercises that attempt making forecasts in matters of diplomatic initiative and response.

But I did not have the opportunity of witnessing such an in-house exercise by the analysis desks of the IB. The concept of separating the operational desks from the analysis desks had crept in much later, well after 1980, when the Punjab and Kashmir operations desks were separated from the analysis desks. This tactical separation has now been accepted as the functional philosophy of the IB.

Broader intelligence estimate, both strategic and tactical, is supposed to be carried out by the Joint Director X, a position close to the heart and brain of the DIB. Originally designed to function as a brain hub of the IB and the architect of intelligence estimate this position has always been used by the IB for other mundane purposes. This position has been generally used as the hub of the Special Branch of the government of India that carries out routine enquiries against ministers, MPs, senior bureaucrats and all and sundry enquiries assigned by the PM and the HM. Most of such enquiries are related to survival of the ruling heads and the party they represent.

About 14 years later in my career I was tasked by a sensitive desk to carry out enquiries against certain ministers in the cabinet of Indira Gandhi. One of them, holding education portfolio, had allegedly received kickback in the purchase of colour TV sets for rural schools. My suggestion that the CBI and the Central Vigilance Commission should conduct enquiry against a minister was rebuffed with a single sentence: was I interested in keeping my job? I sure was. Therefore, I carried out the exercise and I believe Indira Gandhi later changed her minister.

The diversion is only by way of illustration. What is of paramount importance is drawing up of periodic SIE on different live subjects and gaping fault lines. However, the important task of national intelligence estimate, especially intelligence estimates related to the chronic trouble spots in the country and the gaping socio-political and economic fault lines has hardly been attended. I did not encounter any such estimate regarding the insurgency situation in the North East.

Going back to the troubled period in Nagaland between 1970 and 1974 the IB officers had given excellent account of themselves as fire fighters. There were important gaps in agent recruitment and intelligence generation but our daily breads were earned with ease and the image of the IB, as a prime intelligence organisation did not suffer much damage.

However, at the macro level there was very little intelligence input from Delhi encompassing the likely impacts from the developing situation in East Pakistan, internal developments in China and the Chinese strategy in Indian North East. That the pro-Chinese post-Phizo Naga leadership would emerge as the fulcrum of the insurgency movements in the North East and the internal fault lines in Assam and elsewhere would be exploited by Pakistan, China and certain pro-Pakistani forces in Bangladesh were hardly assessed and conveyed to the field formations. The insipid annual report of the Home Ministry has always been an exercise in bureaucratic skulduggery.

I must give some credit to the Armed Forces. During my discussions with the MI reps in Kohima I always gathered impressions that they were adept in making long-term intelligence estimate, not only on the defence front but also on the internal security front. At a later date the Joint Intelligence Committee was assigned the task of making such intelligence estimates, but its functioning was stifled by non-cooperation of the prime intelligence agencies. And at no point of time an effort was made to correlate the internal security estimates with the military and diplomatic estimates. Each satrap

functioned inside his assumed sovereign territory, and there are reasons to believe that these leopards have not changed their spots.

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I left Nagaland in late September 1974 with a heavy heart and great expectations. My heart was heavy because I was leaving behind a theatre where I spent the first few years of my married life with my lovely wife and where our two sons were born. I had come to love and appreciate the people of Manipur and Nagaland. I hated the idea of severing my personal and professional contacts with some of the top Naga and Meitei leadership. I very much liked to stay on to see the fruition of the new peace initiative. But Delhi's magnanimous offer of posting me to Calcutta as the Assistant Director, Security Control, had held out a greater allurements.

My stay in Nagaland was rewarded in a dramatic way, when on the day of our departure to Gwahati I received a visitor from Phek village. He carried a wonderful woollen Chakesang shawl from Zashie Huire, the self styled President of the Federal Government of Nagaland. I still salute those valiant and chivalrous Naga, Meitei and Non-Naga tribal people who added several layers of happiness to our lives.

I had often fought wars against them. But those wars were related to national security. These were not directed against the people of the states. I think I had helped the process of integration by using the tools of subversion, conversion and equalisation of our mutual perspectives on vital national and local tribal issues. I did not only complete a tenure I accomplished some self-imposed missions.

TWELVE

BACK TO SANGRI-LA

The difference between a politician and a statesman is: a politician thinks of the next election and a statesman thinks of the next generation.

James Freeman Clarke.

Our momentary tryst with Calcutta, where we reported in November 1974, was haunted by mysterious destiny. The amorphous force did not want us to root in Calcutta, our city of dream. We glided and fled over the skies of Calcutta like *hemanta* (fall season) cloud. It left a bitter taste on our soul and re-educated us about the social realities of the so-called metropolitan, classless, and casteless society of Bengal. I would like to state, in short, that the local satraps of the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau suffered from extreme myopic caste values that reminded me of the hated *Purusha Sukta* of the Rig Veda. The IB unit was reeking with corruption and nepotism. Fortunately for us, an offer came by my way for taking up an assignment in Sikkim, the Himalayan Kingdom that had just merged with India. I decided to avail of the opportunity mainly to avoid unsavoury clashes with the caste satraps, who flaunted their Brahmanism shamelessly.

Sunanda faced immense difficulty in saying goodbye to Calcutta. She had deep emotional links with the great city. She was born in Calcutta. I was also jarred by the trauma. My life was refashioned by the city after my family migrated from East Pakistan.

I loved Calcutta, but I was not destined to live and serve in the city of our dream. We were passing clouds over the city of chance, charm and chivalry.

We drove down to Gangtok on June 9, 1975. The IB had felt the need for posting an officer at Gangtok after the ‘merger’ of Sikkim with India in May 1975. Some said it was an act of outright annexation. I do not intend to open the Pandora’s Box of political and diplomatic obfuscations that had brought to an end a 300-year old ‘religious monarchy’ tucked away in a strategic corner between India, Nepal and China. The bigger countries often dictate terms on smaller countries with different cultural and social values. India had done nothing new that had not been done by the countries of the West. India took advantage of the special treaty relations with Sikkim and exploited the democratic ambitions of the people of the protectorate. Legality of the ‘merger’ is still a suspect, if the circumstances are evaluated in the backdrop of international law and the history of evolution of relationship between British India and Sikkim.

In any case, being an integral part of India the new State required an internal intelligence infrastructure to look after the internal and counter intelligence functions. The R&AW officer was supposed to open a new shop for covering external intelligence pertaining to China. However, for a while, probably for the sake of continuity and cover I was designated as the Officer on Special Duty and not the usual designation of Assistant Director.

Most of the local political leaders, a few key local bureaucrats and members of the intelligentsia were attuned to the practices of dealing with the office of the Political Officer, which was manned by the members of the Indian Foreign Service. The OSD (Police) too acted as an adjunct to the Political Officer. The South Block office of the External Affairs handled the Sikkim affairs. They and the

R&AW were the paymasters. The Sikkimese leaders and people were new to the Home Ministry and Intelligence Bureau. Nevertheless, they did not take time to understand that a new poorer paymaster had arrived with a new brief and a slimmer brief case.

In smaller and ethnically distinguished states of the North East the reckonable personages felt comfortable to deal with the Intelligence Bureau officers. They were treated as direct emissaries of Delhi. The illusion was near perfect and it worked well as long as the innocent ethnic people were not netted in the whirlpool of corruption and politics of 'perpetual defection'. The new realities in the Indian mainland had wizened the political creatures of the smaller states and they found it easier to influence the leaders in Delhi with briefcases rather than interacting with their poor servants, the IB representatives.

I think I had lived up to the expectations of the people, both in Manipur and Nagaland and in the process had learnt the tricks of playing the games a diplomat normally played. The diplomatic content of my work provided a reliable channel sans the late night wet parties and undefined ambiguous demeanour ambivalent yes and nos. The tribal folks in the North East were used to straight and simple dealings and they expected results to follow through the highway of administrative clarity and not through the slippery alleys of slush money. I believe they have undergone major changes, changes that are brought about by easy money and growth of class division in the traditionally classless and casteless societies. Corruption has subverted the constitutional and legal process and there is nothing special about the spread of stinks to the new North East partners of our Great India.

Sikkim was different. It was a home to the innocent Lepchas and the wily Bhutias. The latter excelled in Tibetan shrewdness. The Bhutias represented the ruling elite, who were close to the palace and exercised hegemony on the land and monasteries. They had become accustomed to the sophisticated and complicated relationship with the Foreign Office in Delhi and proximate direct handling by the top politicians of India. Some of the dreamers in the Himalayan protectorate aspired for upgraded relationship with India enjoyed by Bhutan. Some of them even thought in terms of attaining sovereignty like Nepal and aspired for tacit and strategic foreign help.

The Nepalese, the numerical majority but proletariat of the kingdom, hovered over the outer fringes of political and economic affairs of the country. Most of them were not even 'Sikkim Subjects'. Nepal, like East Pakistan/Bangladesh, is a great exporter of human non-assets to India. They traversed through the lesser Himalayas and settled down in fertile pockets of Sikkim.

They were placed in a precarious situation. Across the borders in Nepal the Nepali speaking people were yet to assert their full political and economic rights. In the neighbouring Darjeeling district of West Bengal the Nepalis were placed in a different footing. They were on the threshold of bursting into the arena of real political and economic power. The big brotherly attitude of the Bengalis had alienated the Nepali-speaking people of West Bengal and Calcutta had not woken up to the developmental needs of the serene hill district. The three Ts (tea, timber and tourism) of the Himalayan beauty queen were exploited mostly by the outsiders. Very little was invested back. The Calcutta baboos rollicked in their politics, frolicked in their assumed cultural superiority, and did not consider that Bengali civilisation and culture could even exist north of the Ganges. Years of neglect had aroused sub-national ethnic aspirations and the Nepalis of Darjeeling and the Duars had taken firm steps towards asserting their birthrights. However, the Darjeeling Nepalis enjoyed greater privileges, compared to their ethnic brethren in Nepal and Sikkim.

It is not my intention to write another thesis on the merger of Sikkim or its alleged annexation. The tide of political events in Sikkim was inexorably moving towards democratic rule by the elected representatives of the people since 1963, when Palden Thondup Namgyal ascended the throne after

the death of his father Tashi Namgyal. His inability to accommodate the aspirations of the people was compounded by his American wife Hope Cooke. Her dreams to transform Sikkim to an absolute monarchy had driven the Chogyal to think in terms of independent sovereign status for his country. He was also swayed away by the hollow noises made by some 'western friends'. It would not be correct to assert that Hope Cook had conspired to stab India's strategic concerns.

It is often alleged that this commoner turned queen American was a CIA plant. Most of these allegations are not backed by facts. The Chogyal did not choose correct timings to demand a treaty revision and upgrading Sikkim's relationship with India. What he did not consider was that creation of Bangladesh next door and democratic movement among a section of the subjects had created an anomalous situation which compelled India to reconsider Sikkim's treaty status afresh in the light of its stalled relationship with China. Indira Gandhi was in desperate need of doing something spectacular to retrieve her sagging political fortune. This one tigress was far superior to the assumed tigress of Sikkim, Hope Cook Namgyal, and the tigress in waiting, Kazini Eliza Maria Khangsarpa, wife of the pro-democracy leader Kazi Lehndup Dorji Khangsarpa. The Chogyal was caught up in a time warp, which had rendered the 'merger' of Sikkim inevitable. He had failed to see the galactic whirlwind advancing on his kingdom.

Sikkim could have been a dream come true to the queen. However, to India its strategic importance was paramount. At the height of the Cold War India could not afford to have a suspected US surrogate on its borders with China. Delhi was considered as a rouge ally of the Red USSR and the Bangladesh war had frayed as much nerves in Washington, Beijing, and London as it did in Pakistan. Sikkim provided a buffer between India and China and a friendly Sikkim was absolutely necessary for the Indian army to guard its flanks on the chicken neck area that was precariously closer to the Chumbi Valley positions of the Chinese armed forces.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who was making desperate efforts to emerge out of the shadows of defeat at Dacca and the impact of the Simla Accord, echoed noises raised by the Chogyal. The Nepal durbar too was not very enamoured by tacit Indian support to the democratic movements.

The Chogyal too failed to understand that with her decisive victory over Pakistan Indira had reached the peak of her political career. She had, however, the distinction of turning victory unto defeat. The spring of 1971 was followed by another round of drought, scarcity, post-war inflation, and rampant corruption. She was ready to secure her position by any means, be it the nuclear test at Pokharan or dalliance with the democratic aspirations of the people of Sikkim. In short, that was not the correct point of history chosen by the king and his American queen to play *mahzong* (a Chinese board game) with Indira.

Indira had other compulsions too. Between 1971 and 1975 Indira Gandhi's political boat rocked between the crests of success and the furrows of depression. Failed monsoons, drought, and the follow up effect of the war had telling effects on the economy. The rise in oil prices also helped in pushing up inflation by 20%. Food riots broke out in different parts of the country. This was followed by innumerable industrial strikes.

Indira's woes were aggravated by a series of controversies around Sanjay Gandhi and his Maruti car project and the Supreme Court judgement on the government's constitutional amendments of 1971. She retaliated by superseding three senior judges and appointing her man of choice, Justice A. N. Ray as the Chief Justice of the apex court.

Indira faced another setback when the maverick politician Raj Narain filed an election suit against her for alleged electoral malpractices in the 1971 elections. January 1974 witnessed the outbreak of students' agitation in Gujarat, popularly known as Nav Nirman movement. Her protégé Chiman Bhai

Patel was dismissed and President's rule was imposed. The JP movement launched by the veteran Gandhian and socialist Jayaprakash Narayan had started rocking Bihar and other states. The movement drew support from the left wing organisations as well as the Hindutwa forces of the RSS. The JP momentum was supplemented by the nationwide railway strike initiated by the firebrand socialist George Fernandez.

It appeared that Indira had run out of ideas and initiative. She was not yet ready to play the loser. Her critics at home and abroad had described the 18th May 1974 nuclear implosion at Pokharan as an act of desperation of a leader who had seemingly run out of options. In any case it boosted up Indira's domestic image slightly and she managed to take complete control of the Congress organisation and install her staunch follower Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed as the President of India. Indira bounced back to political offensive, though her home front was marginally clouded by Sanjay Gandhi's marriage to Maneka, whose social image was not considered impeccable, and whose family, Indira thought, did not measure up to the status of the Nehru-Gandhi legacy.

Spate of agitations against Indira almost all over India echoed in the hills and dales of Sikkim too. Her resolve to blunt the democratic movements inside India manifested in another form in Sikkim. Her government lent full support to the pro-democracy forces and the Chogyal failed to gauge the depth of Indira's determination to use the Sikkim card to boost up her internal image. India watchers have often described that her wounds made her more ferocious. Her domestic compulsions had forced her to take a non-resilient attitude to the Sikkim monarch. She made the Foreign Office and the intelligence agencies to play to her tune and push the Chogyal to the deepest of political crevices. The Indian Constitutional Amendment of August 1974 had rendered the Chogyal as a mere constitutional head. Queen Cooke who returned to the USA with broken dreams had deserted him. The lonely king, a sophisticated parlour friend, was no match for the wily games of the Foreign Office, the R&AW and the huge presence of the Indian Army. He played his cards wrong.

Indira was not content with the slow progress of the democratic movement as she was more violently pilloried by the fast pace of the democratic agitations at her home turf. Her dramatic option in Sikkim resulted in marching of the contingents of the Indian Army to Gangtok and invasion of the palace on April 8, 1975. This was followed by a cleverly manipulated referendum on April 14 that returned an overwhelming verdict in support of Sikkim's merger with India. Barring a handful of collaborators most Sikkimese had no illusion that the referendum was manipulated and rigged. It indeed was. It is presumed that the true history of the 'merger' of Sikkim would be chronicled by a non-partisan historian in due course of time.

Whatever it is, Sikkim emerged as the 22nd state of India in May 1975 with B. B. Lal as the Governor and Kazi Lehndup Dorji as the Chief Minister.

There has not been any systemic enquiry into the allegations of rigging of the referendum. Only the governments in Delhi and Gangtok could order an enquiry. Neither was interested. A few stray voices from the supporters of the Chogyal were stifled by the administration and later with the imposition of internal emergency nobody dared to challenge the outcome of the referendum, except a few political adversaries of the Kazi.

I was not in Sikkim to make an enquiry into the past events. I was there to understand the people and the situation and help the government to strengthen the post-merger relationship between Delhi and Gangtok and to consolidate the gains of the merger.

The students of history and Sikkim watchers, however, could not justify the use of the Indian Army to oust the Chogyal. He had surely used his ham radio to send out distress messages but there was no proof that the Chinese had made serious strategic moves along Sikkim and other bordering tracts of

India. The USA, the major conductor of Cold War symphony, also did not make strategic move in support of the Chogyal. Indira used cannons to maim a small potentate that could be done by an ordinary swatter. It was an overkill and perhaps not necessary for the geo-political insularity of India. Expanding its borders cannot ensure the security of a nation. Security comes from within the people. Indira faltered again on that front. The people of India were disenchanted with the Durga of 1971.

It is impossible for me to sit on judgement on the propriety of Sikkim's merger with India. But suffice it to say that the Sikkimese people had been agitating for over two decades for representative popular government and the Chogyal had misjudged the mood of the injured lady in Delhi and he was misled by meaningless noises from some foreign capitals. He happened to cross Indira's path at a crucial point in her life. The 'Durga' of 1971 was almost encaged by internal problems, some of her own making. She was not ready to allow another assumed moment of victory to pass by against a blundering king and his over ambitious wife. Moreover, Indira Gandhi, as I came to know better a little later in my career, could hit more ruthlessly than a gladiator cornered in the ring. Nobody could ever doubt her fighting spirit. She was a born fighter.

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The Sikkim assignment was a tougher challenge than the tasks I faced in Manipur and Nagaland. The merger of Sikkim did not solve its problems. The new status added up to its vulnerabilities. The democratic leaders headed by Kazi Lehndup Dorji Khangsarpa, a Lepcha noble, was inexperienced in handling the complex affairs of a state that was beset with ethnic tension, economic crisis and not so hidden sympathy for the deposed king.

B. S. Das, a distinguished member of the Indian Police Service with vast experiences in handling the affairs in Bhutan, had rendered exemplary services to Sikkim as its Chief Executive. He was well assisted by three Indian Administrative Service officers of West Bengal cadre, K. M. Lal, Jayanta Sanyal and D. K. Manavalan. They played crucial roles in manoeuvring the political events that had resulted in Sikkim's ultimate merger with India. Their contribution in implementing the rule of law and in seeding some sort of economic activities in the capital town and in the outlying districts could not be denied even by the staunchest monarchists, who resented the so called 'annexation' of the 333-years old monarchy. They were seen as the new masters and were loved by those who derived benefits from the developments and hated by others. The people in general were contemptuous of the '*desh bechoas*' (the sellers of the country).

Governor B. B. Lal piloted the complex team of the politicians and the bureaucrats. He was very aptly described as the person who had transplanted in Sikkim, lock stock and barrel, the Indian administrative machine, helped in educating and 'guiding' the inexperienced politicians and laid some of the cornerstones of the new state's economic edifices. The old breed officers, hitherto loyal to the Chogyal and adept in functioning in feudal tradition, were gradually made to unlearn a lot and learn the new mantras of Indian administrative techniques. They did not take time to emulate the virtues of the new system and its shortcomings that encouraged corruption.

I was placed in an unenviable situation.

My immediate concern was to secure an office space for me and get more office and intelligence generating staff for meeting the demands of Delhi. I was saddled with a Deputy Central Intelligence Officer, who simply supervised the administration of the remote check posts on Indo-China border. He wasn't a part of the 'political and internal' intelligence generation system that was exclusively handled by the former OSD (Police) and now the R&AW representative. Mutual efforts finally helped

in solving the accommodation problem. The R&AW was accommodated in a part of the complex formerly occupied by the officers of the 'Political Officer'. I shifted to the designated office and residence of the OSD.

However, I did not inherit any intellectual asset.

The border check posts were mostly located on the higher reaches along China border. The ethnic Lepchas and Bhutias exclusively inhabited these areas. The Nepalese were not encouraged to settle down in the ethnic tribal pockets. The only check post on Nepal border was at Uttrey, which functioned as an immigration post as well. The presence of the IB was nil in the rest of the state, mostly inhabited by the Nepalese and Limbus. The Chogyal had not allowed the Indian intelligence to set up its shop in the interior areas. Some of these pockets were traditionally covered from the IB posts at Darjeeling and Kalimpong.

In fact, way back in 1966-68, as the Sub-Divisional Police Officer at Kalimpong I had to submit a weekly report to West Bengal state intelligence on matters related to Sikkim. The IB officer at Kalimpong often consulted me over the emerging developments in the Indian protectorate. Those were the days when Sikkim's politics had started germinating the stems of democratic aspirations and Kazi Lehndup and his legendary wife, Kazini Eliza Maria, were prominent features at Kalimpong. Most probably a Belgian national, the Kazini was an integral part of the problems and their solutions in Sikkim. She was one of those European entrepreneurs who had fledged on the margins of history and in the fringes of the lives of some of the legendary leaders, mostly contemporary of Jawaharlal Nehru. Her journey through a colourful life finally tagged herself to the fortune of the tall and handsome Lepcha leader, Kazi Lehndup, and the people of Sikkim. Her journey of life is by itself a saga of human achievement.

One of the loyal officials of the former Chogyal had very aptly described the tryst of history in which Sikkim was drawn into the mysterious webs of ambition, aspiration and frustration of three women—Indira Gandhi, Hope Cooke and Kazini Eliza Maria Khangsarpa. Some day someone should be able to peel off the webs of mystery that surrounded the Kazini. I would try to narrate a few snippets of my encounter with that legendary '*rolling stone of history*' that came to rest in the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim.

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It was not an easy task for me to address the infrastructure problems. My regional boss at Calcutta did not appreciate the logistical problems. To him Sikkim was another territory gifted to him after the merger of the Himalayan kingdom. I gave up on him and pleaded directly with the top bosses in Delhi to help me with men power, communication equipment and funds for hiring accommodation. I received immediate support. Within three months I could establish a few intelligence posts at Rehnock, Jorethang, Rongpo, Malli, Geyzing, Namchi, Mangan interior pockets. My efforts were complimented by adequate support from the technical branch of the IB. They provided the basic wireless sets and trained operators. I was allowed to use 20 helicopter sorties in a year to visit the outposts on China border and any number of sorties for evacuation of sick and wounded personnel.

The tiny 22nd state of India presented myriads of challenges.

The Intelligence Bureau was an unknown commodity in Sikkim. The Sikkimese was exposed to the operatives of the PMO, External Affairs and the R&AW. The OSD stamp at my back did not befool the uncanny political gangs and the persona closer to the former Chogyal and even some of the Indian bureaucrats on deputation to the government of Sikkim.

In 1975 Sikkim presented a crystal clear black and white collage, though the intervening colours were not imperceptible. But extreme analytical skill was required to decipher those colours.

The people were broadly branded as pro-India and pro-Chogyal. Being pro-Indian was the fashion of the day. The pro-Chogyal elements were treated as pariahs and were natural suspects, having possible linkages with China, America, and the all-pervasive evil machine of the day, the CIA. The general rung of the government and political establishments were required to demonstrate their loyalty to the new country and new masters in demeanour and deeds. They did everything possible to please the 'deputationist officers' and the enigmatic Indian bureaucracy that were being gradually imported to the new state. The Governor had replaced the Chogyal. The chief minister physically resided in his Mintokgong house located in between two hills, one occupied by the Governor and the other housing the Tashiding palace, abode of the former king, Palden Thondup Namgyal.

Kazi had reluctantly committed himself to the merger of Sikkim with India. Once caught into the web of Delhi's design the Kazi had no other option but to drift along, though he did not want outright abolition of the identity of Sikkim. After the merger his cabinet colleagues and the elected legislators, most of who knew which side of the bread was buttered, vied with each other in proclaiming loyalty to the new political dispensation.

The Kazini too was vociferous in proclaiming loyalty to Indira Gandhi and the new political masters in Delhi. She had achieved the final fruit of her lifelong pursuit, power, glory, adulation and a final destination. But, as I penetrated closer to the hearts and thoughts of the Kazis I was left with no doubt that Kazi Lehdup and Kazini Eliza Maria had not really *bargained* for the merger of Sikkim with India. They wanted the Chogyal out and continuation of Sikkim as a protectorate of India with a democratically elected government and at worse a constitutional monarch.

On several occasions Kazi opened up his heart and conversed with me in Nepali to convey that at heart he was a Sikkimese and had struggled for a democratic dispensation. A Lepcha noble, he was a devoted Buddhist but he did not trust the wily Bhutias and the Tibetans. He considered the Nepalis as demographic ants, who were bound to gobble up the identity of the aboriginals. Kazi had a vision. But he was not a politician of the mettle the Indian politicians are made of. He was a trusting type of person and easily yielded under pressure. His biggest disadvantage was that he believed in the Indian bureaucrats and politicians who guided him along the course of merger of Sikkim, as per the strategic design of Delhi. The Kazini often vociferously voiced the personal and secret views of Kazi. Discretion was not her forte. Behind the back of Kazi some of his Nepali colleagues had arrived at secret understanding with Delhi as they hoped to gain a better deal from an Indian Sikkim, where the rule of majority was the basic ingredient of democracy. I do not want to name these Nepali colleagues at this stage of his life, when he is sufficiently disillusioned with the political leaders and bureaucrats in Delhi.

The events had overtaken the Kazi and Kazini. Back in Delhi Indira Gandhi was in no mood to allow the ripe fruit to fall on wrong laps. She was seemingly on a winning streak and Sikkim offered an opportunity to reaffirm her greatness. She had helped demolishing a part of the history written by the British Empire and the hungry politicians of 1947 by dismembering Pakistan. She had earned for India the membership of the nuclear club. Sikkim was another stepping stone to put her on the pedestal of greatness. Both Kazi and Kazini had failed to fathom her problems and proclivities. They finally ended up as the reluctant tools that helped the people of Sikkim to achieve democracy and lose their distinct identity that they had enjoyed for over 300 years.

Most of the cabinet ministers were ignorant kids and were not able to comprehend the complicated political process that involved in making a democracy function smoothly. The elected legislators had

very little to do but endorse the actions of the Governor which were normally routed through the chief minister with approving seal of the state assembly. But all of them were happy on one account. The merger brought in huge plan and non-plan budgetary support from Delhi and they did not take time to learn the tricks of funnelling the riches to their pockets. Some of the Indian bureaucrats were quick to come to their rescue by teaching them the Indian rope tricks that made budgetary provisions vanish into thin air. Having wide experiences of such magic tricks in mainland India they themselves practiced the trick and taught their new political masters in appreciable collaborative spirit. The merger had inextricably molested the political and moral virginity of the once innocent people. I had seen the same rat race towards the cesspool of corruption amongst the politicians and bureaucrats in the North East. Bhartvarsha like the Imperial India believed in the political philosophy of stuffing the gullet of the concerned people with currency bills to keep them silent and contented. I suffered from serious pain to witness the simple people of the North East and Sikkim imitating the people of mainland India, immersing them in corruption and degrading their intrinsic values. That's the decisive march of democracy!

Has democracy been the harbinger of corruption and total degradation? Well! History will decide this fascinating story of decline of democratic values and moral integrity of the people of India. Some sort of free election alone does not make a country democratic. It requires stringent implementation of the concepts of liberty, equality, and fraternity as enshrined in the constitution.

Some of the old-school bureaucrats and political elements loyal to the former Chogyal were pushed to the periphery and were shunned by the 'loyal' Indians. The line of communication had snapped and politicians like K. C. Pradhan, N. B. Bhandari, and L. B. Basnet were avoided as plague. A few bureaucrats like Jigdal Densappa, M. M. Rasaily, and Karma Topden supposedly close to the palace were on suspect list.

The Bhutia and Lepcha villagers were none too happy to see their 'spiritual king' being treated as dirt and kept confined to his palace. The heads of several monasteries too were smarting under the impression that India had done wrong to their king and 'dharma.'

As an intelligence operator I could not afford to merge myself with the two extremes of the collage. I had a tough job in selling the IB to an administration and a political system, which were attuned to the wavelengths of the other segments of the government of India.

The police commissioner, an Indian appointee, had to shift his loyalty to the new government and had the unpleasant tasks of policing over the elements loyal to the former bread giver, the king of Sikkim.

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P. R. Khurana, a colourful senior IPS officer from Madhya Pradesh, replaced Bajrang Lal, the incumbent police commissioner. Khurana did not blink to tell me in our first meeting that the 'Director Intelligence Bureau had given him a carte blanche' to draw upon the intelligence resources of the local IB detachment. The revelation was followed by a verbal order that I should report to him every week and share all the intelligence that my office generated. He did not think twice to treat me as a direct subordinate and summon my total 'loyalty.'

The proclamation did not amuse me. It had created several complications in the coming years. But I did not have the guts to ask the DIB (S. N. Mathur) if he had really given a blank cheque to Khurana. However, I managed to send a verbatim report on my first encounter with Khurana to the desk supervisor telling him that such an arrangement would simply invite disaster to the Intelligence

Bureau. Khurana interpreted cooperation as total surrender.

Swimming with the tide was an easy job. The ‘deputationist officers’ were my natural friends and it did not take time to befriend the key officials of the government at Gangtok. The bureaucrats are the best weathercocks. Once they discovered that I had developed excellent equation with the Governor, the Chief Minister and his cabinet colleagues and especially the Kazini they did not take time to sing paeon of the virtues of the IB and the excellent person that I was. The lowly district officials submitted even before I intended to ask them to. It was a funny situation, quite different from the early characteristics of the officialdom in Manipur and Nagaland.

But I faced a virtual firewall in persons who were still loyal to the Chogyal and the institutions that were under the influence of the palace. An unwritten law in Gangtok had lain down that the officials of the reigning regime should keep no truck with the ‘Chogyal and his minions.’ I was asked by the Governor to submit regular reports on the activities of the Chogyal, the Crown Prince and the members of the gentry closer to him. Governor B. B. Lal was a seasoned administrator. He understood well the game of intelligence generation and sharing. He was happy with the ratio of intelligence sharing and denial, an art of statecraft not appreciated by many.

But I was the first Indian officer to break the taboo of fraternising with the Chogyal and his trusted people. We started with the Chogyal himself by using the services of Capt. Sherab Palden, a Bhutia member of the former army of the Chogyal. We were invited to tea at the palace on September 15, 1975, just after a couple of months after our arrival in Gangtok.

Sunanda and I were received by the personal attendants of the Chogyal and ushered into the throne room. King Palden Thondup arrived after about five minutes dressed up in typical Bhutia dress and flaunting a weary smile on his face. We did not have to go through the ceremonies of introduction. A man with sharp memory, the king readily recalled our meeting with him in 1968 and commented that he wasn’t left with the resources to welcome my wife in traditional style of the palace.

We talked about the general political scenario in India and the changes and challenges that Sikkim faced under the present dispensation. He did have plenty of good words for Jawaharlal Nehru but was very curt in his reference to Indira. He regretted that Jawaharlal’s daughter had decided very late in the day to treat Sikkim as one of the numerous princely states, which it was not. Sikkim, he added, had enjoyed special treaty relations with India, both under the British and the Independent Republic. Where was the need for flexing muscle against a defenceless protectorate? Wasn’t it a part of Indira’s conspiracy to gobble up the Himalayan kingdom?

I listened patiently. The dethroned king had found a patient listener in me and he wasn’t afraid of speaking out, though he had the full understanding about the nature of the job I was supposed to handle in Sikkim. At the end of the hour-long meeting he conducted us to the royal shrine and offered worship and finally presented Sunanda with a piece of blue emerald. I could not gather the heart to decline the present and parted the pleasant company of the former king with promises of revisits. On my return I transmitted a report to the IB with a mention of the present given to my wife. I offered to remit the present to Delhi for whatever they wanted to do with it. The DIB, however, was pleased with the report and sent a personal note to me emphasising the need for frequent meetings with the former king and persons close to him. He allowed us to keep the blue emerald. He also directed me to keep the Governor briefed.

Gangtok was a small place. The local police faithfully reported to the Governor and the Chief Minister the fact of our visit to the palace. I had already briefed Governor B. B. Lal. But the Kazini fretted and fumed over the visit and asked if I were really loyal to Delhi. It took considerable efforts to convince her about the needs for keeping a window open to the Chogyal and his loyalists. Kazi

Lehndup was not new to the intelligence game and he appreciated my efforts in opening up a meaningful dialogue with the Chogyal and his trusted people. I assured him that this process was necessary to bring to the mainstream the sulking and injured loyalists of the former regime, who were still holed up in the dark grandeur of the past.

P. R. Khurana was the only person who refused to accept gracefully my window-opening game. He demanded a full briefing every time I visited the palace. I declined to oblige him, in spite of his reminders that the DIB had given him a 'carte blanche.'

The news of our visits to the palace had tremendous effect on Chogyal loyalists. Important individuals like Jigdal Densappa, M. M. Rasaily, Narbahadur Bhandari and many others welcomed our visits to their homes. Our social exchanges were soon metamorphosed to important tools of intelligence generation. I used the resources of the IB to cultivate some of these leaders and personalities.

Some of the staunchest followers of the former king were deeply attached to the cult of Sathya Sai Baba, a god man from Puttaparti. I never believed in god men. But I feigned having deep devotion to the so-called saint to engage important people like M. M. Rasaily to bring them back to the mainstream. In fact, I had taken initiative in forming a group of Sathya Sai devotees, which had later flourished into a sizeable organisation.

The IB unit in Gangtok was endowed with the facility of a fully-fledged and well-equipped medical dispensary and a regular doctor. This outfit was primarily used for the staff members of the border check posts and those of the Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute, IB's in house mountaineering school that trained all the new entrants in the skill of climbing and survival in the remotest border check posts. I diverted, with permission of the IB, some medical facilities to some of the Chogyal loyalists and some of them were even supplied with daily kitchen needs from the ration items meant for the check posts.

One of the important beneficiaries was Narbahadur Bhandari, who had suffered most while defending the Chogyal and opposing the Indian sponsored moves to 'annex' the small kingdom. He lived on the meagre income of his wife and I took the advantage of supporting him with his daily needs and medical facilities. He was not a paid agent, but he did not decline to associate with me. I discovered that Bhandari was not a secessionist and he did not want to fight back for the Chogyal. He too understood the realities of the situation and bided his time to build up mass base. I did not see any harm in his open and democratic political activities, though some of his speeches were directed against the '*desh bechoas*' and 'corrupt deputationist officers from India'. Having grown up in democratic India I had learnt to respect the voices of political dissent and I refused to fall in line with the police commissioner to book N. B. Bhandari under Defence of India Rule (DIR) and the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA).

Bhandari later managed to ride on the crest of anti-India feelings and the failings of the government of Kazi Lehndup Dorji and grab political power. I am here not to sit on judgement on the intrinsic honesty of Bhandari and follow the tails of the CBI to unearth the mountain of black money that he allegedly managed to pile up. Bhandari did nothing new. The political breed in India enjoys almost constitutional protection in their acts of plundering the national coffers and the pockets of the poor. He simply followed the illustrious footsteps of his senior partners in Delhi and elsewhere in India.

Bhandari is not a lone thug. He is in good company. However, I cherish the memory of the honest schoolteacher Bhandari who had the courage of conviction to oppose the Indian take over of Sikkim.

With the loyalists of the former durbar fraternising with me I faced very little difficulty in making friends out of the sullen Bhutia and Lepcha village chiefs and the heads of several monasteries. The

final reward came from the Karmappa, the head of the Rumtek monastery. He graced our home by paying a visit to us, and later holding special '*kalachakra*' worship at the monastery before Sunanda was taken down to Siliguri for an emergency hysterectomy operation.

I derived satisfaction from the fact that within the short span of eight months I had succeeded in extending ground coverage to the entire territory of Sikkim and I had achieved unique penetration of the operating system in the 22nd state of India. The border check posts received equal support and I made it a point to take Sunanda and the kids to remote posts like Chungthang, Lachen, Lachung, and Sherathong on Nathu La and Uttrey on Nepal border. We were warmly received by the village elders and enjoyed the distinction of dancing and dining with them. In the process I helped my officers in winning over several trans-border agents who made forays deep into Tibet and gathered valuable intelligence on the Chinese formations and the morale of the people.

My experiences with the brave souls in the Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute were more pleasant than I expected. I was never a mountain man, though I was deeply in love with the hills more than I was with the seas. Sonam Wangyal, the celebrated Everest hero, presided over a team of dedicated officers and *Sherpas*.

They trained the officers of the IB in mountaineering and survival skills. Twice in a year they assisted me in sending out patrolling parties along the frequented and unfrequented routes along the international borders that were normally taken by the Chinese graziers and clandestine operators. The system of sending out patrolling and reconnaissance parties once around May and again in October was part of a well laid out intelligence exercise devised way back by Mr. B. N. Mullick, the guru of post independence Indian intelligence and security edifices.

Our boys mapped out the routes and gathered tell tale signs of enemy intrusion to the higher reaches of the snow bound Himalayan peaks. They observed the Chinese formations across the international borders and on occasions snapped the landmarks in the Chinese territory.

The entire Sikkim border along China was divided into four sectors and eight patrol parties were sent out regularly. The exercise produced valuable intelligence input about use of the old routes by the enemy agents and operators and development of new routes and pickets.

However, after these posts were handed over to the R&AW around 1982, I was told by usual informed sources that the healthy practice of sending seasonal patrol parties had gone into disuse. The R&AW depended more on aerial photography and trans-border human assets, which was a rare commodity. The R&AW officers were made of softer stuff and they always pined and lobbied for foreign postings. Slogging on the ground was not their forte. Continued neglect of this valuable tool of border intelligence had often invited disaster to the security concerns of the country. A glaring example of such neglect and resultant complication was the Kargil coup in 1999, when the Pakistani regulars had managed to entrench themselves deep inside the Indian Territory across the Line of Control. The nation had to pay a heavy price for such blatant neglect of the time honoured intelligence tool, which was once so deftly used by the Intelligence Bureau.

This comment is not related to organisational rivalry. It is based on solid hard-rock evidence.

The SGMI was a low-key but highly efficient organisation. I took the advantage of Sonam Wangyal's stewardship and organised several ambitious expeditions to the higher reaches of the Himalayas. The 22,000' Siniolchu, in the southeastern fringe of the Kanchenjunga was one of the peaks successfully climbed by the IB boys. I had accompanied the boys up to the base camp at 14,000'. During my tenure I had to use the helicopter services to evacuate five of my boys from the higher reaches. One of the boys, Rinzing, was stuck at Dombang post on Tibet border. He could not be evacuated in time due to severe snowstorm and continuous inclement weather. He was evacuated

after five days of strenuous effort. By that time his lung cavity was flooded by pneumonic fluid and he succumbed before we could shift him to the Army Base Hospital at Binnaguri. His ashes were later scattered over the top of the Chomolongma (Everest) by Phurba Tsering, another instructor of the SGMI.

THIRTEEN

INSIDE THE *KALACHAKRA* (WHEEL OF TIME)

The power of accurate observation is commonly called cynicism by those who have not got it.
George Bernard Shaw.

The beautiful ambiance of Sikkim and the quick pace of consolidation of the gains of ‘merger’ were not able to soften the disposition of at least one individual, P. R. Khurana, the police commissioner. He was mighty unhappy over my meetings with the former Chogyal and the visits of the Crown Prince Tenzing Namgyal to our modest home. He even resented my meetings with Jigdal Densappa, M. M. Rasaily and Narbahadur Bhandari. Another person, Narbahadur Khatiwada, the stormy petrel of Sikkim politics, was added to his hate list, because the Kazini had disowned her ‘adopted son’ soon after entrenching herself at the Mintokgong residency of the chief minister. He refused to recognise the fact that an intelligence operative is required to kiss even a venomous cobra.

Narbahadur Khatiwada and his band of fiery youths had helped Kazi Lehndup in mobilising the much needed Nepali support to his movement. Young Nepali leaders like Khatiwada and N. K. Subedi had wholeheartedly supported Kazi out of expectation that in a constitutional monarchy the Nepalis would get a better deal and be treated as equal to the Bhutias and Lepchas. Khatiwada’s youth brigade had successfully opposed the pro-Chogyal forces represented by Narbahadur Bhandari and others. Even Ram Chandra Poudyal, another Nepali youth leader, and a minister in Kazi’s cabinet, did not measure up to the popularity of Khatiwada. But the Kazini’s milk of kindness dried up after Khatiwada started questioning the propriety of outright merger of Sikkim with India. He preferred a loose tie with the big neighbour and a constitutional monarchy. Kazi Lehndup too had not *bargained* for total merger, but he was outwitted by Delhi. Kazi was not undiplomatically curt to the youth leader. But Kazini’s options varied between extremes. After being lodged at the Mintokgong she discovered that Khatiwada had become an agent of the Chogyal and his close friend Mohon Gurung of Rhenok had developed Communist links. The police commissioner took Kazini’s orders rather seriously and started haunting Narbahadur Khatiwada.

My orders from Delhi were very clear. They wanted me to win over the turbulent youth leader and bring him back to the proximity of Kazi. His mischief potential could not be underrated. Delhi’s view had synchronised with my views: Khatiwada could not be allowed to whip up Nepali sentiment and destabilise the Kazi government. Besides the Nepali youths Khatiwada had made inroads into the Sangha constituency that gave him added strength. His strategy of uniting the Nepalis and the Bhutias against Delhi’s winning horse Kazi should be frustrated. These assessments acquired new dimensions after Narbahadur Khatiwada initiated a process of challenging some of the actions of the Governor.

I was not in a position to share these analyses with Khurana. He was a virtual leaking pot and the leaks multiplied after his sundown whisky eroded all banks of reason and training. On September 21 he invited me to his residence for an evening drink. I was, like many others were, mortally afraid of his invitation to drinks. His sundown session normally started around 6.30 p.m. and continued well after the midnight.

On my arrival he insisted on my giving him company. I agreed to hold a glass while he spoke.

“Are you aware that there is an emergency in the country?”

“Yes sir,” I replied, “It was imposed on the 25th of June under Article 325 of the Constitution.”

“Give me one reason as to why action should not be taken against you under the emergency provisions for your anti-national activities.”

I did not expect the bombshell.

“What are you hinting at?”

“You’re a regular visitor to the palace, the Crown Prince visits you regularly, you keep company of the traitors and you’re conspiring with Khatiwada and Bhandari to topple the government of Kazi.”

Khurana, already on high whisky trip, accosted me with sinister charges.

“Are you ready to give these charges in writing?”

“I don’t require. I’ll put you behind the bars.”

“Tell me under what provisions of the law and under what emergency provisions.”

“You’re not sharing your reports with me. You know that your DIB is my friend and he has authorised me to have full reports from you.”

“I’m not aware of any such orders from Delhi. Please ask the DIB to give me written orders.”

I stood up and said good night to the inebriated police chief.

I reported the matter to Delhi and kept the Governor posted with an unsigned report. He counselled me to bear with his police chief and to maintain a solid front ‘against the forces of threat to national integrity.’

*

My first major disagreement with the Governor surfaced sometime in November 1975. He called me to his official residence and asked my view on the propriety of merger of Sikkim National Congress of L. D. Kazi with the Indian National Congress (I), Indira Gandhi’s ruling party in Delhi.

I nursed my own opinion on the imposition of internal emergency that I hadn’t shared with anyone. We all were living through a difficult period. It was not safe to speak out. Indira Gandhi was forced to arm herself with the emergency and several amendments to the Constitution. She was isolated from the people and the reins were hijacked by Sanjay Gandhi, her younger son. Only the braves and fools could dare misguided Mrs. Gandhi and her son.

I did not lack in bravery but I had failed to develop confidence in the political forces that opposed her. The motley combination of the Jan Sangh, RSS, and Socialists of different hues, breakaway congressmen and regional satraps had succeeded in building up sporadic resistance but were yet to generate confidence that they were the political alternative to Indira. Moreover I understood the stake. As the only bread earner I had a binding duty to protect my family.

I, therefore, did not like the idea of swimming with the emergency tide, but at the same time tried to fathom the turbulence created by the Jayaprakash Narayan’s movement. My old friends in the Sangh Parivar (RSS) (identity hidied on their request) were in touch with me and one of them based in Varanasi had eluded the police dragnet and was picked up by me from Siliguri. He had initiated me in the RSS ideology way back in 1953. He was my houseguest for a few weeks and later left for Assam for organising the anti-emergency forces. He gave me to understand that the Parivar was making a definite bid to share power in the centre after Indira was ousted. Was it possible for the Parivar to share power with the ideologically opposed political forces? His reply came in the form of an enigmatic smile. Power, he said, was not a Hindu wife. It could be shared even with the oddest

bedmate, but only for a while. Such sharing alone could prepare the Parivar for staking greater claims to the reins of the nation. I was not yet convinced about the efficacy of this theory. But I supported him with some money for his work in Assam. For obvious reasons I cannot name him. He is still an important functionary of the RSS, though he had fallen foul of the BJP government leaders.

In fact, I was in a confused state of mind. I adored Indira and endorsed some of her tough actions that aimed at putting the country on the rails. But I hated her failure to abide by the court orders and at least a temporary abdication in favour of a trusted colleague. I developed positive aversion for Sanjay and the goons that surrounded him. He was the first sinner to drag down Indian democracy to the streets and put the mantle of anarchy on it. He worked devotedly to destroy the democratic edifices, which his grandfather had helped in putting together.

Nevertheless, I was yet unable to trust the intrinsic capability of the crowd that had gathered around Jayaprakash Narayan and the efficacy of the Sangh Parivar working in tandem with the conflicting political forces.

Amidst a chaotic political scenario Indira Gandhi was planning to hold the annual Congress party session in Chandigarh. Sanjay Gandhi, appointed to the executive committee of the Youth Congress had, in fact, hijacked the party affairs. He had started dictating terms on the politicians and the bureaucrats.

The Governor wanted my views on the desirability of merger of the Sikkim National Congress with the INC (I) during its Chandigarh session. I was not surprised by the question. Kazi Lehndup had already discussed the matter with me and I had informally advised him to maintain the distinct Sikkimese identity of his party. That would, I reasoned, enhance his image and enable him to fight the stigma of '*desh bechoa*'. Kazi was not a decisive person and he was not attuned to the political skulduggery of Delhi. He was under pressure from Delhi and the 'deputationist officers' too worked on him to make the intended merger possible. I had kept Delhi informed about my dialogue with Kazi and had recommended that preservation of the Sikkimese identity of SNC would go a long way in strengthening Kazi's position and consolidating the gains of the 'merger'.

I said the same thing to Governor B. B. Lal. My arguments were elementary:

Kazi and his legislators were described by the common people as '*desh bechoa*' and Alibaba and 31 thieves. The later allusion was directed at the elected representatives to the Sikkim Assembly, who behaved less responsibly than wayside minor thieves. They were used to give stamps of approval to all major decisions formulated by the Governor and implemented by Kazi's cabinet. They were a frustrated lot. With the merger they had lost their relevance and were denied the crumbs they received from the agents of Delhi. They had to depend on the mercies of Kazi and Kazini and the fringe loots that came their way. The Governor and his men failed to measure the degree of frustration of these elected people. The village folks hated them and the integrated socio-political forces of Sikkim had abandoned them.

All were not hunky dory with the Kazi government. There were serious charges of corruption against some of the ministers.

The merger of Sikkim, I argued, should not wipe out the Sikkimese identity of its political forces. The Indian states are states within the State and enjoyed their distinct political character, linguistic and ethnic identity. Kazi's merger with Congress would cast deeper shadows on his personal integrity and his capability to uphold Sikkim's uniqueness. The fear of 'Indian influx' inside Sikkim was stalking the minds of the hill state. I cited the example of the NNO, the major pro-Indian political force in Nagaland.

Kazi, I argued, should be allowed to project an independent image. That, I felt, should allow him

to win over the confidence of the people and build up a broad base in support of his action of merging Sikkim with India. My strong views that merger of the SNC with the INC (I) would not strengthen the national party and brighten up its Emergency tainted image did not please many.

The Governor did not agree with me. He felt that the merger of SNC with the INC (I) would complete the process of Sikkim's political unification with India. I did not agree. But the top man has always the advantage of being correct. History, rather near future developments, vindicated my arguments. Kazi, the creator of modern Sikkim, was thrown to political garbage and newer forces, headed by Narbahadur Bhandari, a man of principle turned political thug, had marginalized him permanently.

I would like to share my thoughts on this aspect a little later, when the same Governor and his advisers forced Kazi to switch over from Congress to the motley Janata Party. That was another pitiable instance of 'leaning tower' syndrome of Indian bureaucracy.

But B. B. Lal was not a mean person. He agreed to disagree with me and persuaded Kazi to board a plane at Baghdogra with his legislative assembly members for Chandigarh, where the Congress party was to meet in December 1975. Kazi returned to Gangtok as a lion. But it was a paper lion. He had lost his political relevance in Sikkim after he merged his party with the INC (I). The politically conscious people of the state did not share the assumed happiness of the masters in Delhi and their representatives at Gangtok. The vox populi condemned the final action of sell out. Kazi Lehdup Dorji Khangsarpa, the tallest political person in Sikkim and the last of the honest one, was entrapped by the mindless political manoeuvres of Delhi. Overnight he became a hated hunchbacked dwarf.

The Chogyal played his cards deftly. Several stalwarts of the ruling party were contacted by his agents and incited them against Kazi's leadership. Very subtle efforts were made to distance the Sangha leaders and some of the important *Gompa* (monastery) *Rimpoches* (holy religious heads) to spread words of disapproval of the actions of Kazi Lehdup and his political colleagues. Tenzing Namgyal, the youthful Crown Prince, spearheaded the silent but effective campaign. Some of the staunch followers of the Chogyal had succeeded in infiltrating the camp of Narbahadur Khatiwada, the impatient youth leader abandoned by Kazi and Kazini. Khatiwada had teamed up with odd partners who represented pro-monarchist views. A few followers of Jayaprakash Narayan operating from Bihar-Bengal borders tried to allure Khatiwada to their camp.

Delhi's instructions were clear. They did not want any destabilising game to be played by the opponents of Kazi. Under a well-researched intelligence operation I befriended Khatiwada and his charming young wife Hemlata. I was a frequent late night visitor to their modest Deorali home and Khatiwada too started visiting my official residence well after the sundown.

Over a time I succeeded in programming him to align his group with the Youth Congress and build up his political base. I did not believe that Sanjay's IYC was a paragon of virtue. The entire nation was being stripped of its moral coating and the tenets of constitutional democratic values were being trampled under innumerable constitutional amendments and ordinances. For strange reasons Indira Gandhi had allowed herself to be imprisoned behind the misdeeds of her son. But that was a power base which fascinated Khatiwada. He discovered a window of opportunity in Sanjay Gandhi.

At one point of time, around July 1975, I was struck by a bout of depression. I came to know from reliable sources in Delhi that Indira and Sanjay were using the Intelligence Bureau and the R&AW to fabricate reports against the opposition leaders. Even I was asked by a senior officer of the IB to submit reports against the pro-Chinese activities of the former king and CIA operations in Sikkim from its Calcutta and Kathmandu bases. I declined to oblige, as I had no clue about such CIA and Chinese operations in Sikkim. Much was made out by the R&AW representative at Gangtok when a

Japanese straggler was picked up by my boys from a prohibited stretch of land near Nathu La, the pass between Indian Sikkim and Chinese Chumbi valley. Even the toughest of sleuths could not stick a CIA stamp on him. He was one of those maverick tourists who preferred to do the most unexpected thing at the oddest possible time.

My reluctance to frame the Chogyal was not viewed kindly by my regional boss in Calcutta. I was telephonically admonished for my 'non compliance' of orders from the top.

At this point of my emotional crisis an unexpected telephone call from Siliguri allured me to drive down to the bustling town and meet my RSS friend in a village hut at Sukna. On transit from Assam to Varanasi, his spiritual home, the friend direly needed financial support. He did not endorse my idea of quitting the job and joining the JP movement. His reasoning was simple: some soldiers fought at the front while the others fought from the rear. He advised me to act as a rearguard soldier. The small monetary help that I could render to my friend helped me toning down my singed psyche. In fact, I drove him down to Bihar border in my office vehicle and helped him boarding a truck from Kahribari for Thakurganj in Bihar.

However, my depression forced me to consult Sunanda about the feasibility of my resignation from the IPS and joining the JP movement. She appreciated my sentiments but pointed out that we had raised a family and she was not equipped to fend for herself and the kids in my absence. What was my priority, my depression or the welfare of my family? She was unwilling to go back to her parental home and counselled me to try to see the positive sides of the emergency. I quite did not agree with her, but I understood the values of her reasoning. I did not have any anchor besides my job. I had no parental home and I did not inherit family largesse. I stood alone by myself and I was fully responsible for the welfare of my family, which I had agreed to raise and take care. I could not abandon them. I struggled a lot to quieten down the quarrelling squirrels within me, albeit temporarily.

All said and done, I still believed that India has not had its encounter with a more dynamic prime minister than Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi, minus the emergency aberration, which I liked to believe, was hastened by a spate of extra-democratic agitations of her political opponents, some of whom were suspected to have been inspired by outside forces. A person of complex character as Indira was could not be judged by her follies alone. India needed her at that glorious and inglorious moment of history. Oh! What a history it was to live with! I had closer encounter with her in her worse days and in the end of it all I strongly feel that she alone cannot be blamed for all the ills of India. She was the tallest person among the pygmies around her and the shamelessly emasculated later day political breed.

However, as 1976 unfolded the emergency rampages of Sanjay and his cronies, I received a strange visitor at Gangtok. This person, a journalist of sort, was a frequenter to the durbar of Kazi along with a saffron clad Buddhist monk, a self-styled Bhikkhu. The journalist was a regular visitor to the palace of the Chogyal but shunned him as a plague after the merger of Sikkim. The journo managed a news and feature agency, and was more of a trader, trading his intellectual properties with the highest bidders. I had definite information about his linkages with the diplomatic personnel of some Euro-American countries. That he traded information with them was well established by the Delhi and Calcutta based spooks. In later day India, during Indira's elder son's regime he had assumed the role of a troubleshooter in the Darjeeling hills and later managed to get a berth in the Indian Parliament. The Bhikkhu too had managed to climb up the corridors of power, enter the portals of the Parliament, and secure a seat in one of the prestigious commissions of the government of India. Such climbers are not strangers in the durbar type democracy in India. Like every clever dog they enjoyed

their sun while it shone. No bitter feelings!

The so-called journalist dropped in at my modest residence sometime in April 1976, when Sanjay was busy with Indira's 20-point programme, sterilisation and demolition missions. He revealed over a glass of Sikkim Supreme whisky that he had an important message for me. The message was not very complicated. All that I was supposed to do was to persuade Narbahadur Khatiwada to form a unit of the Youth Congress and support the actions of the leading light of India's destiny, Sanjay Gandhi. He carried another verbal message for me. I should influence the former Chogyal to write a letter to the Prime Minister supporting Sikkim's merger and submitting to the supreme leader of the country. I listened to the peddler patiently and saw him off with a smile painted on my face and surging rage inside.

Next morning I sent a telex message to Delhi detailing the messages personally carried by the journalist trouble-shooter and asked for their orders. Delhi maintained deafening silence and after a couple of days I received a cipher message that advised me not to transmit such sensitive messages over the fragile telex route. They were silent on the issues I had raised.

Managing Khatiwada was not a big problem. The redoubtable Kazini had thought of peddling R. C. Paudyal, a minister in Kazi's cabinet, as the rightful Youth Congress leader. Moreover, Khatiwada was still smarting under the political wounds that he suffered after the merger of Sikkim. Touted as the adopted son of Kazi Lehndup he had expected a berth in the cabinet. But Kazi was averse to the idea of promoting a firebrand Nepali leader. He preferred to depend on more pliable and rootless leaders. However, I had succeeded in softening Khatiwada to a great extent and he finally identified himself with the Sanjay brigade, albeit temporarily, when he later accompanied Indira to Gangtok on November 19, her birthday. I would like to narrate that story a little later.

Carrying the message of Delhi to the Chogyal was a difficult task. As I understood the former king, the Chogyal was a man of honour. The Chogyal was a tougher nut than Delhi presumed him to be. He listened to me with an impassive face as that of the *Avalokiteshwara* (Buddha) on the *tankha* (scroll painting) at his back.

"How could you come to me with this request?" he finally asked, "I thought you are an honourable person."

"I'm an honourable person," I replied, "I'm carrying a message to you. You can kill the message but not the carrier."

"Than tell Delhi that I've killed the message," he replied with a laughing face, "I respect the carrier."

We parted as friends and the youthful Crown Prince was at hand to see me off at the outer court.

I spent the entire evening to draft a cipher message to Delhi to convey the instant rejection of the idea carried to me by the so called troubleshooter of the inner court of Sanjay. Delhi, as usual, maintained deafening silence.

Having done what I had to do I did not decry the decision of the Chogyal. He was correct from the position he spoke. I thought it was rather demeaning to demand a formal letter of submission from the former king without discussing an acceptable compensation package. The use of a very lowly placed officer for such a wild sounding mission was also inappropriate. My bosses in Delhi were not amused by 'my failure' to accomplish a delicate mission.

I did not have the time to ponder over those earth shaking matters as my own earth had started rocking violently again at the home front. Sunanda had fallen violently sick due to uterine haemorrhage and needed emergency medical attention. She had later undergone total hysterectomy at a Siliguri nursing home. On that critical occasion the former Chogyal sent down a *khada* (silken

scarf) sanctified by the *rimpoche* of the Pemayangtse monastery.

The Chogyal's friendly demeanour did not blunt my intelligence antennae. He was a consummate diplomat and parlour magician. He could charm his way through the narrowest eye of a needle. It was a different matter that his American wife and meaningless noises from some world capitals misguided him. He, like many contemporaries had failed to judge the sharpness of the scimitar of Indira Gandhi. That was the biggest mistake of his life. But he knew the art of manoeuvring the small time politicians of Sikkim. He was in touch, through his charming lady lawyer Rajkumari Bhuvaneshwari, and a Calcutta based Bengali journalist, with some of the leading Indian leaders incarcerated in different jails. Some of them had even assured him of a review of the 'rigged referendum' orchestrated by the Chief Executive, the 'devils on deputation' and the mandarins of the foreign office. I have no intention of dissecting the 'referendum process' and the tactical and strategic tools applied by Delhi to achieve the merger simply because that part of the history etched by Indira Gandhi can not be washed away from the tablet of time by normal political process.

However, my human assets had adequately warned me about the new role of a puppeteer assumed by the Chogyal. He had succeeded in reconnecting the cords to some of his tested political puppets and a few new converts, who were disillusioned with Kazi. K. C. Pradhan, a mercurial but warm hearted person led the new cheer group and was followed by N. K. Subedi, L. B. Basnet and N. B. Bhandari.

Political gems and stars did not stud the government of L. D. Kazi. Most of the ministers were politically immature and they had very little idea about the art of administering a strategic state like Sikkim. The system basically depended on the 'guidances' formulated by the Governor and the dynamics fabricated by the officers on deputation. Some of the ministers often quoted the Governor on the floor of the assembly when asked questions on developmental activities and allocation of fund. I recall an occasion when Narbahadur Khatiwada pulled up a minister for taking shelter behind the coat tails of the Governor on the issue of additional power generation in the state. The house regaled in laughter and the Speaker C.S. Rai had to expunge the minister's reply from the proceedings of the day.

Inefficient they were not in recognising the colour of the treasury bills received from Delhi. The impoverished former Himalayan kingdom was flooded with money, from plan and non-plan budgetary allocation provided by Delhi. Merger manipulated through corruption was destined to plunge into the crevices of corruption, which pervaded the political and the administrative structures. I had witnessed the impact of easy money in Manipur and Nagaland and was left with no doubt that sooner than later Sikkim would be transformed to a cesspool of easy money and corruption.

The former Chogyal hadn't missed the glaring fault line that was widened by the day between the easy-money rich coterie close to Kazi and the impoverished legislators and the political figures deprived of the opportunities thrown open by Delhi. He had started exploiting the fault lines deftly. A few members of the legislative assembly belonging to the ruling party and some prominent members of the opposition teamed up with the royalists and started questioning the roles of the 'desh bechuas.' Kazi was not able to plug the rumbling protests and his advisors came up with the suggestion of detaining a few of the Chogyal followers under the infamous Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) that was being applied mindlessly to suppress the opposition political movements in the rest of India.

I briefed Governor B. B. Lal about the blueprint of the new conspiracy by the former Chogyal after obtaining Delhi's approval. He took immediate corrective measures by partially taking care of the fault lines. L. D. Kazi took care of the moneybags dreamt of by some of the disgruntled elements in his

party and the award of lucrative civil contract projects rekindled a few of the opposition lights. They understood better the language of money than the language of ‘patriotism’ preached by the Chogyal.

The small business of managing Sikkim did not reflect the earthshaking events taking place in Delhi. Indira had postponed the Parliamentary elections in February 1976, as she wanted more time to consolidate the gains of the emergency. The entire opposition was put behind the bars and Sanjay had almost taken over the reins of the country. She postponed the elections again in November 1976 reportedly under pressure from Sanjay. However, she took out time from her ‘emergency commitments’ and flew down to Gangtok on November 19th, her 59th birthday along with Rajiv, Sanjay, Maneka, Sonia Gandhi, and her kids. Governor B. B. Lal hosted them. It was a great day for Sikkim.

The elite of the capital were invited to join Indira and her family over a luncheon party at the Raj Bhawan lawns. Sunanda and I were invited too along with a couple of other senior officers. I had chanced to see Indira in Manipur and once again in Delhi. Personally she impressed me with her dynamic patriotism and irrepressible urge for doing the good things for the country. I was dismayed by the declaration of the emergency and the repressive actions that followed.

Her appearance looked rather clouded, though a bright sun had lighted up the Raj Bhawan lawns. Draped in a saffron *sari* she looked rather worried and sunk within herself. She did not talk much.

The secretary to the Governor summoned me to the Raj Bhawan at about 8 p.m. On arrival he told me that Sanjay wanted to meet Narbahadur Khatiwada and I should personally bring him to the Raj Bhawan. He also asked me to see Sanjay in his room. I did not like the idea but was left with no window to escape. I would like to describe my first meeting with the heir apparent.

Seated alone in his room Sanjay was expecting me.

“Are you the IB fellow? You don’t look like a Kashmiri!”

“Yes sir, I’m the IB rep and I’m a Bengali.”

“Do Dhar’s grow in Bengal too?”

“I’m not sure if they grow there, sir. But my last seven generations are domiciled in Bengal and I’m told that they had migrated from Dhar in Madhya Pradesh.”

Sanjay did not appear to be pleased with the reply. Perhaps he was not happy with the Dhar title itself, having his serious differences with another Kashmiri Dhar, a minister in his mother’s cabinet.

I was surprised to see suspicion and hate coming out of his eyes and contempt from the corners of his lips. It appeared that he wasn’t even happy with himself. Did his anger emerge out of self-hatred?

“How long have you been in the service?”

“Twelve years.”

“Fine. Brief me about Sikkim and tell me in details about the implementation of family planning programme.”

The political briefing was over in ten minutes. But I faltered on the briefing on the family planning programme. All that I could say that demographically the Bhutias and the Lepchas were far below the expected growth rate and the Nepalis too were not threatening the balance of population very adversely.

“Don’t you think that the Nepalis should be subjected to family planning measures?”

“I think it wouldn’t be a politically prudent step. Sikkim has just become a part of India. The citizenship issue is yet to be settled. Sikkim requires economic development and emotional integration.”

“Do you think population control is a bad policy?”

“No sir. But Sikkim is not yet mature for this programme.”

Sanjay dismissed me and directed to produce Khatiwada exactly at 10.30 p.m.

I drove back to my office and raised Delhi over the phone and asked if I should get involved with Sanjay. The desk analyst chided me for disturbing his evening peace and asked me to do whatever I could do not to antagonise the rising son. His final words were something like this: ‘you don’t live another day by antagonising him.’

I got the message loud and clear and picked up Khatiwada from his Deorali residence. He wasn’t apprehensive and expected great favours from Sanjay. Khatiwada of 1976 was a fence sitter. He had not joined the gang of political looters and hadn’t fully digested the ‘deceitful merger’ of Sikkim with India. ‘Disinherited and disowned’ by Kazi and Kazini he was striving for establishing his political identity. Khatiwada of those days was a dynamic person. He was not a mere rabble-rouser. He was divested of his political mooring and was desperately in search of important mentors in the capital of India.

I waited in an anteroom while Sanjay and Khatiwada confabulated in the confines of the room. They emerged after about an hour and Sanjay summoned me by rude finger gestures.

“I’m making Khatiwada an important functionary of the Youth Congress. Ensure that he is not obstructed by the chief minister and others.”

“Wouldn’t you like to speak to the Governor?”

“Do as I say. I’d do whatever I’ve to do.”

“Would you like to reconsider your decision to empower Khatiwada with wider credibility?”

Sanjay looked at me with utter disbelief. He couldn’t imagine that a lowly IB officer would talk in a condescending manner.

“What’re your problems?”

“I’ve no problem sir. The problem is that Sikkim is a new experiment. Kazi should be allowed to settle down and strengthen the process of integration. Khatiwada is a firebrand person and he is disillusioned. I am afraid that he may choose to challenge the chief minister.”

“No problem. I can have another chief minister. Now do as I said.”

I did not know that I had risked my job and neck that night by standing up to the greatest bully of Indian public life. Later I was advised by the Governor not to risk such honest opinion in front of Sanjay Gandhi. He mildly reminded me that as a civil servant my foremost duty was to carry out the orders of the political masters. I did not agree with him. Neither did I agree with Sanjay on a laterday encounter. That’s a different story. I’d like to tell a little later. The encounter over, I proposed to drop Khatiwada at his residence. He insisted on coming to my home and discussing the future course of action.

Khatiwada exploited his Youth Congress connections to build up a political firewall against L. D. Kazi. He was a frustrated man and he was an impatient person. Four Nepali youth leaders had played key roles during the political turmoil that was manoeuvred by Delhi to merge Sikkim with India. One of them Narbahadur Bhandari was loyal to the Chogyal and Sikkim’s special identity. He fought for it and suffered torture and indignity in the hands of the Indian security forces. He changed much later and surrendered his ideology to the lure of the lucre.

The other three Nepali youth leaders R. C. Paudyal, N. K. Subedi and Narbahadur Khatiwada had supported the popular movement spearheaded by L. D. Kazi that aimed at restoration of democracy under a titular monarchy. He hadn’t *bargained* for the abolition of Sikkim’s identity.

N. K. Subedi, an enigmatic young man, was one of the most important segments of the youthful trident that Kazi carried in his hand. Subedi basically opposed the idea of merger of Sikkim with India, and Kazi and Kazini dropped him soon after they were ensconced at Mintokgong. R. C. Paudyal

had succeeded in ingratiating to Kazi and Kazini and remained a minister in his cabinet until such time he condescended to swim along with the tide. He did not live up to the expectation and took off at a maverick tangent both in political and personal life.

Khatiwada, advertised as the adopted son of Kazi, was a unique spark of the 'revolution.' He possessed the properties that could put things to fire but like the amorphous spark of almost all revolutions he was consumed by it. He could not keep the fire in him intact. He too was not in favour of abolition of Sikkim's unique identity. But two indomitable women, Indira and Eliza Maria, had put Kazi on a tiger and he did not know how to disembark. He was left with no option but to swim along the current that flowed from Delhi. He turned to Delhi for everything and started neglecting the Nepali forces that had the potential of challenging his actions.

Khatiwada too was abandoned like a pot of sour *chhang* (millet beer).

Proximity to Sanjay provided Khatiwada the much-needed fuel that he thought could fire up the spark in him again. He felt that he was no more dependent on the dual political stars, Kazi and Kazini, and the cosmic source of power, the Governor and his loyal bureaucrats. He started a sustained political campaign under the banner of the Youth Congress that actually eroded the political base of Kazi. He had started emerging as an alternative power base that had drawn attention of a number of fence sitters. Sanjay as well as my seniors in Delhi did not appreciate the point that weakening of Kazi Lehudup could lead to the strengthening of the pro-Chogyal forces.

Forcing Kazi to merge his Sikkim National Congress with Indian National Congress (I) was another cardinal mistake. Some arguments have been offered that the political managers and hammer smiths in Delhi did not want to commit the mistakes of granting special status to Sikkim and than chipping at those provisions on the sly, like they did in Kashmir. Such actions of erosion-on-the-sly in Kashmir had generated chain reactions of discord, dissent and devastating insurgency prompted and sustained by Pakistan. This analogy was not sustainable. The Chogyal had alienated his own people and a powerful hostile neighbour was not supporting him. Kazi had emerged as the saviour of the people. His independent image would have helped in building up a better political and economic infrastructure for Sikkim.

FOURTEEN

PEOPLE'S VICTORY: DEFEAT OF THE JOKERS.

Most human organizations that fall short of their goals do so not because of stupidity or faulty doctrines, but because of internal decay and rigidification. They grow stiff in the joints. They get in a rut. They go to seed.

James Gardner.

I returned to Gangtok from a short stint of holiday in the southern peninsula, on January 23, 1977, after receiving a message from the IB that I should get back to my station after cutting short my holidaying. The order was prompted by the decision of the prime minister on January 18 to hold Parliamentary election on March 17, 1977. My colleagues told me that she had taken the decision against the expressed opposition from Sanjay and assessment of her intelligence advisors. She had also ordered the release of most of the political detainees. It was a bold decision. That she decided to face the truth after a period of stupefied surrender to her notorious son spoke volumes of her intrinsic faith in democracy and the people of India. Indira had clearly realised that she could carry the emergency on for an indefinite period only to the peril of the country and her permanent destruction, political and probably physical. Her dependence on Sanjay had started frightening her. It was probably the proverbial case of the witch standing before the mirror and suddenly realising that she was no witch at all; she was the dame of democracy and daughter of a visionary, she was the torchbearer of a rich heritage. Indira's self-realisation had prevented her from plunging into the perilous course of permanently damaging the rich Indian democracy.

But Indira's woes were compounded by the sudden demise of President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and that was followed by resignation of Jagjivan Ram from her cabinet and floating of a new party, Congress for Democracy. Hemavati Nandan Bahugana, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, and Indira's aunt and old personal family bug, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, joined his bandwagon. Sanjay, the sandman, who had donned vain steel armour, had collapsed. The fountain of his power, his mother, had rebelled against him. For a while it appeared that the old Indira, the daughter of a chronic democrat Jawaharlal and an ardent disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, had found her feet again.

I admired her bold decision *and liked to believe* that Sanjay, who had taken advantage of the temporary political amnesia of his mother Indira, committed most of the emergency excesses. I did write a personal letter to her, thanking for the brave decision. I was not told about the fate of this letter by her aides. I did not expect. I wanted to see the Durga of 1971 to have a reincarnation.

Did Sanjay have any secret weapon to blackmail his mother? I did not believe in many of the stories that linked Indira with dubious male stalkers, who walked the political stretch along with her. She had suffered much as a child. She had seen her mother being humiliated and tormented. She did not enjoy a blissful married life. Her sons' intellectual achievement often dismayed her. She wasn't happy with Sanjay's marriage. However, it would be preposterous to imagine that Sanjay had in his possession some scandalous material that he used to paralyse his mother's political will.

I would like to revert to this aspect a little later.

Back in Sikkim the Kazi government and the Congress party were not in the best of health. The

contentious issue of citizenship and Sikkim subject had brought to the fore the latent communal bitterness that existed between the numerically superior Nepalis and the politically superior Bhutia and Lepchas. In his heart of heart Kazi was not in favour of granting citizenship to all and sundry Nepali settlers and he was keen to go by the letter and spirit of Sikkim Subject Register.

Narbahadur Khatiwada had raised his voice in favour of Nepali rights even when he enjoyed the confidence of Kazi. His Nepali proclivities had also alienated Kazini Eliza Maria. But Khatiwada used his Youth Congress plank to advocate the Nepali cause more than any other Nepali politician did. But the dazzling spark of Sikkim's revolution had other things in mind.

Little before Jagjivan Ram reneged against Indira Kazi called me to his office and wanted my opinion on accommodating Khatiwada in his cabinet. The idea was not new. But Khatiwada was an anathema to R. C. Paudyal, B. P. Dahal and even S. K. Rai, a party stalwart. They were opposed to his induction to the cabinet and their efforts were fortified by some of the bureaucrats on deputation, against whom Khatiwada had spoken vociferously. I supported the idea and advised Kazi that by inducting Khatiwada he could avert an impending split in the party. I sent a report to Delhi on my discussions with Kazi and also kept the Governor posted.

However, Eliza Maria and some of the cabinet colleagues prevented Kazi. I was given to understand that the Governor too was opposed to the idea. After a couple of days of the formation of Congress for Democracy by Jagjivan Ram Narbahadur Khatiwada dropped in at my residence well after midnight and informed that he was quitting Congress to join the new party floated by Jagjivan Ram. He was in touch with Ram's son Sushil and a few other rebel Congress leaders. I was not concerned with his political decision. My concern was the professional link that I had assiduously built up for over last two years. We maintained our relationship strictly on professional basis and his political somersault did not affect my performance.

But the irrepressible police commissioner, who had mounted surveillance on Khatiwada, was not happy over my links with the stormy petrel. He summoned me to his office and demanded a clarification. I was aghast over the audacious attitude. Khurana was a drunken blob. But I was surprised to see that he had lost his professional sanity too. I returned after giving a curt reply that my relationship with my professional friends did not come under his policing jurisdiction.

Khatiwada was true to his assertion. He parted Kazi's company with three members of the legislative assembly, reducing the strength of the ruling party to 28, in a house of 32. K. C. Pradhan, the most instable political needle of Sikkim, temporarily sided with Khatiwada. The Congress for Democracy organised series of rallies and criticised Indira Gandhi, who was reduced to 'randi Indira' (widow Indira) from '*Indira mai*' (mother Indira). Kazi's alleged misrule, interference by the Governor and 'unholy influence' of the officers on deputation were his stock arrows. He did not come out clearly against the 'deceitful merger' of Sikkim. But one of his friends was motivated to produce a document that Khatiwada had prepared for submission to the new government. I was advised that a lady advocate of the former Chogyal had helped Khatiwada in preparing that document. I kept Delhi informed but did not share this information with the governor.

I was not surprised by Khatiwada's metamorphosis. What for politicians were if they did not take a couple of pole vaults, somersaults and back rolls? He wasn't the first Sikkimese politician to change colour.

Kazi was affronted by another political development when Narbahadur Bhandari, a Sikkimese nationalist and a former Chogyal loyalist floated a new party on March 22, 1977. Bhandari left no hedge between his loyalty to Sikkim and hatred against the 'desh bechuas.'

The March 17 national election resulted in the rout of Congress and personal defeat for Indira and

Sanjay. No optimist had ever imagined Indira's return after what she had done during the emergency regime under wrong advice and evil influence of Sanjay.

The ragtag Janata Party government wasn't exactly what Jayaprakash Narayan had envisioned. Another pack of hungry politicians had replaced Indira's team and hate Indira and finish Indira was the only national programme they could manage to formulate. They too followed the Congress practice of dismissing the provincial governments and ordering fresh elections. It was the most unfortunate practice that the Indian democracy was shackled to. Indira had started the practice way back in 1958 in Kerala and the new Janata messiahs emulated her with vengeance.

Sikkim, a small state with only one Parliamentary seat did not affect the political destiny of India. But the witches in the Janata government court were insistent on dismissing the Sikkim government too. Kazi Lehndup had two options. He could either play the '*aya ram gaya ram*' (historically Kazi preceded Bhajanlal, the Haryana hero of Indian democracy) game and join Janata Party en block or face summary dismissal.

Kazi Lehndup personally rang me up to see him at his residence after 11 p.m. We usually conversed in Nepali. But that night I was intrigued by the use of broken English used by the chief minister. Kazi was fond of *chhang* (millet beer) and Scotch. He liked to retire after a few early drinks unless the affairs of the state required his late night presence. I was never a connoisseur of alcoholic beverage, but I mostly accepted his offer of *chhang*, which helped my penetration into his grooves. Otherwise an inscrutable Lepcha noble, Kazi very often opened up over *chhang* served in bamboo container.

"I'm under pressure to join the Janata Party," He opened up in the confines of his bedroom, "What should I do?"

"Who is pressurising you?"

"Everybody," Kazi continued, "The Governor and a few officers here and Madhu Limaye and George Fernandez in Delhi."

"What is your gut feeling?"

"I think I should not. But the Governor says that Sikkim is dependent of central assistance and grant and my people would starve if I refuse to join the ruling party."

I explained to Kazi, under oath of secrecy, that he should not switch over again. The first switch over to Indira Congress had eroded his credibility and popular base. Another change could create political crisis for him.

"Khatiwada is with Bahuguna and Jagjivan. They might topple me and make him the chief minister."

Kazi's argument was simple.

"I don't think they would do that. I suggest you revert back to Sikkim National Congress and try to move nearer to the people of Sikkim. Changes in Delhi should not worry you."

I was not sure that I could motivate Kazi that night. Next morning I transmitted my assessment to Delhi and pronto came a lightening call from the desk analyst. My presence was urgently required for certain consultations.

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I had a prolonged meeting with the desk analyst and tried to convince him that Kazi was on the verge of losing his grip on the electorate. The people of the state did not like his joining the Congress. Another switch over could jeopardise his political existence and that would signal the rise of the pro-

Chogyal forces. My senior colleague was not convinced and I was presented before the Union Home Minister, a sun burnt ambitious Jat from western Uttar Pradesh. He looked up at me and kindly offered a seat and spoke a single sentence.

“Get Kazi join my party.”

That was the end of the dialogue. I took a flight back to Baghdogra and broke my journey at the parlour of Kazi before I went home. The troubleshooting journalist and the Bhikshu and a couple of other hangers on surrounded him. I called him aside and shared with him the wishes of the Union Home Minister. Kazi looked up with his big eyes and spoke an enigmatic sentence in Nepali.

“Huncha. Tara Dilli mo lai football josto lath mardaicha.”

It meant that he would oblige Delhi but regretted that Delhi was kicking him around like a football. I was not amused by the comment. He was really a football, which had very little option but to be kicked around. He had agreed to be kicked around by Delhi in the oust-Chogyal game and it was now impossible for him to quit the arena without being kicked again and again, till he was kicked out of the stadium.

Finally, in a classic action of political prostitution Kazi merged the Sikkim unit of Congress with the Janata Party, which gave a unique opportunity to his political rivals to chisel out his coffin. The final nails were hammered in after the next election to the state assembly. Kazi was consigned to political oblivion. I would like to tell a few more snippets about the humiliation that this giant of a person suffered in the courts of Delhi politicians.

Kazi’s switch over to the Janata Party had outwitted Narbahadur Khatiwada. He tried to maintain the distinct identity of his party by renaming it as Sikkim Prajatantra Congress and made overtures to the leadership of the Congress (I). But Indira’s political advisors preferred to dissolve the state unit. She had other priorities than attending the affairs of the Sikkim unit of Congress, which did never exist at the grassroots level.

Having lost the grassroots support Kazi started depending more on the Governor and a band of officers who identified their own survival with that of the chief minister. I was pained to see the pathetic state of affairs, but could do very little to motivate my seniors in Delhi to suggest some course correction to the political leadership. The self-righteous Janata conglomerate busied itself with a single agenda: demolish Indira and punish her associates.

The situation in Sikkim was aggravated over the issue of communal representation, re-determination of the proportionate representation by the people of Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha origin. The new breed of Indians who had started seeping into the social and political capillaries of Sikkim also demanded equal rights with the Sikkim citizens. Kazi, at his heart of heart was opposed to the abolition of preferred representation ratio to the minority Bhutia, Lepcha and Tsongs. The Indian bureaucrats’ thinking process was conditioned by general Indian susceptibility to the threat of unhindered migration of Nepali citizen to India and the brewing political agitation in the Darjeeling hills.

To add to the worries the untimely and unfortunate statement of Prime Minister Morarji Desai on the propriety of merger of Sikkim with India had helped reopening of the hitherto waxed hornets nest. Khatiwada and Bhandari did not lose the opportunity of unfurling the banner of revolt against Kazi and the values he stood for. The Chogyal and the members of his think tank immediately jumped into the fray. They were assisted by a few Calcutta and Delhi based journalists who like the Janata leaders failed to see virtue in the actions of Indira Gandhi. Their personal and ideological bitterness incapacitated them from discerning the special security and political situation in which Sikkim was placed as a border sentinel against China. The very journalist, who did some troubleshooting on

behalf of Sanjay, switched over allegiance and started promoting the interests of the new political leadership. Kazini Eliza Maria told me in no uncertain words that the journalist was paid hefty amounts to influence the ministers in Delhi. I did not like to break the glasshouse she was caged in by telling that her precious money had only fattened the pocket of the news and feature agency man.

Kazi depended on me a lot. But my capability was limited by the situation of drift that had taken over the Intelligence Bureau. They too got busy in mending fences with the new masters and did not lag behind in mobilising the agency's assets to haunt down Indira Gandhi. Indira was the sole problem for the IB too. Surveillance on Indira and her close associates was total. Their phones were tapped, mails opened, movements shadowed and friends and acquaintances grilled and interrogated. The Janata government used the IB as ruthlessly Indira had used it against them during the emergency. The night-beauties of IB did not find it difficult to switch over bedmates. I shuddered at the professional promiscuity of the organisation. How could the same set of officers get ready to burn Indira at the stakes, who had lapped up the dusts of her walkway only a couple of months ago? The answer was not very far to seek. IB did not work under any systemic control. It was a department and worked under personal supervision of the PM and the HM. Therefore, bed hopping was inevitable for the organisation.

However, I kept Kazi and the Governor informed of a sinister move that had started taking shape over the 'infamous Sikkim statement' of the Morarji Desai, the Prime Minister. The members of the legislative assembly were being influenced by some mysterious forces to demand a vote against the merger of Sikkim like they had earlier voted in favour of the merger in 1975.

I was surprised to see that the senior IB leaders preferred to play cool to the new game plan of the Chogyal and his think tank. To keep track of the activities of the 'independence' protagonists I requested both Delhi and Calcutta to provide me with the facilities of selected phone tapping and interception and examination of postal mails. The need for the selected use of micro tape recorders and radio microphones were emphasised. These requests were summarily turned down. Absence of technical and electronic gadgets confined my intelligence gathering capability only to human assets.

The ambience of merger-romance was over and the forces of disintegration had started cutting out new furrows. Some of them were in touch with the directionless and unfocussed leaders of the Janata conglomerate. The former Chogyal had started reshuffling his cards with great care.

I was not capable to sit on judgement on the correctness or otherwise of the merger of Sikkim. I was not the instrument either to undo what the political leadership did in 1974-75. I was there in Sikkim as an instrument of the government of India to generate intelligence on the security ambience of the newly merged state and to perform counter intelligence operations along the Chinese borders. Having sensed that Delhi had lost its bearings I kept myself confined to honest reporting.

But the high drama of political instability reached the apex around the *Deepavali* (festival of Light) day of 1977. My human assets informed me that 11 legislators of Kazi's Janata Party, including four ministers were on the verge of defecting and toppling the government. Their plan included two vital aspects: formation of an alternative government and passing a majority resolution demanding annulment of the '*deceitful merger of Sikkim*' with India. Some pro-Chogyal elements had started spreading rumours that once the State Assembly annulled the merger the new sovereign Sikkim would be recognised by a few international powers. The illiterate people of Sikkim were misled by such whispering campaign. I shared the information with Delhi and Calcutta and waited for instructions. Nothing came.

Around 7 p.m. I received a call from the Raj Bhawan and was advised to see the Governor immediately. Governor B. B. Lal was already seated in his ornate office room and was in the process

of discussing the matter of political instability with Davy Manavalan. I was promptly ushered in and on demand from the Governor I shared with him the precise intelligence that I had. I also told him that about 12 legislators were herded together at a secret place in the capital. It was a sort of 'action camp' to motivate the legislators and to finalise the rough edges of portfolio allocation and distribution of moneybags.

The Governor summoned the police commissioner for rescuing the 'camped' legislators. I requested him not to compel me to discuss the delicate matter in front of the police chief. But he insisted that I share the complete information with Khurana. I had to give in.

The Governor desired that I should help the police to retrieve the 'camped' legislators. I declined to oblige and suggested that at best I could show the place to Davy Manavalan from a safe distance and he could do the rest. This compromise was agreed upon. Davy Manavalan was one of the oldest 'deputationist' officers from West Bengal and he had established excellent rapport with the Sikkimese politicians and bureaucrats. A man of outstanding integrity and a devout Catholic, Manavalan was an excellent performer. I returned home after helping in rescuing the legislators and called Delhi up to apprise the desk analyst of that evening's developments.

The night before *Deepavali* is traditionally a gambling time for the superstitious Hindus. The avid gamblers fill up several holes where alcoholic beverages are served liberally. Gangtok was no exception. But after my rendezvous with Manavalan was over I returned home for a family dinner and rest. Our elder son was down with chicken pox and Sunanda too was running temperature. I wanted to spend the festive evening with them.

But my destiny eluded me a peaceful pre-*Deepavali* night. Khurana rang me up to demand as to why I did not share with him the information of likely defection prior to my briefing the Governor. He was as usual very high on whisky and could hardly speak out the words he intended to convey. Khurana was not the guy to take the message gracefully. He kept on ringing me after every 10 minutes and came down to abusing me.

Khurana raided my home with a great commotion. Dressed in a woollen evening gown and armed with a pistol he stormed into my house and demanded that I open the door for him. He brushed aside the CRPF armed guard and kept on banging the main door.

Sensing trouble I called staff members who lived in the same campus. They ran down to my help. I requested K. M. Lal and Davy Manavalan to come down to my residence to pacify the drunken police chief.

As I opened the door Khurana stormed into the outer corridor followed by a deputy superintendent of police, whose only job was to give company to his commissioner till he dozed off well after midnight. The young Bhutia officer apologised and requested me to help him out. Sunanda requested Khurana to sit down and talk slowly as our son was running high temperature. But the police chief, high on spirits kept on shouting and hurling abuses for my alleged defiance of his superior authority. Fortunately for us Lal and Manvalan reached our home in five minutes and stood silently behind Khurana. On seeing them he rushed out of the corridor and bumped against a stair. We steadied him and helped him getting into the car that brought him to our home.

Sunanda and I felt extremely humiliated by the outrageous behaviour of the police commissioner who had even forgotten the normal social niceties. Next morning Sunanda and I drove down to the Raj Bhawan and apprised the Governor of the mischievous and objectionable behaviour of Khurana. I reminded the Governor that as the head of the state he had every right to be privy to the security and stability related intelligence, but his police commissioner could not get away by making such demands on me. I followed this up with a written complaint to the Director IB with a copy to the

Governor. That was the end of my official and social relationship with Khurana.

My point was well taken by the Governor and Delhi too supported me. Khurana was transferred out and I was able to help out my former boss at Kohima, M. N. Gadgil to join as the new police chief. I had gone out of the way to lobby for him as he was on the verge of reversion to his state cadre and he had no chance of earning the next higher rank. He did me a good turn in Calcutta by tilting in favour of my posting to Gangtok and did whatever I could do to influence an obliged chief minister and a gentleman Governor.

The intricately complicated aspects of relationship between the state and the central intelligence machineries and the appropriate protocol of sharing intelligence require deeper examination. Some of the police chiefs expect the central intelligence to serve their local interests, which are generally conditioned by the requirements of the political bosses of the state. I faced similar difficulties in Manipur, where a frustrated and incompetent IG police had mounted surveillance on my subordinates and me. Baleshwar Prasad, the corrupt Chief Commissioner, goaded him.

However, Sikkim was a different case study. It was a new laboratory of political experiment and the Governor was a seasoned and balanced administrator. He deserved a better police chief, which Khurana was not. His demands exceeded the limits of the Rubicon that are imposed on an intelligence officer by his training and the ethics of his profession. Sharing and denial of intelligence by itself is an art that has to be learnt over a long period. But some bulls to which a china shop is as good as the wheel cart of a vegetable vendor often misinterpret polite intelligence denials as acts of defiance. That was the tragedy with Khurana, which was compounded by his drinking binges.

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The developments in Delhi under the first non-Congress government, a queer coalition of conflicting ideologies and directionless leaders caused severe convulsions in my mind. It appeared that Morarji Desai and his ministerial team were merely glued together by hate Indira mortar. They had very little time to govern the country. Their demolish Indira programme was joined vigorously by the media persons, intellectuals and the so-called secular democrats. Indira Gandhi was no doubt guilty of mutilating the constitution, tampering with the judiciary and destroying the administrative iron frame in the name of loyalty and commitment. The emergency aberration had unfolded the ugly aspects of a democratic system mortgaged to a gargantuan political party and a leader who had forgotten the golden rules of democracy that the system should not be made subservient to the personal stability of a leader. Indira had become the 'high command'. That indispensability was incompatible in a democracy had escaped Indira's attention. Did she start believing in the sycophantic slogan that Indira was India?

Sanjay Gandhi had seemingly established a stranglehold not only on her style of functioning but also on her cerebral properties. The backseat driver had assumed that India was there to be plundered and treated as a bonded chattel maid. They were blatantly wrong. They had initiated the process of destroying the finer grains of democratic process and introduced the elements of muscle, money and street violence as the new weapons that degenerated to plain and simple criminality. Sanjay was the first irresponsible Indian politician, if he was a politician at all, to put crime and politics on the high pedestal of social and political acceptability.

However, Morarji Desai's single-minded obsession against Indira and non-governance had disillusioned most of the thinking citizen of the country. He failed to take India out of the morass of political morbidity and economic disaster. Moreover he was dogged by the ideological conflicts

inside his political juggernaut.

The Jan Sangh was wedded to the anachronistic Hindutwa concept of the RSS, which might have been relevant in the pre-partition days as a symbol of Hindu interests as against the only-Muslim single minded programme pursued by the Muslims and encouraged by the bankrupt Imperial masters. The Jan Sangh ministers tried to follow their own brand of political objective while the multi-hued socialists opted for more anarchic handling of the sensitive national issues. A few of the cabinet colleagues of Morarji had already started plotting his ouster and promoting themselves as prospective prime ministers.

The farce of Indira's arrest and the resultant haunting and the comical handling of the Shah Commission had left no doubt that the dream of Jayprakash Narayan had gone sour and the revolution that he had envisioned was being systematically demolished by the hungry pack of politicians whom he had parked at the helm of affairs of the nation. His dreams too were shattered like those of Mahatma Gandhi.

I felt apprehensive when the establishment head of the IB sounded me of my possible transfer to Delhi. I had completed my tour of duty in Sikkim. I had earned the distinction of setting up the Intelligence Bureau's edifices in the new state and I had succeeded in generating valuable human assets both for the internal as well as the counter-intelligence wings of the IB. It was time for me to seek out a wider field. The kids now deserved better education and as a career intelligence operator I was also required to gather some experiences as a desk analyst.

I was insulated from the process of witch hunting that had cascaded down the entire IB. The new masters did not hesitate to use the IB for haunting down Indira and her close allies like Indira did to her political opponents. The powerful organisations of the government like the IB, CBI and the R&AW had become handy tools in the hands of the fragile political masters. There was no law in the country to make them accountable to any overview committee of the Parliament or any other constitutional watchdog. The intelligence machineries in India were used as obliging housemaids and the same practice continues unabated. These organisations, like the police and paramilitary forces, have become coercive arms of the government and they are not in any way accountable to the taxpayers and the citizenry, who are supposed to be the ultimate masters in a democracy.

Whatever it is, we left Gangtok for Delhi on December 16, 1978, to start another phase of our life that I envisioned was not going to be rosy at all.

I was deputed to Sikkim at an important juncture of its destiny. The post-merger process required speedy consolidation and emotional integration, besides ingestion of planned economic package. The able Governor had taken care of the daunting task of providing Sikkim with a viable administrative infrastructure and economic development. I must add that B. B. Lal and some of his officers had laid the foundation of solid economic progress though the later day politicians did not fail to emulate their counterparts in the other parts of North East India. Economic activities had become synonymous with fattening of the ruling class of the day.

I derived satisfaction out of the facts that I had done whatever I could do to establish the Intelligence Bureau as a respected wing of the government of India in Sikkim. Generation of internal and counter intelligence tools was perfected to the best of my ability and I had succeeded in penetrating almost all segments of the Sikkimese society. The politicians and the people had started looking up to the IB unit as an independent window to Delhi. The chief minister and the governor had reposed more trust in the IB than on the state intelligence. In my perception it was no mean an achievement.

FIFTEEN

BACK TO THE RAMPART

When you're a young man, Macbeth is a character part. When you're older, it's a straight part.
Sir Laurence Olivier.

Delhi is a cruel place. It is a place of fortune hunters and essentially a city of migrating bureaucrats and firmly rooted traders and rulers. The rulers survive for a while. The bureaucrats fade away very fast. The traders and fortune hunters stalk the city like their historical and mythological four legged evolutionary partners.

Delhi is a city of opportunity too. The destiny of the geo-political entity called *Bharatvarsha* was made and unmade by the rulers and predators of Delhi. Waves upon waves of human activity around the seats of power had given Delhi its unique flavour and stink. The stink was visible. But to discover the distinct flavour of Delhi one had to dive deep into the human pool.

I too could not escape the fear and flair of the city that was in real sense the *Indraprashtha*, abode of the king of the *suras* (in fact, the Aryans). It was a leveller of some kind, though not for all. For a small intelligence operator like me, Delhi presented the dream peak of success. It also levelled up many of the notions that the heaven born bureaucrats of the All India Services nurtured. I was aware of the possibility of my expectations to be bulldozed by the systemic juggernaut.

The first leveller came in the form of one bedroom transit accommodation in an up coming complex in Minto Road, next to the infamous Turkman Gate. The next hurdle was learning the open sesame mantra that opened the gates of a public schools to our children.

Having taken care of the family I was prepared to jump into action.

I sought out my RSS friend (Benaras one), who had reverted back to his *pracharak* mission. A self-effacing person, he was not interested in governmental matters. Our interactions confirmed my doubt that the Jan Sangh was not in a position to provide good governance. The conflicting interests in the Janata conglomerate were straining the very seams of the coalition. The former Congress elements were in collision with the regional satraps, and the ever-splitting socialists. Charan Singh, Jagjivan Ram, and Bahuguna were perusing their own agenda. Morarji Desai was obsessed with the mission of humiliating Indira and tarnishing the Nehru legacy with as much black paint as he could master.

The RSS was not interested in prolonging the oxygen supply to this queer experiment. They were busy in experimenting with the dynamics of transition from an exclusive cultural club to a ruling entity. The wand of power was new to them, and they were not sure how to translate it to electoral magic. Indira was a hate object, but that was not their political mantra. It did not advance their Hindutwa agenda. My friend was candid in admitting that the coalition would collapse sooner than expected. He was aware of the machinations of Indira Gandhi and Sanjay to drive a wedge in the ruling coalition. They were in touch with Raj Narain and Charan Singh. Even Jagjivan Ram was not averse to the idea of ditching Morarji, if he was promised the top slot. As a member of 'Dalit' community he thought he had the right to occupy the South Block room. The political scenario was gloomy enough to shatter faith of the sepoys of Jayaprakash Narayan.

I remained in touch with my RSS friend and prepared myself for the next assignment.

I expected an opportunity to handle an analysis desk. But, I was summoned by B. R. Kalyanpurkar, a Joint Director, and was grilled on various aspects of human, technical and electronic intelligence tradecrafts. I was foxed by the detailed interview. Kalyanpurkar, a soft spoken and mild mannered *Konkan* Brahmin from coastal Maharashtra, was pejoratively called as the ‘safe deposit vault’ of IB, for his alleged habit of sitting over files. He did not like his juniors to take quick decision. He himself did not take. I was, they opined, surely heading for a massive black hole

After about seven days of the elaborate interview I received an order posting me as the Assistant Director of the IB’s famous training facility at the Anand Parvat. I welcomed the order. As the training in charge I was only to teach the techniques of decision-making and not take any earth shaking decision. I expected that my stint with the training institute would help me in concretising some of the unorthodox tradecrafts that I had practiced during field postings. I was painfully aware of the inadequacies of the hackneyed training manuals that were being imposed on the new and old officers. No one had taken care to study the training manuals and practices of the western countries, especially those of the MI5, MI6, the CIA and the French intelligence organisations. We had no real-time access to the tradecraft used by the Russian and Chinese intelligence, though our counterintelligence units covered their activities on Indian soil. The tradecrafts applied by the foreign intelligence operators in India too were analysed for use by the counterintelligence branch concerned but these were not integrated with IB’s training curricula.

I was thrilled over the idea of getting a chance to do some research on the training methodology and upgrading the assorted gadgets that help HumInt, by providing technical support.

I devoted two weeks to understand the training curricula and the contents of the tradecraft subjects. The curricula content had not changed since I attended the course in 1968.

I concentrated on the tradecraft subjects and the techniques of human agent building, secret communication, concealment, memory training, secret enquiry and ancillary technical subjects like foot surveillance, shadowing, and operational intelligence in insurgency and terrorism affected areas. I quietly attended the classes of some of the instructors with a view to assimilating the quality of the contents and the impact on the trainees. The new recruits were more receptive than the old serving officers, who were recycled periodically for so called refresher courses. For them it was either a paid holiday or a forced detention. Most of them, I realised had developed resistance against learning new tradecraft techniques and thought that Anand Parvat had very little to offer. The police officers on deputation to the IB also resisted fresh training inputs. Most of them refused to be transformed from policemen to intelligence operatives.

In the meantime, vast changes had taken place in the blueprint for inducting the members of the Indian Police Service to the Intelligence Bureau. Earlier most the IPS officers were caught young from the training college and inducted to the IB on the third or fourth years of their service under the ‘earmarking scheme’. They were supposed to spend entire service life in the IB, and fashion themselves as career intelligence operatives and executives. The ‘earmarked’ officers were supposed to act as the hardcore spine of the organisation.

Indira Gandhi had abolished this system partially to build up a ‘committed and loyal’ band of officers around her and partially under the pressure of the IPS lobby, who were on constant lookout for greener pastures in Delhi. They sought out safe shelters in the central police organisations when they were in conflict with the state governments. The Intelligence Bureau, they pleaded, should be

treated as a central police organisation, and not as a specialised agency to be handled by a 'selected few'. They were supported by the Indian Administrative Service Officers, who were keen to dwarf the reach of the IB to the ears of the PM and the HM, and create a loyal band inside the secret service. This had opened up the floodgate of short tenure deputation to the IB, especially of the officers having political patronage, and those who wanted to escape from the tougher state cadres in the North East and cadres where the Marxists happened to run the state governments.

It's not that most of these officers were transit passengers. A few of them had shaped up as good intelligence bureaucrats and had managed to build up good rapport with the ruling politicians of the day. Some of them were identified with the political totems in their respective states.

It was a painful experiment to train some of these officers. Way back in 1968, I was trained along with officers eight to twelve years senior to me. They were not interested in shaping themselves up as intelligence operators. They wanted some happy cushion in Delhi and return to their states when the weathercocks blew favourable winds. During my tenure in the training institute I found that this crop of officers had no craving for learning the tradecrafts and the slogging that a field officer was supposed to undergo. Some of them decorated the 'subject desks' and others managed to get posted to the regional units of the IB and lorded over their small empires, as long as they did not jump to a higher trapeze.

I worked on preparing a concept paper on the requirement of revising and updating some of the training manuals I emphasised the need for studying the tradecraft specialities of some of the leading foreign intelligence organisations. Some of the suggestions included mandatory qualifying tests before a direct recruit officer was promoted to the next higher rank, meaningful interaction between the officers of the general and technical wings and restoration of the 'earmarking scheme'. The other 'preposterous' idea that I incorporated was the induction of middle level officers from the tertiary institutions like the scientific, economic, and specialised fields of communication. I also suggested creation of a separate unit for training IB officers in the tenets of Islam, and shaping them up as 'real Muslims'. The other unit that I suggested was related to the teaching of the 'black arts' of intelligence tradecraft that should equip IB officers in operating inside target 'enemy territories', and in areas affected by insurgency and terrorism.

I think that my revolutionary ideas had upset the applecart of some of the faculty members and a few boss-men. Talking about change was an act of heresy. I was posted out of the training facility in early August 1979, and was directed to take charge of the 'election cell' under supervision of Mr. Sudhin Gupta, a fine but disillusioned and disinterested officer. I did not expect a better scenario after about nine years of my first encounter with Gupta, because he had himself become a 'resistance' to new ideas and changes. He loved his past and lived in the past

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The election cell had started functioning at a low key well before the Presidential order dissolving the Parliament on August 22, and scheduling of elections to the Parliament in January 1980. The Presidential order was preceded by bizarre developments around the Janata conglomerate. Morarji Desai had proved beyond doubt that he was not the visionary who could rescue India from the mess created by Indira Gandhi's younger son. He was busy in witch hunting, and his son had started indulging in questionable financial dealings. Morarji's billion blundering actions had brought about serious fissure in the Janata Party.

Maneka Gandhi, the young wife of Sanjay, had managed to scandalise the government by

publishing lurid sexploits of Suresh Ram, son of Jagjivan Ram, in her glossy magazine *Surya*. Various other scandals involving the Janata leaders overshadowed the gossips, writings and exposes of the alleged demonic activities of Indira and her younger son.

The RSS backed Jan Sangh was caught in the web of the murky question of dual membership and alleged non-secular activities and the maverick socialist Rajnaraian, and his mentor, Chaudry Charan Singh, the Jat patriarch from Uttar Pradesh, had toppled the Morarji government with strings-knotted help from Indira and her son Sanjay. Charan Singh, a pioneer of the politics of defection, was not new to the concept of changing sides. He had earlier performed that magic in Uttar Pradesh.

India was not the only country to be rocked by political turmoil.

The farcical performers in Delhi had not taken into account the diabolical developments in Pakistan that followed the ouster of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and assumption of power by General Zia-ul-Haq. The fundamentalist General had initiated the process of Islamisation of Pakistan and had launched Pakistan on a course of closer coalition with the US for fighting the Russian backed regime in Afghanistan. He too initiated the process of encouraging the ethno-religious groups in Indian Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir.

The Janata government had blissfully ignored the growth of new geo-political realities in the region, and Morarji Desai had, in fact, reopened the question of 'merger of Sikkim' with India. His undiplomatic gesture in meeting A. Z. Phizo, the rebel Naga leader, in London had subverted the spirit of the Shillong Agreement, reached in 1975.

Indira Gandhi did not have to do much from the confines of her 12 Wellington Crescent home, a small place that doubled as the residence of her extended family, and her office. The 'revolution' initiated by Jayaprakash Narayan was squandered away by the hungry and tactless politicians of the Janata conglomerate. They failed to understand that the people of the country were not interested in hunting down Indira for her emergency follies. They had been aggrieved and had given Indian democracy a chance to change for the better. The Janata leaders betrayed them. The people wanted economic regeneration, poverty alleviation, and transparent governance and not witch-hunting.

Indira had not failed to seize upon the buffoonery of the pack of Janata jokers. She had managed to return to the Parliament and revive the Congress party by causing another split. The common people soon understood that Indira was the best bet for them to take care of the internal political, social and economic problems and steadying Indian strategic policies against the diabolical designs of Pakistan.

My simple and insignificant election desk, therefore, assumed some importance. I was required to collate data from all over the country and prepare intelligence assessment about the main election issues, prospects of the parties and emerging law and order condition. For this daunting task four subordinate staff, with very little experience of the electoral process in the country, supported me. On top of it my immediate boss was more concerned with coma, semicolon and full stops and immaculate Oxonian words that were used in the reports rather than the projection of political trends and issues that were shaping up the mood of the people.

At this point of time a strange person visited our modest Pandara Road home. A former minister in Indira's pre-emergency government and maternal grandfather of Sunanda remembered us after a gap of about 11 years. The learned educationist and politician shared a family dinner and finally told me that Sanjay Gandhi wanted to see me. I was foxed by the request. My brush with Sanjay at Gangtok was not a pleasant one and his reputation, as the guillotine man did not escape my antenna. I flatly refused to oblige my wife's grandfather.

Around the same time I was directed by a Joint Director to see the caretaker PM in his office. I had met Charan Singh for a few moments when he had ordered me to motivate Kazi Lehndup Dorji to

merge his Congress unit with the Janata Party.

I was ushered in to the sprawling room of the PM and was handed over a list of election candidates of the remnants of the Janata conglomerate from various states. He ordered me to submit a quick assessment on the prospect of each candidate and what all his government was required to do in each constituency to influence the electorate. I was surprised by the order of the lame duck PM. He should have normally routed the request through the Director Intelligence Bureau and the cascading channel down the line. I walked down the corridor of the North Block to see the Joint Director who had deputed me to see the PM. He listened to me and asked me to keep this off the record and to direct the field units of the IB to file immediate reports. He added that this was a normal practice in the IB and general election assessments as well as specific assessment for the ruling party were being done on regular basis.

I carried out the exercise honestly with adequate support from my field colleagues and finalised a report by mid-September. It brought out a startling picture. A distinct pattern of Indira wave was discernible and my computations indicated that Congress (Indira) was heading for a landslide victory, scoring over 300 seats in the new Parliament. My Deputy Director grilled me for over four hours and rather reluctantly agreed with the conclusions and pushed the report up to his next senior. It was time for me to be grilled again by the Joint Director, who disagreed with the report and tersely commented that the Prime Minister was not likely to be amused by my performance.

I was presented before the Union Home Secretary, who glanced through the report and asked me to follow him to the PMO. The lame duck PM gave a cursory look at the report and asked if I were a Trojan Horse of Indira Gandhi. I tried to explain the basic electoral scenario to the best of my ability but the old man on the other side of the table was not convinced. He took out a report earlier submitted by me in which I had mentioned about the instances of muscle being used by the Jat community against the backward classes in certain constituencies in western Uttar Pradesh. I was asked to withdraw the report and recast the election assessment 'with an objective outlook'.

On return from his office I received a dressing down from a senior officer and was advised to pack my baggage for likely reversion to my state cadre, West Bengal. That night I returned home with a bruised mind and an acute sense of humiliation. I opened my mind to Sunanda after the kids went to bed. She comforted and encouraged me to look for a different career-window and assured that she would do her best to adjust with any vicissitudes that might befall on us. We sat around the coffee table in our living room and tried to plan out our next strategy in the uncharted field in West Bengal.

Around 11.30 p.m. the door bell rang. I was ready for an order placing my services back to West Bengal. Instead, I faced an unexpected visitor as I opened the door. He apologised profusely for the late incursion and sought permission to come in. For certain reasons I am holding back his identity. He was an important Congress (I) leader and was known for his proximity to Indira Gandhi. After brief preliminaries he wanted me to meet R. K. Dhawan and Indira Gandhi. The idea was preposterous. I was not unaware of IB surveillance around Indira and her important aides, including R. K. Dhawan. The IB had bugged most of their phones and had planted discreet watchers at 12 Willingdon Crescent, the home and hub of activities of Indira Gandhi. Dhawan's parental home at Atul Grove Lane was under blanket intelligence coverage. His personal residence at 141 Golf Link was also covered by the IB sleuths. In fact, two IB agents were infiltrated amongst the security staff that guarded Indira Gandhi. My face was known to them. I pointed out to my visitor that I was already in trouble and I did not like to jeopardise the safety of my family by jumping into uncertain waters.

My friend pressed me to see Indira and Dhawan. I requested him to allow me to churn over his suggestion. He insisted on visiting me the next night around the same time for a definite answer.

Sunanda and I discussed the unexpected development late into the night and our sleep was further disturbed by a telephonic call from her maternal grandfather, the former minister in Indira's cabinet. He too insisted on my meeting Indira Gandhi.

We finally decided to take the plunge knowing fully well that I was putting my service security on the line and I was about to breach the time-honoured code of conduct. Did I act imprudently under momentary pressure from the HM? I think I did not. The politician in my parental genes and me, still hibernating, had called out loudly to help Indira to take the country out of the Janata mess. It was, I think, an act of messianic madness. Well! Some people are born with two squirrels inside and believe they have a mission. Nothing could be done at that stage of my life to change me.

Next night I was driven in a friend's car to a distant location from where another car picked me up. I was driven straightaway inside the small front lawn of 12 Willingdon Crescent and was ushered into a room where R. K. Dhawan received me. I had met him very briefly after the 1969 visit of Indira Gandhi to Imphal. I did not expect him to remember my face. A witty person as he was Dhawan feigned to have placed me promptly into the correct slot. We settled down over tea and cigarette. After a brief discussion on the overall election scenario he escorted me to a poorly lighted room where Indira was seated in a pensive mood. I did not fail to notice the tear marks on her cheeks. There were wrinkles on her forehead and her eyes betrayed a defeated look.

She started with the acts of witch hunting by the Janata government and asked me if I could help her. Indira's lonely figure and her depressed demeanour touched the chords of my heart. Her request sounded as an act of clutching at a straw by a drowning person. It amounted to a piece of history touching my soul. I was overwhelmed and assured her that if she expected a lowly placed officer like me could help her I was there to help. I did not miss her tearful eyes and did not cynically brush it aside as a part of the theatrics she was alleged to have perfected over the years.

I did not jump into the decision to meet Indira Gandhi with a view to save a damsel in distress. I was no Don Quixote. I did not intend to score points against the imbecile and lame duck PM Charan Singh. The Jat satrap from Uttar Pradesh could by no means emerge as the leader of India. He was not even good enough for the complex state of Uttar Pradesh. I was mostly amused by his tantrums.

I looked around inside the IB organisation and other segments of the government. Most of the senior officers of the IB and the R&AW were aligned with the Janata leaders, political stalwarts from their respective states and caste totems. One of the senior officers of the IB, Thanga Velu Rajeswar, considered close to Indira was shunted out of the IB and he was cooling heels at the Andhra Pradesh Bhawan in Delhi as the Resident Commissioner. He was still in touch with Indira and R. K. Dhawan.

Indira Gandhi had inducted Mr. S. N. Mathur into the IB on recommendations of some Punjab politicians and R. K. Dhawan. But he managed to mend fences with the Janata leaders and survived the onslaught. A few senior officers like K. P. Medhekar, B. R. Kalyanpurkar and R. K. Khandelwal had maintained distance from the feuding political forces but had become suspects in the eyes of the Indira loyalists.

I did not have any equation with the political leaders from West Bengal. I had left the state on the fourth year of my service and I had very little contact with the affairs of the state. Moreover, the Communist leaders were not particularly fond of me, as I had crossed their path as a young Jan Sangh and a Congress activist. I was, by nature and upbringing, against the Indian Communists, and I considered them to be more loyal to the extraneous forces than Indian national interest.

My personal preference was for promoting the political prospects of the Jan Sangh and now the Bharatiya Janata Party. I continued to be drawn to the RSS and I had not been able to overcome my partition day's hatred for the Muslims. I looked around for my RSS friend, who had played a key role

during the JP movement. We met twice but I did not get any positive direction from him. He himself was confused and felt that the existing leadership had not been able to work out any strategy to draw the imagination of the people. My friend finally opined that the grassroots RSS workers would prefer to support Indira instead of the rump Congress headed by Swaran Singh and the socialist brand of perpetually splitting politicians. My friend, an outspoken person, finally concluded that the time was not ripe for the RSS to make a determined bid for power. They would like to wait for a while for the Congress to 'whiter away'.

The prevailing political spectrum and my personal proclivities to get involved in nation-building politics finally got the better of me and I decided to help out Indira Gandhi consciously and deliberately. I did not agree to support her out of any expectation. I was motivated by pure and simple concern for the state of affairs of the country and the rot that had started eating away the social and economic security of the nation. The regional geo-strategic situation and the developments in Afghanistan and Pakistan had also started threatening the internal and external security fabrics of the country. I took the plunge consciously out of a genuine conviction that a chastised Indira should be able to provide a cleaner and stronger government.

However, I discussed with Dhawan my nagging reservations about Sanjay Gandhi. Indira Gandhi was forced to give election tickets to a large number of Sanjay cronies. They would play havoc with the system again. Dhawan explained that Indira had no option but to depend on Sanjay at her moment of political isolation. Rajiv Gandhi was not interested in politics and Sonia Gandhi was busy in managing the affairs of the Gandhi household. Maneka, daughter of a flamboyant mother and brought up in a different social milieu, was busy with her own pursuits and was unable to relate herself to the cultural values of the Nehru-Gandhi family. Indira, Dhawan explained, was aware of the ambitions of Sanjay and she was not going to allow him to run political riot as he did after the Allahabad High Court judgement and after imposition of the emergency. She was no doubt fond of him, but was highly weary of his unscrupulous and unjust way of functioning. Indira, he assured me, was ready to command the boat herself and she had rescued her soul out of the magic black box of Sanjay.

How did she do it? Dhawan had lighted another Dunhill and assured me that I should be able to discover the truth very soon.

We met regularly to exchange notes on the election scenario. Indira Gandhi insisted on having a day-to-day input of the impact of her election campaign and analytical study of all the constituencies. She was keen to know the weaker links and remedial suggestions. It was a tall order. It was not safe to meet her at 12 Willingdon Crescent home. I had declined to see Dhawan at his Golf Link residence too.

However, I did not want to disappoint Indira. It was worked out that Vincent George, a stenographer in the AICC and an assistant to Dhawan and Raghu, another AICC assistant (later Sanjay's temporary assistant), would visit my home in the night, take down dictation and type out the material for presentation to Indira Gandhi first thing in the morning. This routine continued till the day of the polling.

I was not sure if Indira was impressed by the study reports. We had a final assessment meeting three days before the polls. Indira was not inclined to believe that her party would score a decisive majority. She gave a final weary smile and commented that she hadn't come across another chronic optimist like me.

I took it as a compliment. Indira had put everything at stake and she knew that another defeat would mean permanent exit from politics and another round of hate campaign. Her psyche was hovering between hope and despair. She had become highly suspicious in nature and did not trust people

around her. She depended on Sanjay but had started developing positive dislike for Maneka, though she doted on Sanjay's son Varun. She earnestly believed that the evils in Sanjay would be aggravated by the avaricious propensities of his wife and mother in law.

The fear of the return of another vengeful hotchpotch Janata type regime often sent her back to the cocoon of gloomy despair. She had in her the habit of consulting occultists and Dharendra Brahmachari, a sort of yogi. He had started exploiting her susceptibilities by feeding her 'intelligence on threat to her life and the malevolent designs of the cosmic forces.' Another minor *tantrik* from Bihar, somewhat related to the Kalkaji temple, had also started hovering around her. But he was a minor crook and faded away soon after he managed to make a few millions through dubious dealings. Indira was a highly superstitious lady and I witnessed her strange habit of believing in omens. It was easy to exploit her susceptibilities that had arisen out of her personal suffering and those of her mother and her final journey to disillusionment with Firoze Gandhi.

Indira did not suffer from the lack of advisors even in her dark days. The old 'Kashmiri faithfuls' had parted company. But a few new Kashmiri midgets like M. L. Fotedar and Arun Nehru had started replacing the old intellectual giants. These new crops were mere trouble-shooters and fortune hunters. They were as duds as wayside peddlers could be. They were more loyal to Sanjay, but Indira had started lending her ears to them. She was susceptible to rumours and gossips camouflaged as authentic intelligence.

T. V. Rajeswar was steadfastly loyal to her. He supplied her with regular election assessment, especially on the peninsular states. R. N. Kao, the R&AW chief too had maintained discreet ties with her. His private assessments were, I believe, very useful. I was not sure if she liked my input. Though I flaunted the Dhar family name I was not a Kashmiri and my dark skin and Bengali-English hadn't perhaps impressed her.

One night, perhaps about 10 days before the polls, Vincent George came to my home and conveyed that 'madam' wanted to see me urgently. I met her late in the night and was confronted by my own reports about the election forecast that I had supplied. My assessment, which was again rejected by the IB bosses, had indicated that Indira Congress was likely to bag around 320 to 350 seats. I had given, if I recall correctly, a state-wise break up of the seats her party was likely to gain.

She flipped over the pages and looked up at me.

"How are you so sure about the count of seats?"

"I'm not sure ma'am," I replied, "These are based on calculations derived from the field operators. And these calculations include caste and community factors too."

"But I'm told by other sources that I may only get about 200 seats and heavily depend on the Communists and a few regional parties."

"I don't think so. The country wants a change and they want you to lead them again. I think they are opting for you."

A thin smile lighted her face momentarily and she again went back into her cocoon of silence. Dhawan signalled that it was time for me to go. We shifted back to his room and discussed the report seat by seat. My final count was 335 and nothing below it. He too was not very hopeful about the accuracy of my calculations and cautioned me that Indira was in a desperate mood. She might finally breakdown if she lost the election.

"What happens if she succeeds?" I asked.

"We will make you a big man."

"You can't. And I don't want any favour. Only see that Sanjay does not run riot again and derails the country.."

As usual we shared tea and cigarettes and parted with hopes that my report would boost up Indira's moral and she would intensify her election campaign in some of the identified weak constituencies.

The result of the election had gone the way I had calculated. Indira Congress bagged 351 seats and Sanjay too made his entry to the Parliament from Amethi. Indira was sworn in for the fourth time as the prime minister of India.

An invitation card sent over to my home by Dhawan honoured me. It was an emotional moment for me too. Indira again adorned the South Block room and Dhawan occupied his usual place as the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister. Like the majority of the electorate I too hoped that Indira had emerged as a wizened person from the tragedy and trauma of the emergency and she should be an improvement upon the factious and vain Janata leaders.

Indira moved back to her Safdarjung Road home to prepare herself for another chapter of history that was replete with cruel tragedy. She was born as a tragic child, attained her youth through tragic and tormenting circumstances and ended up in somewhat Greek Tragedy style.

SIXTEEN

IN THE FRYING PAN

Nothing splendid has ever been achieved except by those who dared believe that something inside them was superior to circumstances.

Bruce Burton

Indira Gandhi was catapulted by the sorcerers of democracy, as some Janata leaders liked to say, ‘from the dustbin of history’, to the pinnacle of power. The mandate was clear, in absolute black and white; black for the discredited and rejected alternative that the people of India wanted to give themselves and the white again for Indira, the Durga turned demon, they had rejected barely three years ago. The event proved that Indian democracy was maturing and the people were not yet maimed and paralysed by the money and muscle power and they exercised their verdict decisively whenever the crisis-ridden country required them.

Indira, as a link person to India’s independence struggle and the carrier of the genes of a family that made remarkable contribution to the cause of the nation was called upon time and again by her countrymen in the fond hopes that she was the best inheritor of the vision of Indian unity; the vision that was spun by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal, Sardar Patel, Subhash Bose and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee.

She had successfully extricated the country from its political and economic morass and gave it the first taste of warfield victory in 1971. She had undone, albeit in an ironical way, the act of partition that her father and other national leaders were forced to accept when the British escaped from India. The country at large and I, as a minor Indian and a nondescript intelligence operator, hoped that Indira would bring about structural and thematic changes to put India on the path of economic progress, war against poverty, and the struggle for social equality. The fractured India of 1980 needed a healer and not a distant podium fencer.

There were others who earnestly believed that Indira would never again be able to come out from under the evil influence of Sanjay and his goons and the crafty and puny political bureaucrats those had grown as fungus around her, but claimed to be the members of her kitchen cabinet. I had on a couple of occasions discussed this point with Dhawan and a couple of friends in the Congress party. They were mighty disturbed with the emergence of Sanjay as a powerful force in the party and the government and they indirectly expressed that Indira Gandhi too was not unconcerned about this factor. But she was deserted by most of her old Congress colleagues and she was desperately in search of seasoned and stabilising personalities around her. She, a few of them frankly opined, would not like to mortgage her political rein to Sanjay. Rajiv Gandhi did not entertain the idea of lending shoulder to his mother at this critical point of time. However, at home Indira was more dependent on Sonia Gandhi than Maneka. The younger *bahu* (daughter in law) had developed various other interests, which Indira did not approve.

People expected a lot of changes and changes were galore. I do not intend to delve into the wider bureaucratic and political changes that cascaded down the country soon after Indira Gandhi’s fourth coming as the Prime Minister.

The Intelligence Bureau too faced the axe. S.N. Mathur, the amiable and ever smiling Director Intelligence Bureau made way for T. V. Rajeswar, an IPS officer of 1948 vintage from Andhra Pradesh cadre. He was not new to the IB. He had befriended. R. K. Dhawan and he professed loyalty to Indira Gandhi. Rajeswar was the first DIB, many of us felt, with modern outlook and vast understanding of the virtues of 'operational work'. I appreciated his sharp and penetrating approach.

I did not have any opportunity to work with Rajeswar, as I spent my first 10 years of tenure in difficult field stations like Manipur, Nagaland, and Sikkim. I was known for my operational skills but not as a desk decoration piece, which was essential in developing equation with the rising stars and suns in the agency. The DIB is supposed to be the Galactic Core of the IB's stellar system. But a few major planets managed to attract satellites around them, mostly on the basis of regional and linguistic affinities, if not caste commonalities. Many amongst us were expert astronomers, who could precisely calculate the apogee and perigee of the rising and collapsing stars and planets. They adjusted their compass accordingly frog-leaping the barriers of loyalty. They were adept in changing colours more than the chameleons are alleged to be.

I was, in fact, a new commodity in the vast stellar system of IB. Only a few officers knew my name and face. My most amazing encounter was with. Mathur, when I called on him to announce my arrival from Gangtok on transfer. He lapped me up with an indifferent and perplexed look and demanded to know my identity.

My modest identity did not evoke any interest in him. Perhaps he was too preoccupied with the ruins of the Janata government and the uncertain clouds that hovered over his head. Perhaps I was wrong in devoting myself single mindedly to intelligence production and not endearing myself to the eyes and minds of the pillars of the IB. I was wrong in assuming that my work would speak for me. In the bureaucratic jungle of Delhi, I learnt at great cost, rather late in my career, that excellence in work was not an essential accessory for surviving and thriving in the oddest chemical concoction of Indian bureaucracy. Belonging to the right club and having ticket to the right coterie were the greatest manures.

I was an unknown commodity to the new DIB. It was not beyond his knowledge that I had drifted closer to Dhawan and Indira Gandhi. He had the right political linkage from his Congress patrons of Andhra Pradesh and from behind the cover of his insignificant post at the Andhra Bhawan he had continued to assist Indira Gandhi through the Dhawan route. He was immediately rewarded and I must admit that Rajeswar was the correctly tampered intelligence technocrat to lead the organisation, which required revamping and reorientation. As a leader of men he was second to none. He had excellent grip on the macro and micro vistas of the problem areas in the country and he was in possession of the right radar to navigate in the murky waters of fourth reincarnation of Indira Gandhi. In a sense he was the first modern-minded DIB. He had been exposed to the modern techno-gadgets and new formats of operational tactics required to combat insurgency and terrorism. He was the best the crucial period of history could produce from the storehouse of the IB.

Rajeswar did not feel comfortable with me. He was not to blame. In an organisation like the IB, that enjoyed the lack of constitutional accountability, only the top man mattered. His closeness to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister determined the credibility and saleability of the organisation. A mid-ranking officer like me could, under no circumstances, afford to emerge as the alternative eye and ear of the chief executive of the nation. I understood his problem, but I could not auto-declutch from my connectivity with Dhawan and Indira Gandhi. It was a complex connectivity.

I was in no position to seek a transfer out of Delhi. The boys had secured admission in a good school and we hoped that after a strenuous tenure of 10 years in difficult stations we would be

allowed to bring up our children in a big city. Sunanda required a break and the kids too deserved quality education. Sunanda advised me to consult Dhawan. But I resisted the temptation and waited out for my orders. A little joy came in the way when I was promoted to the next rank of Deputy Director and was awarded Police Medal for meritorious service, though it was as routine a decoration.

The crucial question of fitting a square peg like me in a round hole was temporarily solved. Rajeswar called me to his room and told me that he was deputing my services to the Ministry of Finance, as a Director to assist the just constituted Gold Auction Enquiry Committee, headed by K. R. Puri, a former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India. Enquiries revealed that my deputation was co-terminus with the life of the Committee. My future, thereafter, would depend on the whim of the DIB. He might, I feared, revert me back to my state cadre after my tenure with Puri was over. I thought that was the time for me to consult Dhawan but I did not have to. I stood up to Rajeswar and told him that as an earmarked officer I cannot be sent on deputation to a ministry. I had accepted intelligence as the anchor of my career and I intended to hone up my professional capabilities in the fields of counterinsurgency, counter terrorism and counterintelligence fields.

We had a heart to heart talk. He was convinced that I hadn't volunteered to help Indira out of my desire to grab plush postings and earning extra bucks through questionable means. I did, what I had done, out of my conviction that India required a change for the better and Indira was the best bet. Rajeswar understood my point of view and asked me to see Dhawan before I reported to K.R. Puri. I was allowed to continue on the IB's strength and draw my pay and allowances from its acquaintance roll. I think that was the time when I developed some kind of friendship and understanding with Rajeswar that still continue to be very warm. Our friendship did not arise from our so-called common loyalty to Indira.

My meeting with Dhawan at 1 Safdarjung Road office was brief. He broadly hinted that they had great expectations from the Gold Auction Enquiry Committee and the team headed by Puri should find out enough dirt to blacken the faces of Morarji Desai and his son Kanti Bhai.

*

K. R. Puri was one of the nicest souls I had encountered. His Committee was not formed under the established law of the country. It just had an administrative sanction and its reports were only to be submitted to the Finance Minister. As an investigating body the GAEC (pronounced Ga`-e`k) was not endowed with the powers that were enjoyed by the Shah Commission. I was not empowered to summon witnesses, conduct raids, seize material evidence and even interrogate the alleged suspects. I was left with no doubt that Puri Committee was yet another tool of political vendetta and no one at the top were interested to find out the truth about the questionable action of Morarji government to fritter away the country's gold reserve. With that kind of scissor it was not possible even to shear a mere strand of hair of Kanti Bhai. I was not interested either in digging out the skeletons from his cupboard. That was not the essence of democracy. That was simply autocracy given a fashionable garb through the manipulated electoral process.

With this realisation I prepared myself to assist K.R. Puri. The Faridkot House office and the Commission's work did not enthuse me. The job, I felt from day one, should have been entrusted to the CBI which was empowered to carry out investigations into the financial irregularities involved in the auctioning of gold reserve. But the genial personality of Puri and the lively company of Sunil Khatri and S. K. Mishra, two other officers, compensated my boredom. We were able to trace down

the bulk buyers of the auctioned gold in Delhi, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Surat, Baroda and subsequent flow to the bulk jewellery manufacturing markets in Amritsar, Calcutta, Proddattur, and Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh and a couple of other places. Our investigation could confirm the open flow of the gold amounting to 1500 kilograms. The rest of the gold lifted by the bulk buyers had simply evaporated. Some broad hints and fragile linkages indicated that the auctioned gold had found way to a Gulf country. But the committee did not have the instruments to probe those leads.

At that point of time I felt the necessity of a serving uniformed police officer to assist me in field investigation. Puri was prompt in writing to P. S. Bhinder, Delhi's Commissioner of Police, and a known Sanjay Gandhi acolyte. My experiences with the police forces were limited to my Darjeeling days and later day operational association in the North East. I never imagined that Bhinder would drag his feet on a minor request. He was busy with bigger tasks and responsibilities and old friend Sanjay was still around. His wife too was preparing to launch her political career from Punjab.

After about a month's prodding I was accosted by a tall and burly Jat police inspector at my Faridkot House office. His salute was smart and his demeanour not too polite. I made him to take a seat and started explaining the task ahead.

He did not have patience for my laborious unfolding of the complicated linkages between the bulk and the retail buyers and the jewellery manufacturers.

"*Saab*," He stopped me in between, "Have I done anything wrong to you?"

"No. Why should you? In fact I have seen you for the first time today."

I replied.

The burly Jat followed by unfastening his bag of woes. He had just managed a posting at a coveted police station in central Delhi after defraying an awesome expenditure of Rupees 500,000. He got it because he was the highest bidder. His collections were yet to equal the expenditure incurred by him.

"You tell me sir," he concluded by asking a potent question "Is it fair to drag me out of that police station at this stage? Should I not earn at least an additional 1500, 000?"

"What for?"

"Some I would keep for the rainy days and some would go for bagging my next promotion and an equally good posting. Excuse me sir," he finally stood up, "You're not a real policeman and you won't know these things. But please write me off."

He presented me another smart salute and a broad grin and left.

I appraised Puri of my encounter with the police officer and decided to carry out the job between S. K. Mishra and myself. My report was ready by April and my findings did not match up to the expectation of the persons who had entrusted me with the job. It was a jinxed enquiry. A cabinet minister from West Bengal and his special assistant, an IAS officer, and one of their Bombay based industrialist friends had brought upon pressure on Puri and me not to push the matter too far. I couldn't even if I wanted to. The committee had the right to sniff around and formulate some broad findings but it was not legally empowered to dig deep into the sordid affair.

I requested K R. Puri, after the final report was submitted, to release me for my duties in the IB. I was apprehensive of the fallout of the 'sham job' that I had done. But Puri appreciated the report and told me very frankly that he was pleased with his other job of Chairman of the Public Enterprises Selection Committee. He would, he said, continue to function from Faridkot House. He graciously offered me the job of a vigilance director in one of the leading public sector undertakings in Bombay. I politely declined the offer and reported back to Rajeswar for the next assignment.

Rajeswar did not waste time in slinging me over to the slot of Deputy Director in charge of foreigner's affairs, which looked after immigration control and interpreted and devised policy matters in respect of the foreigners visiting India as tourists, research scholars, students and even as investors.

Those were the days of the CIA ghosts lurking in every nook and corner of the psyche of the scared politicians. The Cold War fumes and special treaty relations had tinged India with the Russian rouge and we were told to be scared of the CIA ghost that still tilted towards Pakistan and harboured the nefarious design of destabilising India. My task, therefore, had assumed certain unnecessary paraphernalia and I was given to understand that I should wield the baton strictly and guard very carefully all the doors and windows of the country that were prone to violation by the demonic foreigners. I did my job rather faithfully and had even started believing that the CIA was only a few steps away from breaking the country into pieces. I was, as a student of current geo-political history, was aware of the roles being played by the CIA and other intelligence agencies of the 'free world' in collaboration with the Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan in Afghanistan and inside some of the Central Asian Republics of the Soviet Union.

In fact, in my spare time I had prepared a small monograph on the likely spill over of the Afghan jihad to Indian Kashmir and its likely effects on the Indian Muslim psyche. The process of Islamisation in Pakistan and the growth of jihadist forces did not augur well for India. The Islamised Army, ISI and freelance mujahedins were sure to pay attention to Indian Muslims and disaffected ethnic groups. The note had also mentioned about the role of Al Qaeda outfit of the Saudi millionaire bin Laden. The CIA and the ISI, I suggested would like to strike in the North East and Punjab and Kashmir. My mention of Punjab was, in a way, prophetic. I was following the emerging bonhomie between the Pakistani dictator and some members of the Sikh Diaspora and their linkages with certain leaders of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) and a few well-identified fanatic religious figures. I have reasons to believe that Rajeswar had gone through the report. But, at that point of time, we in the Intelligence Bureau were not properly geared to track, identify and neutralise the ISI operations in India. IB's preparations were childish and the senior operators were limited by their myopic attitude from strengthening the counter and forward intelligence capabilities in important field formations in Assam, Punjab and Kashmir.

Most of the officers were contented with routine collation of information and preparing occasional status paper. These static studies were good enough for record building, but were not good enough to grapple with the gathering clouds in Punjab and Kashmir. The Pakistan counterintelligence unit did not simply have any spread to the territorial SIBs and the field units were not armed with the mandate and wherewithal to locate, investigate and neutralise Pakistan's penetration into the vital sectors in India. The ignorance was blissful but laden with devastating explosives. It was impossible to engage the top echelon of the IB to this emerging danger that grew out of Pakistan's reoriented India policy. Moreover, I was intruding into the domains of officers who were elaborately seasoned with several embellishments. They were simply more 'powerful' than I was.

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My stint with the foreigner's desk was short lived.

I was asked to take over the important desk of counter-intelligence that looked after the intelligence operations of the Soviet Union and its satellite countries in India. It was a daunting task

and I was foxed by the sudden change. I had more or less successfully sealed up all the crevices and cracks to deter the evil foreigners entering India through recognised and unrecognised routes. I had tried to venture into the sacred territory of legal and illegal Pakistani and Bangladeshi traffic into India. A note prepared by me was circulated to the concerned desk officers and they came down heavily on me for intruding into their exclusive territories. They were of the considered opinion that their flanks were stronger enough to save India from the evil designs of Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Intelligence Bureau had not developed a system of informal brainstorming and threat evaluation through open-house discussion. The desk chiefs were the master chefs who catered to the ears and eyes of the boss and the government. The IB functioned in close compartments (the practice is still on, for obvious reasons) and the concept of restrictive security was implemented to the dizzy limit of prohibiting flow of free ideas.

However, my posting to the weighty USSR counter-intelligence desk surprised a few other stalwarts of the IB and ruffled a few decorated plumes. The US and USSR desks were headed by fairly senior officers and an officer of my seniority was normally assigned to the analysis desks, preparing daily summary of information, a rather mundane affair and drafting unofficial reports (UO reports, not really unofficial) for different consumers in the government. Most of these reports were polished and brushed up again and again by the links above for dotting the 'I's and cutting the 'T's and off course rendering the language as unintelligible as possible.

My appointment to the USSR counterintelligence desk, as I said, had evoked surprise and concern in some quarters. One of the senior officers, who boasted to be the last word on national and international communism summoned and grilled me for over an hour to prove that I had forced out a very competent officer by pulling some strings somewhere. He could not find any hole in my understanding of the KGB and GRU operations in India and the intelligence organisations of some of its satellite countries. On the other hand I pointed out to him that the USSR had got bogged down in its Vietnam, in Afghanistan, and its internal political stresses and strains and economic disaster were likely to destroy the edifices of the communist empire. The Vietnam debacle had, for the time being, had tantalisingly limited the American expansion in the Far East and South East Asia. The Afghanistan debacle would not only give a fresh lease of life to American ascendance in the region, it would also signify the beginning of the end of Iron Curtain regime.

He agreed with me grudgingly and advised me that by replacing my predecessor, a powerful *saryupari* (hailing from near the River Saryu, connected with the mythological birth place Lord Rama) Brahmin from Uttar Pradesh, I had created powerful enemies. This was a pregnant advice. I did not ask for the change.

A serious stock taking of the human assets and technical operations, besides mobile surveillance, shocked me beyond comprehension. The high profile unit did not achieve any penetration either in the core area or in the periphery of the target mission's intelligence operatives. A few journalists having the licence to attend diplomatic parties and a few drivers and watchmen were the only intelligence assets. It was not even funny to dare covering the deep penetration by the KGB, GRU and their sister organisations operating from the diplomatic missions of the client countries.

The controlling officer was apprised of the ground situation and suggested an aggressive approach for targeting identified and suspected intelligence operatives of the Soviet Block and their live Indian 'talents' amongst the Communist parties and their front organisations. The project was approved with an unlimited secret service fund allocation. I had the satisfaction of locating and hooking at least four human assets, one from a satellite mission and three from the Indian communist targets.

The developments in Afghanistan had brought the steams of the Cold War to India's doorsteps. The

KGB, besides operating from Afghan soil, had targeted the Afghan refugees in India. A few Afghan high officials loyal to the former king and Pushtun leaders having linkages with Pakistan and US backed mujahedins had walked into the KGB network. Delhi had emerged as an important operational base of the Soviet intelligence that intended to outflank the ISI and the CIA.

I was discouraged from penetrating the KGB network on the plea that it was not compatible with the diplomatic initiative of India in Afghanistan. I had no expertise in Afghan affairs but I tried to fend off the Foreign Office experts with the argument that we had a duty to know the activities of the KGB in India. India's Afghan policy, I felt, was lopsided and it required realignment in the light of the popular sentiment of the Afghan people. Supporting the Soviet backed regime and ignoring the aspirations of the people of Afghanistan could be counter productive. I also pointed out that the Afghans were fighting in the name of Islam and the Indian Muslims supported them. Blind backing of the communist regime in Kabul could alienate the Indian Muslims and give opportunity to the ISI and the CIA to incite troubles in Kashmir and other strong Muslim pockets. India should not be seen, I had argued, as an enemy of the Islamist resistance in Afghanistan. I was silenced by a homily on the 'imperative needs' of diplomatic support to the Afghan regime. The intelligence machine had no reach in that prohibited territory.

The Indian communists never excited my political and social instincts. For reasons right or wrong I considered them as extensions of the Soviet and the Chinese interests in India. Very few of them were fired by the ideological fervour of the Bolshevik revolution and hardly believed in the socio-economic dynamics preached by Marx and Angles. They did precious little to unify the Indian society and fight against caste system and blind minority-ism. They were too timid to go for armed rebellion and too bourgeoisie to break the socio-economic taboos India suffered from. The Indian communists were no proletariats; they exploited the slogans of the proletariats to fatten their own pockets. Some of them indeed were committed to the ideals of Communism but most of them were the later day B team of the Congress, reinvented by Indira Gandhi.

My painstaking research and intelligence penetration had succeeded in identifying over four Union ministers and over two dozen members of the Parliament who were in the payrolls of the KGB operatives. Some of them are still around. One of them, a journalist of sort, is now on the payrolls of a Bombay based tycoon. He masquerades as an evergreen 'troubleshooter', a Pakistan expert and an *avatar* of track II diplomacy. For obvious reasons I would not like to name them. So much so with a celebrated communist!

But the most surprising area of penetration of the KGB was the Ministry of Defence and those layers of the Armed Forces, which were responsible for procurement of military hardware. My list of these galactic stars did not amuse the bosses and I was advised to 'secure those information' in my archive. No one at the top had the gumption of illuminating the government with the identity of the Soviet targets.

The vast sweep of Soviet penetration had surprised and shocked me. A study of Left controlled publications of newspapers and periodicals indicated that the main parties and front organisations received considerable subsidies from the Soviet embassy. Several writers, poets and artists were on their payrolls. Over a dozen of them were on regular visit to the Soviet Block countries for fraternal meetings, education, and treatments. The roster was so long that it became well nigh impossible to keep surveillance on all of them. The most interesting case was that of a member of parliament, who regularly received a pay packet from the Soviet embassy for covering certain segments of the kitchen cabinet of Indira Gandhi. In fact, the Soviets had succeeded in considerably influencing a large number of educationists, literatures, artists and opinion makers.

My activities had attracted the attention of a left affiliated Muslim intellectual, who claimed to be a historian and an expert in diplomatic skills. He approached me through a common friend of the university campus and wanted me to meet a diplomat of the Soviet embassy. His temerity surprised and shocked me. I declined the offer and kept my superior informed. This intellectual historian and expert in diplomacy had succeeded in cultivating certain members of the coterie around Indira Gandhi. He considered himself as an architect of India's pro-Soviet Afghan policy. He had managed to gather around him a few Pushtun expatriates and peddled that 'achievement' as India's vanguard amongst the Pakistani and Afghan Pushtuns. Indeed his blind faith in the rouble had blinded him to the realities of tribal politics in Afghanistan and the pioneering role played by a towering Pushtun to demand integration of the Pushtun dominated areas of present Pakistan with India.

However, my tryst with Soviet counter-intelligence unit was short lived. I had started trampling over too many powerful toes and focusing the arc lamp on a grey area that was dear to the communists as well as to some factions of the ruling party. Deeper penetration of the forces won over by the Soviet Block by an intelligence agency had irked a number of important secular and democratic opinion makers.

For reasons unknown to me I was directed to take up the reins of the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau, Delhi. I was not sure what had hit me and I could not determine if I should celebrate my assumed 'elevation' to one of the lever-pedals of the Director, Intelligence Bureau. Much later I was told that the Prime Minister's office had desired my posting to the position that was supposed to carry out some of the 'dirty jobs' of the power centre.

SEVENTEEN

GRILLED IN OPEN FIRE

A man's faults are the faults of his time while his virtues are his own.

J.W. von Goethe.

My posting to SIB Delhi did not evoke any sense of achievement. A live fish cannot smile through its contorted lips when the chef takes it out of the aquarium and puts it on a blazing grill. I knew for sure that troubled times were ahead of me. The silhouette of fire was not too distant.

The Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau unit in Delhi has earned the dubious characteristic of being one of the handy tools, which are used for non-specific and broad-spectrum field intelligence jobs. The nature of the job varied on the immediate requirement of the prime consumers of the DIB. The variations swung erratically like an off the pinion pendulum. Some day it meant enquiries and surveillance operations against Indira Gandhi and her family members and at other times the orders were specific to targets like Maneka Gandhi, Morarji Desai and I. K. Gujral. It was difficult to specify the job. Tasks were assigned mostly on phone and in personal briefing and very little time was conceded to produce the finished product. The mad rush was necessitated by the tendency of the Indian rulers to ask for the moon and expect it to be delivered with Pacific oyster sauce in a couple of hours. It was and continues to be an errand boy's job. Very little of classical intelligence practices are built in the very utilitarian structure of this office.

So, I was there at the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau office in Delhi, inheriting the coveted chair from H. N. Bhargava, who was pushed out because of his alleged closeness to some of the Janata Party leaders and his alleged prejudicial activities against Indira Gandhi. I did not inherit any human and operational assets from him. The only 'friend' to whom I was introduced by Bhargava was S. K. Jain who had earned later day notoriety as the architect of 'Jain Hawala Scam'. I could not develop a steady professional friendship with him. On a very delicate issue he wanted me to carry a briefcase to one of the Congress leaders from Bihar, who claimed proximity to Indira Gandhi. I was offered a tidy sum of Rupees 10,000 for the job. I was appalled by his audacity and was not left with any doubt that he had used some of his IB acquaintances for such noble purposes. I declined the offer and there ended my relationship with him. He did not chase me either. I was not privileged enough to attract attention from deep sea sharks like him.

I was left with no illusion that my induction to the field unit was more of a noose around my neck. I excelled in fieldwork but I was new to the complex and labyrinthine political and bureaucratic abattoir, where either the wildest or the dumbest could survive. I was neither.

My brush with R. K. Dhawan and Indira Gandhi did not buy me ticket to the elite club of conspirators, manipulators and briefcase carriers. I had remained where I were, a minor intelligence operator who was yet to be initiated to the magic world of under the sleeve kirsch, dentured smile and ruthless manipulation. I did not deserve the job. But I was there.

The first task assigned to me was to rummage through the old records of the SIB and to locate all papers related to Indira Gandhi and her family members originated during the Janata Party government. It took me seven days to wade through the muck and discover a couple of sensitive

reports on Indira, Sanjay and Maneka, which did not portray them in delightful light.

Some papers hinted at the vaults of trusted persons with whom Sanjay's ill-gotten wealth was secreted. A few of these papers threw amusing lights on Maneka, her mother Amteshwar and sister Ambika. They were stars by their own right, but such stars twinkled only in the hi-fi parlours.

A bunch of papers related to Sanjay Gandhi's alleged amorous relationship with a glamorous Muslim lady and a sort of Punjabi beauty, who later gained prominence as a Congress leader. It is difficult to say if these reports were based on facts or were fabricated to malign the second son of the PM.

The papers were removed from the files and were hand delivered to the appropriate authority in a sealed cover. I had no right to ask about the destiny and destination of these records. I had no option but to literally accept the eternal fatalistic advice tendered by an ancient illustrious son of Dwarka on the sea, to the third son of king Pandu, who aspired to win back a kingdom on the Jamuna—never expect the fruit of your labour.

I would better not breach the concept of confidentiality about the documents but one of these papers had queerly indicated about likely access of Sanjay to some papers related to Indira's personal life. It also mentioned about a query from a minister in the Janata government and expression of inability of the originator of the communication to retrieve the highly prized document. He was of the opinion that Sanjay's wife might have had secured it in a place other than her mother's house.

It's not that the thought of Sanjay's hypnotic hold on Indira did not flash through my mind and I did not try to rationalise the likely causes. But who I was to wreck my head on the alleged 'souring relationship' between a mother and a son and the intrusion of a 'bahu' in Indira's life, of whom she thought very little about? Unfortunately I was tasked a little later to dig out those very papers. That was another disastrous episode I would like to discuss in details.

The new job required my personal attention for about 18 hours a day. I was supposed to produce, like the genie of the lamp, whatever was demanded by the DIB and often by the ever smiling and smoking SA to the PM, R.K. Dhawan. My office was supposed to function as the personal special branch of the DIB and the PMH and PMO.

I must share with the readers that my induction to the SIB and my supposed proximity to the DIB and certain personalities in the PMH/PMO had started shedding some extra gloss on my presumed bigger than life status. I suddenly found that I was a much sought after person in the social circuit and many a top bureaucrat and ruling party leaders seeking me out and paying attention to me. It's not that they did not try to pay 'something else' to me wrapped in neat not too lean packets. I hadn't yet qualified for brief cases. But I disappointed my well wishers by refusing to accept the packets. I had no illusion that my today wasn't a reality. My tomorrows were more important. I was doing what any other officer would do in the given situation and that was an important ingredient of 'heroism'. I was never a 'party creature, expert in holding glasses and Sunanda too was not 'hi' type to bask in the flash light of the glitterati of the mirage called Delhi's parlour and five star lobby society. I have no doubt we had disappointed many hungry snouts, which wanted to use me for attaching themselves to the capillaries and the arteries of the providers of the day.

I must share a funny incident. My course mate in the IAS called me up with an affectionate voice and asked me over for a cup of tea at his office, which was attached to a minister. I was surprised by the cool call. Hailing from a nondescript Bengali refugee family I might have had entered into the hallowed portals of Indian bureaucracy but I was not 'aristocratic and flashy' enough to join the club of my colleagues who carried better money-serum and social position. I was not an 'in thing'.

However, I was profusely entertained over coffee and cakes in the glossy room. I was informed

that the honourable minister wanted to see me. It's not that I had not known that minister. He was elected to the West Bengal legislative assembly once and thereafter did not dare to fire-walk the real test of democracy: facing and winning a popular mandate.

The reception was effusive and affectionate complaints were many. Married to a granddaughter of Dr. Triguna Sen, he said, I should have kept up the contact with him. I was not overwhelmed. I knew he did not mean what he said.

His request was simple. Could I help him by agreeing to meet an industrialist from Bombay? Why not? I had no difficulty in meeting anybody. That was a part of my job.

The minister rang up someone and told me that I should see the industrialist in a hotel suit at Taj Mansingh. The meeting took place the same day. The radiant eyes and broad smiles of the industrialist and the smooth hospitality impressed me. He was surprised to know that I was not a connoisseur of the golden liquid.

"I want a small help."

"No problem if does not infringe my charter of work."

"I know you're close to Pandekar (name changed), the Customs Collector in Bombay. I want some help from him."

"That's no problem. The minister can call and tell him."

"That's not possible. Please help me by arranging a meeting with him."

I was not unaware of the background for this minor request. I had befriended Pandekar during my short tenure with the Puri Committee. My impression about his honesty and straightforwardness had modified my opinion about colours with which the officers of this service are painted. He was fond of film; especially film making and I took the opportunity to witness the shooting of a film at the RK studio.

I did not find it easy to convince Pandekar to meet the industrialist. He had a long story to tell about serious malfeasance involved in the import of certain machineries by the industrialist. He, however, agreed to see the dynamo of Indian industry. The matter, I was told, was sorted out by intervention from the 'higher authorities' sometime in the first week of June 1980. In any case my friendship with Pandekar did not snap, and I gained the friendship of a person who was destined to pierce the pockets and souls of the political creatures and bureaucrats and reach the pinnacle of success in the field of Industry. The new acquaintance was Dhirubhai Hirubhai Ambani. The circumstances in which we met did not leave a good taste. But I had rediscovered this man more meaningfully in early 1993.

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Around that time, little before the fateful June 23, I was directed to gather information on two sensitive aspects. One related to the emergence of a 'parallel PMH/PMO' at number 1 Akbar Road other than the office attached to number 1 Safdarjung Road where Dhawan conducted the orchestra. The discreet study indicated emergence of a new powerbase, which was opposed to Dhawan and which favoured a coterie around Sanjay Gandhi. M.L. Fotedar had emerged as a powerful figure in that coterie. They made deliberate efforts to undercut Dhawan.

Dhawan had never failed to proclaim his unflinching loyalty to the 'Family'. He was fiercely loyal to Indira Gandhi. But very many members of the 'Family' did not trust him. Dhawan should be understood in proper perspective of his position in Indira's personal and official lives and roles played by such 'personal assistants' all over the world. Uncharitable descriptions that he was a

‘doormat of the Nehru Gandhi family’ should be discounted as a piece of aspersion. He was no doormat. He acted as a useful prop to Indira in her good and bad days. Dhawan wasn’t the odd man out to be loyal to the ‘Family’. He had the courage to declare so. There is no dearth of ‘durbar loyalists’ in Delhi. They remain ‘loyal’ to the durbar, whosoever may happen to don the durbar crown. Dhawan was loyal to the persona of Indira Gandhi, not to her crown. Therein lay the difference between him and other ‘durbar loyalists’.

As I was saying, a parallel powerhouse was coming up at the Akbar Road annexe. For a short while Jagdish Tytler presided over the nascent coterie. Kamal Nath often overshadowed him. Arun Nehru and pilot Satish Sharma too hovered around, but the corpulent Nehru and the other pilot with shifting grey eyes were not trusted by Sanjay.

Indira was, in fact, surrounded by the brawny elements loyal to Sanjay and putative politicians who had very little expertise in running the affairs of a complicated country, especially in the concluding decades of the 20th century. They belonged to the Jurassic past and brought in their wake the added values of muscle, crime and thuggery on which Indira had very little control. I was often pained to see her relying on these thugs than on saner elements who still believed that India could be managed in better democratic manner.

I had no way to know if my studies on the power struggle inside the PMH/PMO had pleased the authority. But the findings were startling.

Fotedar did not like my face and surname. He wondered how a dark-skin Bengali dared to steal the Kashmiri pundit surname of Dhar! Only once I tried to explain to him that we derived our surname from a town called Dhar in Madhya Pradesh. Our ancestors Dharkars had migrated to a small place called Dhar in Punjab, bordering Himachal Pradesh and later to Bengal. The original family name Dharkar was shortened to Dhar. Fotedar tossed the genealogical explanation out like he was fond of tossing out cigarette ash held in between his fingers.

A perception had started developing that Indira was on the verge of dumping Dhawan and the new blue-eyed boy of Sanjay, V.S. Tripathy (an IAS officer) was likely to take over.

I had first encountered Tripathy at the Willingdon Crescent office of Dhawan, where he used to regularly carry certain files. He did not take time to earn the confidence of Sanjay and Fotedar. Dhawan too committed a tactical mistake by helping him to reach the portals of the PM Office. It was a wrong choice. The Brahmin from Uttar Pradesh had the ubiquitous reputation of using his acquaintances as stepping-stones to higher slots. The two had developed inimical relations soon after the accidental death of Sanjay.

My assessment was that Indira Gandhi had not lost faith in Dhawan proved right. She was allowing a new power centre to grow up for Sanjay. The young leader of the nation did require lieutenants loyal to him and those who understood his philosophy of running the affairs of the state. Sanjay was on the verge of fashioning the India that he aspired to inherit from his mother in a different way, not very different from the emergency experiments. With the support of more than 160 committed Parliamentarians he could inherit India even before Indira anointed him.

Indira had another reason to build up a parallel reflector. She admired Dhawan’s loyalty and continued to use him deftly. But she suffered from an acute sense of loneliness. Intrinsically she did not trust many people around her. And like the durbar empress she believed in compartmentalising the channels through which her dictates flowed. She always used multi-channel dispensers and gatherers. Dhawan happened to be one of the channels and he had no other identity beyond the shadows of Indira Gandhi.

Dhawan’s alleged collaboration with Sanjay during the emergency days was not sustainable. He,

like Indira herself, was sustaining his own existence and advancing his own interests by carrying out Sanjay's orders. A postman should not be blamed for a letter that carries bad news. Most of us believed that Sanjay was a bad news for the country and Dhawan often carried the bad news to the political and bureaucratic operators.

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A bad news he could have been, but I for one did not like him to go the way he went down with the Pitts S-2A aircraft along with Captain Saxena on June 23, 1980. A mother had lost her dear son and political heir; a young woman had lost her husband and a child his father.

It should be around 8.10 or 8.15 a.m. that I received a call from my bankrupt South Indian industrialist friend who claimed closeness to the PMH.

“Have you heard the news?”

“Which one? Who slept with whom last night?”

“Don't joke. She has got him killed.”

“Who has killed whom, be clear.”

“Indira has got rid of Sanjay. He has just crashed along with the brand new aircraft of Dhirendra Brahmachari.”

“How do you say that? A mother cannot do that to her son.”

“It's Delhi dear,” The fiend told in a light voice, “The durbars thrive and perish on intrigues. He had become a white albatross around her neck.”

“Don't be silly.”

I did not have the time to reflect on the allegations made by an apparent and frustrated friend of Indira. I called up the Director to share what I had just heard and rushed to the spot of the accident. I reached there around 8.30. Indira Gandhi and Dhawan and a few more political figures were already there. I happened to see the grieving mother from a close range, as close as a couple of feet, looking intently at her son's dead body placed in a truck. Her face was covered with her palms and I could see tear drops rolling down her ashen cheeks.

I received instructions over the VHF hand set to follow the dead body and Indira to Lohia hospital. In the meantime I had managed to deploy my men at the site of the accident, 1 Safdarjung Road, Lohia hospital and the place where Brahmachari resided. I was no aviation expert. But I managed to get hold of a person at the Safdarjung airport to collect details on the aircraft and the precise details of Sanjay's activities before he took off for the last thrilling flight. I was given to understand that Sanjay had not allowed sufficient time to the ground staff for routine technical check up. He loved the new bird and was in a hurry to have little thrilling exercises.

The field staff informed me that Indira and Dhawan had revisited the debris of the plane after Sanjay's body was brought back to the Safdarjung residence. She assisted by Dhawan had rummaged through some of the debris. They were there for about 20 minutes. My interpretation of the second visit was that the mother in Indira was magnetically attracted to the site where her dear son had crashed. But the aforesaid friend close to the PMH did not agree, like many other Indira and Sanjay watchers. Sanjay had won an election but the common people did not trust him.

“How are you sir?”

The know-all friend again called.

“I presume I'm okay. Why don't you drop in for coffee?”

“I'd be delighted.”

He came to my office and behind the closed doors he sipped coffee and tried to give a tour of the alleged cupboard skeletons of the Gandhi family.

“You’re too naive a person Dhar,” the so-called Gandhi-Nehru family friend declared pompously, “Sanjay was no Indian Oedipus. But he had access to the unpublished controversial chapters of M.O. Mathai’s book.”

“But why should he use it against his mother? A son wouldn’t like his mother to be scandalised.”

“Normally not. But we’re not talking of a normal person. Sanjay did inherit a few good qualities of his father, a lot of his bad qualities too.”

“Dear friend,” I dismissed the friend, “your story is good for some of the famous parlours of Delhi. It does not fit into the mosaic of an intelligence operator. I am programmed to get at the truth.”

“Gossip spins out of truth when the truth can not be directly seen. It’s something like the midday sunlight. You can’t afford to look at the truth, that is the sun, but you know from the gossip of the sun, I mean its heat and energy that it’s there.”

“Thanks for the valuable philosophical rendering of a very complicated matter. But don’t expect me to report it to my bosses.”

“It’s your goose. Cook it with any seasoning you like. But the documents are with Maneka now. Another cosmological event, the forthcoming solar eclipse in the Gandhi family would prove that the sun is surely there.”

“What the hell you mean?”

“Watch out the *bahus* (daughter in laws) and the big bang of annihilation and not creation.”

The towering Tamil Brahmin stood up and smiled back at me.

“You intelligence people don’t know anything about what goes on in that power house, the mind of Indira. You follow events. I follow the aroma of her character. I’ve seen Maneka’s family more closely than her father had seen. I’ve been a long time watcher of the Gandhi family. That’s how I made my millions once upon a time and that’s how I lost them.”

I failed to interpret the mysterious smile on his face. But I did not discount the fact that this man was, unlike other gossip mongering glitterati of Delhi had deep access into the family of Maneka and had uninterrupted access to the household of Indira Gandhi. Left to myself I would have not dared to investigate the matter. I have never been a cowardly person but courage is often limited by discretion, an apt English word that broadly means, save your ass. That’s what I intended to do.

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A lot has been written on Indira’s wonderful shock absorbing capability that she displayed after the calamitous accidental death of Sanjay. A son so dear to her and her heir apparent had died and yet she was ready to see some of the important government files on the 26th of June and was back in office on the 27th. Indira had displayed extreme courage to live and function beyond the apocalyptic events.

I had chanced to see her for a few moments when she graciously disengaged herself from the swarming relatives and family friends and walked down to the corridor where I waited behind Nathu, her personal valet. Her face hadn’t lighted up with the usual smile and her eyelids were laden with tear particles. I simply greeted her silently which she returned with a sad twist of her lips, which was not a smile. Perhaps it was a mother’s expression of her infinite loss. It was a mother’s loss and only a mother could appreciate the void Indira suffered from.

Sanjay’s death did bring around appreciable attitudinal changes in Indira. The elder *bahu* had endeared herself to her mother in law not for calculated strategic reason. I had no difficulty in forming

an opinion that Sonia Gandhi had identified herself with the Gandhi family and she was an honest wife and mother, who did not like the political dusts and dins that Sanjay preferred more than love and worship. Some informed sources claimed that she nursed not so mute disdain for the ways Sanjay and Maneka conducted themselves. Sonia had taken up the burden of household work and the personal affairs of Indira when she was forced out of 1 Safdarjung Road accommodation and was obliged to shift to 12 Wellington Crescent home of Mohammad Yunus. Sonia was fond of her private life with her husband and children and a few friends that Rajiv and she had gathered around them. Like most Italians she liked her privacy and close group of friends.

Indira's growing dependence on Sonia was clearly perceivable. The smiling presence of Sonia and her kids immensely relieved her emotional stresses. Rajiv Gandhi too stood like supportive granite by the side of his mother. However, he maintained scrupulous distance from the marauding political hyenas that were keen to see the lamb jumping into the political abattoir.

The other person who was perceived to have nudged closer to Indira was Dharendra Brahmachari. His closeness to Indira has been profusely commented upon by many, some based on ill information and some out of malice. Indira was a vibrant human being. She had chosen her love and married him, though it wasn't a roaring success. The Indira, who was physically born out of the wedlock between Jawaharlal and Kamala, had defeated the Indira of simple flesh and blood. She was the spiritual inheritor of Jawaharlal and she was a product of the struggle of the Indian people for independence to which her family had an umbilical bondage. The Nehru family has been accused of dynastic ambitions. We must remember that the Nehrus were a product of the Indian ambience and to an Indian dynasty is as sacrosanct as his God is. Like most Indians Indira was matured in the juice of feudalism. She sincerely believed that she had a role to play in shaping the destiny of the country. She did not consider herself another Joan de Arch, but her faith in the field of unity between the Indian people and her family was rather fatalistic.

She was a modern and sophisticated person. But she was immersed too in the mumbo jumbo of superstition, *tantrik* rituals and fatalistic attitude towards *karma*. Her faith in such ritualistic religious behaviour had almost merged with her inner spiritual strength after Sanjay's death. Dharendra Brahmachari and other charlatans who were out to earn quick bucks by advertising their proximity to the seat of power exploited that shadowy corner of Indira's psyche. Such proclivities of Indira are exemplified by the following incident.

To my amazement I was instructed to enquire if a particular minister in Indira's cabinet was holding a *mahamaran yagna* (black ritual to seek destruction of enemy) at the banks of Jamuna off Nigambodh funeral ground. I did not entrust the enquiry to any junior staff and took it upon myself to loiter in the funeral ground for at least two days to verify the information. The particular minister had visited the crematorium to attend the funeral of a relative, but not for performing a *yagna*.

On the third night I returned home after inhaling a lot of putrid fumes, smoke and ash and told Sunanda that I should seek a transfer out of the SIB. Gathering intelligence and performing a couple of dirty tricks for the sake of the profession was one thing and chasing ghosts and goblins was another ball game. She counselled me over a nicely cooked dinner and told me to go down to the PMH and unburden my anguish by telling the truth.

My findings did not satisfy one of the aides to Indira Gandhi (not Dhawan). He claimed that the information from Brahmachari was impeccable and reliable. I pointed out that reality should exist on the grounds and not in the imagination of an individual.

That was not the end of my travails. I was summoned to the high-sounding yoga school of Brahmachari and was grilled for over thirty minutes.

“Did he not visit the *ghat* (cremation ground) on that day?”

“Yes he did.”

“Was there no *yagna*?”

“No. He had gone down to the Jamuna waters to immerse the ashes of his relative.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“Then go and brief Dhawan. He would inform the PM.”

On another occasion I was directed to investigate a so called *sadhu* (holy person) who had started building a temple at Chhattarpur, not far from the farmhouse where Rajiv was building a home on a piece of land purchased by his father Feroze Gandhi. The *sadhu* was allegedly involved in some esoteric exercise to invoke the evil spirits to destroy Indira. That *sadhu*, as I knew, was close to Sanjay. He claimed that he often functioned as the conduit of the younger son of Indira for collecting ‘funds’. I have no comment to make on this. The personalities involved are no more on this earth, including a member of the IAS, who bitterly opposed Dhawan after he climbed the stairs of the PMO simply stepping on the back of the gritty Punjabi from Jhang.

The *sadhu* fortunately spoke my lingo too, Bengali. It was not a problem for Sunanda and me to strike friendship with him. He had not yet gained the superlative holy status, but his alleged closeness to Sanjay coterie had already added a few shades of ‘greatness’ around him. He too turned out to be a very earthly *sadhu* who was busier with affairs other than spiritual. The majestic temple now stands witness to his entrepreneurial ability.

I have narrated these two incidents to show that it was not difficult to have access, albeit temporarily, to Indira’s closer circle if one could manage the correct stairs and had in store abundant jinns and goblins and of course seemingly believable gossip. Indira, despite her brave countenance, was a scared person. She was scared from her childhood. Her brave armour often developed leaks, which was exploited by the charlatans. The brave lady had always carried under her medulla the prejudices of Bazaar Sitaram and Anand Bhawan. That way she was a real Joan de Arc. She was brave, she had a flair for martyrdom but she was a true Indian, not above the *sanskar* of her soil. Dharendra Brahmachari wasn’t the lone walker in this path of treacherous exploitation. There were other ‘holy men’ too, who were on the prowl to exploit her susceptibilities.

I cannot resist describing another funny incident in this connection.

Delhi’s grapevine wasn’t unaware about my perceived closeness to R.K. Dhawan and Indira Gandhi. Right or wrong, my visibility in the PMH and PMO was regular. I was often directed to visit that place late in the night, when the high and mighty of India lined up before Dhawan’s door and waited for Nathu or some other domestic to arrange a minute’s meeting with the Prime Minister. I often noticed the domestics pocketing gratuitous rewards from the beaming barons of industry and commerce. The doormen to the durbar are the most important heights to climb. It wasn’t unusual for these petty creatures to expect a couple of chips from the fortune hunters.

The circumstances had misled the high and mighty of Delhi to believe that I was the crocodile clip to connect to the PMH/ PMO. I had perceivably graduated to the select club of people who were supposed to be closer to the powerhouse. On the fragile wings of that perception I was often invited to the parlours and stag parties at places where entry of people of my stature were banned. I had the rare fortune of meeting ‘*mamaji*’ K. N. Agarwal in one of such parties, which were sanctified by Scotch, business deals and exclusive dance and *gazel* renditions. A present day famous Punjabi lady crooner was a regular to such exclusive evening parties.

‘*Mamaji*’ cornered me over the very important issue of my abhorrence for alcoholic drinks.

“What kind of officer are you? Scotch generates reliability. A sober guy in a whisky party is not trusted.”

“Thanks for the information.”

“Do me a favour.”

“How can I help you?”

“Have you heard of Chandra Swamiji?”

“No.”

“He is a great *tantrik*. He can perform miracles. Arrange his meeting with Indiraji.”

“Why me? You can approach a bigger guy.”

“Do it and you will be rewarded?”

“Sorry. I’m not in the line.”

He was disappointed. But I was later asked by the bosses to keep the line open to ‘*mamaji*’ as he had access to certain arms peddlers like Adnan Kassogi, a top official of the MEA connected to Kassogi club, Win Chadda and other international racketeers. I did maintain a low profile professional linkage with him till such time I could absorb the shit littered by the *mama* and swami duo. I have no reliable information if the two tricksters had succeeded in nudging anywhere closer to Indira. Dhawan told me that the Prime Minister did not trust Chandra Swami and she hadn’t given any lift to the god man. *Mamaji*, however, had built up bridges with V. S. Tripathy and his brother in law, who had succeeded me in SIB Delhi. I had the next chance of renewing my contact with *mamaji* only in 1991. In between, I have reasons to believe, that they had succeeded in cultivating certain aides of Rajiv Gandhi and had played key roles in certain manipulative operations.

The Indian Rasputins have not been able to draw the attention of the intellectuals. Such intellectuals have either been clients of the tricksters or they did not have the time to unearth the astoundingly important roles played by them. Chandra Swami earned some notoriety because he nearly got caught in his own web, but scandal is the elixir of the mightiest and the richest. Such Rasputins have usually hooked most intellectuals at some stage of their evolution to greatness. Indira and Rajiv should not be singled out for allowing some god men to exploit their *sanskars*. Indira did not allow these magicians to go beyond a limit. But the lesser leaders after her did not have perception of the ‘Lakshman Rekha’; Indira could impose on her behavioural pattern.

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The pace of work and the nature of tasking had almost drained me out. My services were required for over 18 hours a day and not quiet infrequently I was dragged out of bed very late in the night. I wanted a break to be with Sunanda and the kids. The boss was gracious. We were permitted to have a short break of five days. That coincided with the year-end holidays in December. We had chosen Rajasthan for the break as it would be cheaper on the pocket and my service colleagues in Jaipur were expected to provide cheap accommodation in their guesthouses.

We were invited for a meal at the house of a Sikh friend at Ganganagar. I happened to meet there a Sikh youth who was scouting out cheaper cultivable land around the Rajasthan canal. The shy youngman said that he belonged to a family of freedom fighters from village Rode, near Baghapurana in the district of Faridkot, Punjab. His grandfather Joginder Singh had taken part in the Jaitu rebellion against the British. Our host introduced him as Jasbir Singh Rode, a Brar Jat by caste. Harcharan Singh, his uncle and former junior officer of the Indian Army, accompanied him. We had small talks about the Jaitu *uprising* and visit of Jawaharlal there in the face of stiff British opposition.

Asked about his education and vocation the young man informed me that he had undergone religious studies in a prime Sikh seminary near Amritsar and was engaged in small trading. He was mostly busy in preaching his own seminary's religious message amongst the rural Sikhs.

The small talks rekindled my knowledge about the pro-Congress roles played by the youth's other uncle Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a Sikh priest from Chowk Mehta seminary called Dam Dami Taksal. A small town fundamentalist, Jarnail Singh was cultivated by Sanjay Gandhi and the former chief minister of Punjab Giani Zail Singh with a view to spilt the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the politico-religious party that championed pure Sikh causes and had stirred up the nation by floating what was later known as Anandpur Sahib Resolution in 1973. I would like to share with the readers my initial brush with the burgeoning Sikh separatist movement between 1980 and 1983.

I liked the saffron turbaned and mild mannered young man but it did not come to my wildest dream that just after seven years I would again meet him in a dinghy cell of Delhi's Tihar jail.

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My temporary breather was neutralised by a couple of thorny tasks. The most complicated one involved the immediate family of the Prime Minister. It would not serve any purpose to recant the circumstances under which Sanjay was married to 'a commoner' Maneka. Indira wasn't an haute socialite. But she was brought up in a world of paradoxes. Motilal and Jawaharlal's western preferences were tempered by the Kshmiri Hindu Brahmin orthodoxy of Swaruprani and Kamala Nehru. She was a queer admixture of the cultures of Bazaar Sitaram, a lane in the walled city of Delhi inhabited by orthodox Kashmiris and Anand Bhawan, the modern abode of Motilal Nehru. The Nehrus were born aristocrats having links with the glorious Muslim past of Delhi. They were the first few outside the Presidency towns to be anointed by the nineteenth century renaissance. They were amongst the firsts to catch upon the English and French way of life and when destiny called they were amongst the first few who renounced the foreign symbols and rallied around whatever was 'swadeshi'.

The family of Colonel T.S. Anand and Amteswar Anand could by no imagination claim social equation with the Nehru-Gandhis. They had a nice home at Jorbagh, interests in business and some landed property. The colonel was a mild mannered person and believed in level living. Many Nehru-Gandhi watchers squinted their eyes and lowered their voices to inaudible decibels when Maneka's father's dead body was found in a rural Delhi field with a cryptic note and a pistol by its side. He had presumably committed suicide. Several theories were floated about the personal life of Maneka's mother, Anand's suicidal proclivities and the distinct possibility of Sanjay silencing him for permanently burying some of his stinking cupboard skeletons.

Maneka and Sonia did not gel well. The young girl married to the son of a Prime Minister expected a lot from her life. She did not anticipate the witch-hunt by the post-emergency mavericks, who believed more in driving nails than fashioning new designs for the beleaguered nation. She was under stress. She was often hysteric. Sonia had married an airline pilot and waxed happily with her private life. Rajiv, as far as I noticed, did not approve of Sanjay's way of 'fixing things' as if India was garaged in his shed and waited for a few tightening of screws and bolts. Sonia was brought up in the western way of life and had adapted the Indian way without any difficulty. She did not identify herself with the new Punjabi culture of Delhi that emphasised on cloning the so-called haute society lifestyle, best described in cheap novels. She had merged with the values of the Nehru-Gandhi family.

Gandhi family critics, like my Tamil Brahmin friend of Golf Link, who was still in touch with me,

did not fire aimlessly when they spoke about incompatibility and hostility between the two bahus. The situation had deteriorated after Sanjay's death. Maneka, my naughty friend expressed, had access to vital clues to some of the ill gotten wealth of Sanjay. Huge amounts, he claimed, were stashed away abroad about which Indira had no clue. The most pathogenic stories that flowed out of the house related to the fight over Sanjay's booty and inheritance to Sanjay's political legacy. Correctness or otherwise of these reports can only be substantiated by the two key players, who are still around and orbit around different trajectories.

There were, however, no doubt that Indira did not like her political heritage to end with her. Sanjay was a great hope and disappointment. Her fond hope that she would be able to chisel him down to Nehru-Gandhi traditions turned out to be a chimera. He betrayed her expectations, but he was the only political candle that seemed to have held out the hope of keeping alive the dynasty. Indira had created a new Congress, which was different from the party inherited by her father and the one she had impatiently waited to inherit from Lal Bahadur Shastri. Those who suffered from the delusion of reviving the Congress of the independence movement had failed to comprehend that Indira had discarded it long back. The Indira Congress had substituted the Indian National Congress. Sanjay was an integral part of that change over. He had a rightful claim to the inheritance.

Rajiv was truly apolitical. A Torino girl, that Sonia is, cannot be apolitical. Her family had dabbled in politics of Piedmont region. Torino was the capital of Italy between 1861 and 1865. But the young girl from Torino had accepted the fact that Sanjay was the chosen inheritor. She had willingly shouldered the family chores and served the family more like an Indian bahu. Maneka, like her mother, was busy with the world outside.

Succession of another Nehru-Gandhi was inevitable. Outside the 'Family' there was no national figure that could lead the new political entity called Indira Congress. The political followers of Indira derived their identity from her. It's the 'family' that was identified by millions of Indians, rightly or wrongly, with the legacies of the pre-independence Congress. No body, not even the political rivals of Indira had taken pains to drive the point home that the new Congress was a 'Family' affair. It did not reflect the aura of the bygone days.

It was all but natural for Indira to think of passing the baton to her son, the real inheritor to her political structure and charisma. Rajiv could not escape the pressure and long before May 1981, he had consented to understudy his mother. He had, in fact, started to take political and administrative lessons from various experts at his No 2 Motilal Nehru Marg office, where wizards like Vijay Dhar, Arun Singh, Arun Nehru and Amitav Bacchan etc managed the show.

My old acquaintance Vincent George, the clerical aid to R.K. Dhawan was catapulted to the position of personal secretary to Rajiv. He had earned the confidence of Sonia with painstaking efforts and their common Christian linkage had clicked well. We have maintained friendly relationship till today. George knows that he cannot purchase me and I know that I am not on offer for sale. That has strengthened the bond of trust.

However, my association with Dhawan had transcended the professional parameters. We had developed a bond of friendship. This bond continues at a low key. I had to pay a heavy price for this act of fondness for Dhawan in 1983 soon after the Delhi municipal corporation elections were over. The heat against Dhawan had started building up from the day Rajiv had decided to choose a young set of advisors who were attuned to his cultural values and shared his world vision. Rajiv did not act differently from his mother. She too was in the habit of kicking in and kicking out her personal aides.

Maneka did not like to surrender Sanjay's political mantle to Rajiv. Sanjay wasn't a mere life partner to her. Like her mother she too was a big player and looked forward to be the wife of the next

Prime Minister of India. Sanjay's death had wrecked her emotions and ambitions. But she was a person in hurry. Like Sanjay she hated the idea of spending meaningless time in the political nursery. She felt that she was ready to walk into the shoes of her husband. She wanted to contest the Parliamentary seat from Amethi. Indira was not averse to give some political accommodation to her young daughter in law. Maneka's social behaviour often irked Indira but she had developed a soft corner for the young widow.

Maneka had in the meantime surrounded herself with a few young admirers and advisors. Her parental family too played a crucial role in stoking the ambition of the young widow. Maneka was indeed in a hurry.

Sonia, I suppose, was opposed to the idea of Maneka assuming important political role on sound practical considerations. She had visualised the glimpses of power coming her way with the decision to induct Rajiv to active politics. She hated the idea of rooting of a parallel centre of power in the personal office of her sister in law. She supported Rajiv. The breaking point between Sonia and Maneka was almost reached even before Rajiv declared his intention to contest the Parliamentary poll on May 5, 1981.

I was surprisingly called upon to carry out a discreet and personal study about the electoral prospects of Rajiv. It was supposed to be an independent study. My brief included an in depth study of the possibility of sabotage by some of the supporters of Sanjay and Maneka Gandhi. I accepted the tasking by the PMH but I kept my boss apprised of the unusual request.

Rajiv's triumphant entry to the Parliament had broken the barriers of Maneka's patience. Indira Gandhi's patience too had worn thin. Delhi's gossip vine poured in unsavoury stories about the machinations of Amteshwar Anand and her younger daughter Ambika. Some of the unsavoury stories did project Maneka in bad light. The young lady too did not take care of the webs of legacy that she had got entangled into by marrying a Nehru-Gandhi. The 'royals' of India were supposed to maintain a façade of impeccable public image. Maneka had disappointed Indira by her personal and social behaviour. The time was not correct for a Princess Diana like personality to hit the voyeurs of a conservative Nehru-Gandhi family, last of the nineteenth century political aristocrats.

Impatience and impudence pushed Maneka further away from the family; in fact, Maneka had never donned the Nehru-Gandhi family's tribal identity. She had remained marooned in the tribal identity of her mother. This had rendered the situation more brittle. The fragile emotional bonds between Indira and Maneka reached a point of no return when the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi legacy sensed that a rank outsider was staking claim to her inheritance. Friendly counselling and social pressure could not patch up emotional and behavioural skirmishes inside the family. That had probably prompted Indira to seek outside help to monitor the activities of Maneka, her mother and a few close followers of Sanjay who egged on the green debutante politician to challenge Indira and her new successor designate.

That's where I came into the picture. My brief from the company boss and from the PMH was not brief. The tasking included surveillance and shadowing on Maneka and her associates and generation of intelligence on her activities. It was a daunting and detestable task. I tried to wriggle out of this tricky task by requesting that the job should be assigned to another crucial unit of the IB that worked as the personalised enquiry and intelligence generation tool of the Director. I was overruled and directed to present my project report on the new mission. I took up the assignment with great reluctance, but I had a job to do to support my family.

The mission involved intelligence generation from inside the PMH and from within the household of Amteshwar Anand. It also required a clever mixture of HumInt and TechInt operations.

Generation of intelligence from within the PMH was a virtual minefield. Mine was a known face at the Safdarjung residence and Akbar Road office of Indira Gandhi. My unit was involved in some security and intelligence coverage in and around the PMH. I was supposed to keep watch on certain questionable visitors and beef this up by subsequent enquiry reports. The VIP security unit of the IB maintained profiles of these visitors. I took advantage of the existing resources to generate intelligence on Maneka's activities inside the PMH. A few friends of the young widow of Sanjay were wired up. That produced tonnes of appalling information on the impetuous young lady who had decided to embark on a collision course. I felt a streak of pity for the young girl, though I developed a secret admiration for her grit. All said and done she represented the new brand of womanhood, who had the courage of challenging the mightiest in the land. She wanted to earn her right through open war. Her uncompromising attitude, I thought, betrayed her recklessness. Did she suffer from a tunnel vision? Perhaps she did and perhaps she still does. In any case Maneka was in a no win situation as she was pitted against a mighty lady who was known to be a merciless tigress when it came to demolishing her adversaries.

Generating intelligence on Amteshwar was not a big challenge. My friend of Golf Links had known her in and out and was pleased to supply more grey details of his personal relationship with the lady in addition to white facts. Certain aggrieved family friends and relations of late T. S. Anand volunteered a kaleidoscopic collage of information. Amteshwar and her daughters had taken full advantage of Sanjay's pre-eminence and harassed and persecuted them over property matters. The minions of Delhi police that were commanded by a Sanjay crony frequently visited them. A detailed enquiry was carried out over the financial matters of the family and special efforts were directed at unearthing the 'undisclosed fortune' of Sanjay. My officers had burrowed deep into the affairs of the family. Some of the personal details were nauseating and I did not cherish the idea of looking into the private bedrooms of individuals. Human frivolities often opened up exotic windows into their characters and in some social sectors the players exhibited extreme resilience. But in a high-strung political drama the bedroom scenes often spelt out irretrievable disaster. Sanjay and Maneka had earlier used this trick with deadly accuracy over the escapades of Suresh Ram, Jagjivan's prodigal son. However, I was told that the reports were useful to Indira Gandhi.

Maneka was not a loser type either. She had inherited certain strong attitudinal traits of her mother and she had tasted power between 1974 and 77 and for a while after 1980 elections. She toured different parts of India as the wife of the virtual deputy and the future Prime Minister of India. The Sanjay cronies adulated her and some of the meetings at Amteshwar Anand's Jorbagh home attended by them projected Maneka as the real inheritor of Sanjay Gandhi. Indira was not attuned to the idea of challenge to her authority. She had opted for her son and not for the daughter in law, who, in her perception was a plant in the Nehru-Gandhi household.

I was called upon to attend another dirty job. One must understand the rules of the game. There is no way out but to oblige the department and government even if the job is dirty and unlawful. I was no exception.

The *Surya* magazine floated by Maneka in mid 1970 had functioned as a political vehicle of Sanjay Gandhi. Indira considered this rag as a useful weapon during and after the emergency. Soon after relations inside the Gandhi family started fraying, Maneka and her mother entered into a deal with Sardar Angre of the RSS for selling the ownership of *Surya* to Dr. J.K.Jain, a prominent member of the RSS and the Jan Sangh. Indira was opposed to the idea and she felt betrayed by Maneka's action. She was overwhelmed by political and communal troubles and deserved peace at home. She was haunted by one misfortune after another. But a hurt Maneka was in no mood for compromise.

I was tasked to infiltrate the *Surya* editorial board. It was an easy task. My reports and often galley proof of the crucial items were forwarded to Indira through 'appropriate official channel.'

But Maneka was not content with what she had done with *Surya*. My old friend in the RSS enlightened me about the burgeoning political relationship between Maneka and a section of the Jan Sangh (Bharatiya Janata Party) as well as other opposition leaders. I was briefed to follow up the leads and to identify Maneka's linkages with the saffron as well as other political leaders.

But the unkindest cut of all was the alleged decision of Maneka to circulate 'SHE', the censored chapter of the autobiography of M. O. Mathai. This document was reportedly in possession of Sanjay even before the emergency. But he had no intention of using it overtly to discredit his mother. But he had made it known to Indira that he possessed the vital weapon. It has never been possible to confirm these reports beyond any tinge of doubt.

Maneka had allegedly copied and circulated the scurrilous SHE chapter along with some family letters, which depicted Rajiv in poor light. I was tasked by the competent authority to trace out copies of SHE and to steal the master copy that was hidden somewhere in the office of *Surya*, now owned by Dr. J.K.Jain. I readily accepted the first task and declined to take up the second one. But I was steamrolled and was told that I should either do the job or get ready for sack from the Indian Police Service. I was ready to face reversion and take up a uniformed assignment in Bengal. But sacking with a trumped up charge would have devastated my future and family. Nevertheless, I explored the possibility of reverting back to the Calcutta newspaper with which I had started my career. I was advised by the owner that they had borrowed heavily from a nationalised bank and they were not in a situation to displease the government by offering an employment to me. I had approached the Calcutta college, where I taught for a while. They pointed out that direct entry to faculty was impossible and I was age barred. My resolve to quit was diluted by family pressure. They did not want to move out of Delhi when the kids were just settled in nice schools. Like all lambs I offered my neck to the cross bar.

I happened to discover the SHE at an unexpected quarter. Someone tipped me off that copies of SHE were in circulation amongst a group of IAS officers of West Bengal and some of them lodging in the Hailey Road state guesthouse were using it a piece of pornography. Two of them were my course mates in the Mussorie academy.

I approached one of them, who had access to the document and explained to him over a luncheon the sensitivities of Indira Gandhi over that questioned document. He understood the gravity of the situation. He directed me to another course mate and contemporary at Kalimpong. He received me well at his Calcutta residence but the document had in the meantime had passed into the hands of Bikram Sarkar (Sardar), another IAS course mate and married in a prominent congress family of Bengal. Bikram did not play a fair game. He refused to see me and sent a word that the document was in possession of C. G. Saldhana, another IAS officer of Bengal cadre.

My colleague, K.M. Singh and I drove all the way to Chandigarh to meet Saldhana. He was surprised by the untimely knock and told me in confidence that the document was still in possession of Bikram Sarkar, who had started pulling all conceivable political strings to wriggle out of the situation. My enquiries revealed that the scion of the politically prominent schedule caste family nursed a grudge against Indira and was not averse to the idea of embarrassing her by sharing the document with some Marxist leaders of West Bengal, which he finally did.

In any case I succeeded in retrieving four copies of SHE from different quarters. I was directed to submit a written report about the involvement of the IAS officers. I declined to submit a written report on the plea that they were my course mates and I believed that they had just chanced to access the

document. Maneka had allegedly circulated the scurrilous piece widely written by a sick-minded Mathai. I gathered an impression that my boss had submitted a detailed report to the Prime Minister on the incident. But no harm had come to any of my IAS colleague.

Bikram Sarkar, however, took it upon himself to lobby with the Union Home Secretary and other IAS officers in Delhi to brief them about my 'high handed' treatment to the senior officers. In fact, I was branded as an anti-IAS creature and had become a persona non grata to some of the senior IAS officers in Delhi. The enquiry had cost me my friendship with my colleagues and Bikram continued with the tirade long after Indira was assassinated. He had later joined Mamata Banerjee and was returned to the Parliament.

Having burnt my fingers in 'operation retrieval SHE' I had more or less decided not to undertake the charted operation against Dr. J. K. Jain. I was given a final warning to proceed with the matter as Jain had reportedly tied up with a publishing house to bring out a reprint of Mathai's autobiography that would include the censured chapter. My operators failed to infiltrate the inner core of the new management. Finally I was ordered to carry out a silent 'Watergate' type nocturnal break in and retrieve the vital original document. I requested for police assistance. It was refused. Having left with no option I accompanied by my deputy and a few trusted officers broke into the office premises of *Surya* late in the night. The market place was scantily guarded but our operation did not go unnoticed.

Indira Gandhi might have been happy on this small victory over her daughter in law, but my name had reached the ears of Jain through a channel of leakage in the IB. A couple of pro-Janata Party elements were still active in the IB and they were not amused by the latest political reincarnation of Indira. One of them was lodged in the very personal section of the Director Intelligence Bureau. He was a close associate of V. S. Tripathy, the all season IAS officer who had by now entrenched himself well in the PMO. I had access to precise information that Tripathy's brother in law had passed on the vital information to his Janata Party contact from Uttar Pradesh.

For the second time I had earned the dubious distinction of being named by the politicians in a public meeting. The first one had happened way back in 1972 when the government of Mohammad Alimuddin was toppled by the congress with active collaboration of the Intelligence Bureau. However, this minor '*suryagate*' did not roll over to any serious political crisis for Indira Gandhi. But I was marked out as an errant intelligence officer. I was not surprised when a senior IAS secretary to the government of India made an open dig at me in a security meeting. The SHE episode had made this lobby permanently hostile to me. None of them were ready to look beyond the incident and ask the service colleagues if their action of circulating a scurrilous piece of fiction by Mathai on a respectable lady had not infringed the service ethics and ordinary moral parameters. How could they imagine of an Indira Gandhi clothed in see-through muslin and perambulating before their sick minds and eyes? The whole affair smacked of sick mentality of a section of sex-starved colleagues, who happened to gatecrash into the Iron Frame.

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The popular perception that Maneka was thrown out of 1 Safdarjung Road is not correct. She had meticulously prepared for the event and precipitated the matter by floating a political outfit, Sanjay Vichar Manch just a day before Indira returned from London. My static watchers and moles inside the PMH had noticed Maneka and Ambika transferring out small baggage items, which allegedly contained cash, from Safdarjung house to her mother's place at Jorbagh. It's not my intention to go over the sad incidents that culminated in the final departure of Maneka and the political hypes she

tried to build up by projecting herself as a wronged daughter in law. All that I can add that Indira was obsessed with the idea of dynastic succession and her natural choice was her own son, the one who was almost eclipsed by his more aggressive and abrasive younger brother. She had a right to make the crucial choice. Maneka was not ready to take her turn. It was not a clash of personalities. It was a clash of interests and ambition. It would be futile to paint Indira as an aggressive mother in law. She had seen her mother being tortured and insulted. Indira had, I know personally, great regards for women, especially for women in material and mental distress. She was not a tormentor of the young widow of her son. Some scribes and topical historians, however, had tried to paint the Maneka affair with the 'emergency brush'.

Soon after Maneka contrived her exit from the Safdarjung residence of Indira Gandhi I was directed to mount renewed TechInt and HumInt operations against Amteshwar Anand and Maneka Gandhi.

For some technical reason the IB was not able to hook the residential phone of a close relation of Maneka to its monitoring box. I was directed to bug the target phone and locate a 'safe house' to record the transmitted telephone and room conversations. It was an impossible task. Technically the project was viable but logistically it presented insurmountable difficulties.

The house was a hub of major political activities and some of the later day political stalwarts and barons of industry (a governor included) were her regular parlour guests. I had to have the vacant possession of the house at least for two hours to implant the radio devices.

The domestic servant was won over and he offered running commentaries on the happenings inside the residence. An unexpected tip from him that his employer would be out of Delhi for two days offered an opportunity to place the bugs in the target home. The home telephone was 'rendered dead' in collusion with the obliging exchange staff and we waited for a call to attend the 'dead' phone.

The range of choice of miniature radio microphones was limited. I had opted for two long-range transmitters that would offer the facility of recording room conversations from a safe outpost 150 meters away. I was offered only two short-range devices and asked to 'find out' a safe house within 100 meters of the target home.

Uninterrupted power supply posed another problem. I planned out the operation in to two separate segments: bugging the home telephone and planting a device in the master bedroom. A brand new 'priyadarshini' phone was acquired and a miniature radio transmitter was placed inside a condenser coil. The device was activated whenever the user lifted the phone. The remote recording device faithfully recorded the voices of the caller and the called.

The expected call came next day and we gained access into the target house in the garb of telephone linemen. The new phone replaced the faulty one with the compliments of the divisional engineer.

The other device was camouflaged inside the hollowed out underside of a bedside table that flaunted an imported flower vase. The device was connected to the power line to give it infinite life.

The next problem was to locate a 'safe house' to place the remote receiver and recording devices. The inventory of the technical division could produce an unwieldy set that required considerable place to secure.

We scouted the area and finally hit upon the idea of tapping the priest of the temple that was located in a nearby green patch. The saffron clothed priest wasn't a novice. He was often tapped by the static watchers of the IB to ferret out information about the famous, not so famous and infamous visitors to the target house. His attachment to the almighty god had not undermined his quest for the miniature round silver wheels, called money. He agreed to oblige after a little bit of heckling. The

offering paid to the doorman to the god was quite hefty. But it met our operational requirements. I presume the information gathered through channel was shared with the consumer. Technically the operation was a tremendous success.

The hunger for intelligence input on real and perceived enemies often transcended the limits of physical hunger that burn inside the stomach. The successful house-breaking operation gave an impression to some of the aides of the Prime Minister that sky was not the limit. I was summoned and was asked to submit a feasibility report on bugging Maneka's office at Rajindra Place and her Golf Links home. It took me about a fortnight to survey the target areas, identify the vulnerable points and work out an elaborate action plan. My assessment was simple: the IB should not try to implant technical devices inside the premises used by Maneka. She was too small a political fry to pose a danger to the mighty Prime Minister and her newly selected successor. Politically it would not be a prudent step. I was overruled and was directed to meet an aide in the PMO.

I tried to argue out that sensitive intelligence operations should not be exposed to untested officials of the main consumer. I insisted on working through the trusted channel, R.K. Dhawan. A deeper probe opened up the mystery tunnel. Dhawan continued to enjoy the confidence of Indira Gandhi. But Rajiv, the new inheritor, had different ideas about his political antennas and coterie of advisors. To him and his friends Dhawan was a 'stenographer'; he was not the computer wizard. He simply did not belong to the new age that was about to follow the political furrows cut by Rajiv and his wonder boys. Fotedar opened up a new window to the 'darshan' and favour seekers and political bounty hunters.

I was advised to cultivate some flexibility in my approach to senior political persons and to learn the strategy of using multi-window operations. I did not and still do not agree with such rank opportunism, especially in the field of intelligence generation and dissemination. Bed hopping cannot be a part of trade-ethics of any intelligence community. It can at best be a part of an intelligence operator, who advances his progress in service through favour-shower and patronage-spring.

I was again ushered in the smoky room at 1 Akabr road. The aide enquired about the blueprint of my plan to bug the office and residence of Maneka. I feigned ignorance and requested him to canalise the requirement through the DIB. He did not wait for the penultimate exit of the words from my mouth. Fotedar picked up the RAX and asked the DIB about the bugging operation. After putting the handset on its cradle he looked up at me triumphantly and informed that my boss had cleared the operation and I should submit compliance report, 'for the information of the madam', within three days.

He walked up slowly to a steel cupboard and brought out a miniature tape recorder.

"Have you seen this before?"

"No."

"It's an imported tape recorder. Now take it and arrange to record the conversation of Zail Singh with Sardar Fateh Singh (name changed)."

"He's the home minister. How can I do that?"

"It's my information that Zail would meet the emissary of Bhindranwale at Bangla Sahib Gurdwara. Now don't forget that you're employed by the government to carry out orders and not to beg excuses."

"That's not my area of responsibility."

"I have spoken to Rajeswar," he declared pompously. I presumed it was a lie.

"Now get the meeting recorded and get back to me directly. There's no need to inform your DIB."

The suggestion was to record the conversation of the Union home minister with an emissary of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the priest turned fundamentalist militant leader of Punjab. The Punjab

wool ball that was designed and architected by Sanjay Gandhi and Zail Singh had started rolling out of Indira Gandhi's closet. I would like to make some detailed comments on this part of India's shameful history a little later.

I did not give any commitment to the personal aide of Indira and accept the tape recorder. I had solid reasons not to go by his advice. The emissary of the Dam Dami Taksal priest was my professional friend and he had alerted me about the apparently damage controlling effort of the veteran Sikh politician. He had recruited the fiery Sikh priest for Sanjay, who later crafted out the Frankenstein out of a minor fundamentalist priest owing allegiance to the Taksal variety of pure Sikhism-said to be Wahabism of Sikh religion.

I mulled over the developments. My analysis pointed at a sensible conclusion, it was time for me to get out of SIB Delhi and even from the IB, notwithstanding reservations of my wife and the children. I could foresee a noose dangling over my head, and I did not find any difference between the emergency days and the post-emergency regime of Indira Gandhi. I had failed to develop a liking for Maneka as a public figure because I had seen the colour of her personality. But I did not agree with the risky operation of bugging her office and residence. The lonely widow did not pose any political or security threat to Indira and Rajiv Gandhi. But people around them had gone paranoid and wanted the IB to 'finish' her.

The hazards involved in the operation were again explained to the brain trust and was requested to reassess the project requirement. Technical operations are more glamorous than mundane HumInt. But a successful technical operation with antiquated gadgets of the IB often involved tremendous risks.

I was advised to live up to my reputation and I was allowed to report to the controlling officer directly. He exempted me from the humiliation of appearing before the aforesaid aide, the most insensitive and ham handed operator of Indira Gandhi. I was given the liberty of choosing my own timeframe and modus operandi of implementation of the project. I obtained a final concession: abortion of the project if threatened by exposure.

The assigned task was accomplished without breaking into the premises of Maneka Gandhi. I managed to identify the pairs of wires that connected the telephones of her office and home telephones. Appropriate miniature radio transmitters were connected to the targets pairs of wires near the junction boxes and, which were hooked to miniature tape recorders. My men simply changed the tapes after every 4 hours. I doused myself with a convenient amnesia and did not bother to identify the ultimate consumer of those tapes.

The meeting between Zail Singh and Fateh Singh produced tonnes of vital intelligence on the developing imbroglio in Punjab. My hand-recorded report was personally delivered to the Joint Director overseeing the Punjab affairs. I believe that the content of that incriminating report was personally conveyed to the Prime Minister through an unsigned memo secured in a blue envelope. That was the usual procedure to share sensitive intelligence on the ministerial and political colleagues of Indira Gandhi. Besides the prime consumer only R.K. Dhawan saw these reports.

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Rajiv's arrival was marked by the induction of corporate managerial talents to Indian politics. Derided as 'computer cowboys', Rajiv's new aides especially Arun Nehru, Arun Singh, Vijay Dhar, and Suman Dubey claimed to have added 21st century modernism to the stale Indian political panorama. They were in no way connected with the Indian masses but they had opened up the windows to the dynamics of advanced geo-political concepts, liberal economic approach and

modernisation of the technical inputs in governance. However, Rajiv did not succeed in matching the concepts of traditional caste, community religion based politics and rusted economic outlook with his vision of the 21st century. Indira had taken cautious steps to deviate from the traditional forces and values. But young Rajiv did not believe in taking cautious jump.

His handling of the Asiad 1982 and the eighth NAM-CHOGM conference firmly established Rajiv's managerial capabilities. But the 1983 goof up of projection of the Andhra Pradesh election and subsequent blatant manipulations to oust NTR had added shades of doubt to Rajiv's capability to handle 'grassroots level politics'.

On the eve of the Asiad '82 I was present in one of the security related meetings taken by a cabal member of Rajiv. The security briefings highlighted the threats from the armed goons of Bhindranwale and the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Force. The representative of the R&AW and Intelligence Bureau pressed for strict movement control on the Sikhs travelling to Delhi from other Indian locations, especially Punjab. I was just baptised in handling the Sikh/ Punjab affairs after the assassination of Baba Gurbachan Singh, the Nirankari sect chief, by Ranjit Singh, a hardcore Bhindranwale and Akhand Kirtani Jatha follower. This was the direct fall out of April 1978 clash at Amritsar between the forces of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Fouja Singh and the Nirankari sect, who were allowed by unimaginative Janata governments in Delhi and Chandigarh to hold its annual session in the holiest city of the Sikhs on Baishakhi day (lunar new year).

Bhindranwale did not stop with the blood of the Nirankari chief. This was followed by the assassination of Lala Jagat Narain, a patriotic journalist (his son too had fallen to the bullets of Bhindrawale followers about a year later), H.S.Manchanda, chief of the Delhi Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee and A.S.Atwal, a deputy inspector general of police of Punjab.

The need to insulate Delhi from the Sikh fundamentalists, Kashmir militants and the international terrorist organisations was imperative. But I felt that by blanket harassment and humiliation of the Sikhs we would simply push the moderates to the lap of Bhindranwale, who had already started screaming for 'Khalistan', a separate homeland for the Sikhs. I presented a plan for targeted screening at the entry points and positioning of joint police forces of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi at selected points to thwart entry of the suspected militants. I was overruled by other security and intelligence experts, who had gathered more layers of moss on their cranium than I did in my 14 years service. In one of the meetings Rajiv even spoke in favour of using 'terrorising tools to destroy the terrorists'. That was my first direct exposure to the future Prime Minister of India. I gathered an impression that the sprouting of impatience and intolerance was outbalancing the growth of self-confidence in Rajiv. He had started believing in superficialities and was more vulnerable to sycophants and superfluous glitter. He appeared to be supercilious to suggestions that did not fit into his scheme of things.

The Asiad and the CHOGM might have had added to the international image of Indira and Rajiv. But they were slipping into deep political instability. Soon after the Andhra Pradesh fiasco Haryana election results gave a serious jolt to Indira. The Congress lost to the forces headed by the Jat patriarch Devi Lal.

The Intelligence Bureau and the PMH pressed my services to sabotage Devi Lal's electoral success. The first task was to arrange a meeting between Indira Gandhi and Devi Lal. The Jat patriarch was in no mood to meet the Prime Minister. He received me well and offered heavily milked tea spiced with cloves and green cardamom. His thick eyebrows often danced to his moods of anger, frustration and indignation. But I had succeeded in softening the loveable towering figure to 'accidentally meet' Indira briefly inside a lift in the Parliament house. The planned meeting took place and subsequently they met twice to discuss the political scenario in Haryana.

The other task, ‘Operation Harit’, involved weaning away some of the Haryana legislative assembly members to Indira Congress. This was the third time that I was commissioned to act against a constitutionally elected assembly. However, intelligence operatives enjoy the only privilege: silently carry out government orders, be it illegal and extra constitutional. This operation dismayed me and gave rise to serious doubt about the performance of Indira Gandhi. I was forced to re-evaluate my romantic appreciation of the lady, who ‘rescued India from the errand boys of J. P. Movement.’

This dirty task was achieved rather easily. In this game Khurshid Ahmed, Banarasi Das Gupta and Devi Lal’s son Ranjit Singh, (all Haryana politicians) played crucial roles. No money passed through my hand, but I believe the PMH had defrayed huge amount of funds directly to the political personalities. It’s better not to speculate on the amount that changed hands. The final evaluators had decided that the soul of each legislator should have a different price tag-varying between Rupees one million to five million. The principal motivators received hundred million and above.

The electoral defeat in Haryana was turned in to an ‘*ayaram gayaram*’ (defection) brand political victory. Chowdry Bhajan Lal had finally arrived as another piece of passing cloud in the political firmament of Haryana and Delhi. I did not try to cultivate this wily politician. My task was well defined and I was supposed to leave the matters to the initiative of the PMH after ‘Operation Harit’ was concluded.

During this operation I bled from the pricks that my conscience normally suffered. However, I had already passed the stage of initiation and had graduated as one of the witch-priests of the Intelligence Bureau, which presided over most of the black acts and deeds of the ruling masters. I had become an integral part of the ‘establishment’, which was in no way accountable to the people and their constitutional institutions. Pleasing the masters was the greatest yardstick of efficiency. To be useful to the ‘designated consumer’ was the key to success. And in India the designated consumers are the Prime Minister and the Home Minister. However, again I peeped inside and found that my birth-mate, the two squirrels, were still there and was not paralysed by the morphine of power.

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The Andhra fiasco and Haryana rope trick inexorably proved that Indira was heading towards another political slide. The Punjab situation had started eroding her Hindu vote bank. She was haunted by the Antulay scandal, the Kuo Oil deal, the Bhagalpur blinding and communal riots in Uttar Pradesh. Assam continued to breathe heavily on her shoulder. The AASU had almost paralysed the state administration. The Nellie massacre, in which the Muslim community were very adversely affected, had cast a doubt on Indira’s capability to rule the country.

On the western flank Afghanistan was on fire. India’s Afghanistan policy was not compatible with the geo-political realities of the region. India failed to assess that Pakistan had transformed itself to a breeding ground of Islamist jehadees in the ruse of fighting the communist regime in Kabul. The expertise achieved by the Inter Services Intelligence and the military establishment in engineering armed guerrilla warfare and refining the rough edges of proxy warfare was not likely to end with the fall of Babrak Karmal regime and humiliating retreat by the Soviet forces. Afghanistan was a training ground for Zia—ul-Haq and his fundamentalist coterie. He was soon to transfer the theatre of proxy war to India, Punjab to start with and Kashmir to end up as the final conclusion of the ‘unfinished agenda’ of partition.

I had taken up two operational projects to infiltrate an Indian agent into an ISI run *mujahideen* training camp at Spin Khwar in NWFP, bordering Afghanistan without any knowledge of the R&AW.

The talent, an Afghan Pushtun, was trained for two months and was inducted into the Gulbudin Hikmatyar faction of the *mujahideen* force. He successfully returned to his launching base in India and his debriefing proved conclusively that the CIA and ISI were training Arab, Malayan, Indonesian, Philipino, Bangladeshi and other Muslim volunteers in addition to the Afghans. He specifically mentioned about the presence of two Sikhs at a camp near Isha Khel in Pakistani Punjab.

Another agent infiltrated with the Sikh pilgrimage jatha that visited Pakistan in 1982 had brought back conclusive proof of the involvement of the ISI with some of the Indian Sikh delegates.

However, the supervisory Joint Director in charge of Punjab desk did not think much of these reports. He was, as I mentioned earlier, in the habit of sitting over complicated reports and killing the issues by allowing the arrow of time to pass him by. It was an impossible task to motivate him to appreciate a piece of raw intelligence and connect it up with the bigger mosaic. He was happy with the preparation of the routine daily reports on Punjab situation, cutting the Ts and dotting the Is. I found it difficult to induce him that 'operational approach' inside the extremist superstructure of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale should be blended with normal intelligence collection and data compilation. A few of my proposals to infiltrate 'operational agents' inside Dal Khalsa, Akhand Kirtani Jatha, and the Dam Dami Taksal were turned down on the plea that Punjab was out of my jurisdiction. I failed to climb over the dead wall. But my tryst with Punjab had just begun.

There is a common perception that the Sikh Frankenstein, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, was a creation of Indira Congress leaders like Giani Zail Singh and Sanjay Gandhi. It's not the entire truth, though the marks of chiselling by Indira Gandhi's younger son and the former chief minister of Punjab are distinctly discernible on the 'terrorist profile' of the preacher from Dam Dami Taksal.

Sikh communalism is as much an integral part of the rise and growth of communal politics in the late 19th and early twentieth century, which was marked by creation of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), followed by the formation of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). That particular period of British occupation of India was the real crucible of growth of the concept of nationalism based on religion. The concept of Sikh separatism has often been labelled as 'total separation' of umbilical ties with Hinduism. True as it may be it should also be realised that there existed and still exists a distinct streak of geo-political separatism amongst a section of the Sikh intelligentsia and religious stalwarts. Seeds of separatism lay buried below the garbage of 'identity crisis' and sprout into life whenever the STATE becomes vulnerable. Today's Pakistan may have decided to go easy on the Punjab issue. It would not be prudent to believe that they would develop permanent amnesia. Punjab continues to be a potent fault line.

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The rise of Bhindranwale was simply not sparked off by conflict between 'religious semantics' between the pure Sikhs and the 'deviated sect' called the Nirankaris. The tectonic shifts in Punjab's geo-politics and economic activities had played a distinct role. This was compounded by the threat of demographic nightmare and Hindu intransigence. The politicians, both the Congress and the Akalis, contributed liberally to the aggravation of the political ambience.

It would not be prudent to put a marker on 14th April, 1978, being the holy date when Sikh terrorism was born. An unimaginative and tactless Janata Party government had allowed the Nirankari *samagam* (congregation) to take place at Amritsar on the holiest day of the Sikhs, the day the Khalsa Panth was created by the Tenth Guru. The ruling Akali Dal government in Chandigarh had conveniently forgotten its demand enshrined in the infamous and indiscreet Anandpur Sahib

resolutions.

Sanjay Gandhi did not engineer the events of 14th April. It had brought Jarnail Singh closer to Zail Singh and Sanjay, who discovered in the fiery rabble-rouser the potential of a fundamentalist of radioactive proportions. They expected him to decimate the Akali brand of fundamentalists and bring back Indira Congress to power in the border state. They were in direct contact with the priest from Dam Dami Taksal, the fountainhead of Sikh fundamentalism. This was borne out of the fact that Bhindranwale and his 'youth brigade' of the All India Sikh Student Federation, Dal Khalsa, Akhand Kirtani Jatha as well as the grassroots level *pathis* (one who recites the scripture), *granthis* (custodian of the Holy Book), and *dadhi* and kirtani *jathas* (ballad and devotional singers) owing allegiance to the Taksal had campaigned for Indira Congress candidates in all the three regions of Punjab, especially for Sukhbinder Kaur, wife of Sanjay crony P. S. Bhinder.

I was once called upon, in May 1981 to contact a relative of Jarnail Singh and bring him to Delhi for a meeting with the home minister. I had fortunately met the young nephew of Jarnail Singh at Ganganagar just a couple of months back. I picked up young Jasbir Singh and a personal aide to Jarnail Singh from Shardulgarh on Haryana border and drove them straight to the official residence of the home minister. They went back with two fat shoulder bags. I was asked to drop them at Mansa near Bhatinda. I did my job with the characteristic silence of a deaf, dumb and blind intelligence operative.

Indira Congress' victory in the 1980 elections strengthened the unholy bonds between Zail Singh and Bhindranwale. The home minister spurred the district authorities to issue arms licence to the followers of Jarnail Singh, which were later used in criminal activities. Zail Singh was not satisfied with the ministerial berth in Delhi. He incited the Bhindranwale extremists against the Indira Congress chief minister Darbara Singh, who had gathered courage to arrest the errant priest from Chowk Mehta gurdwara on September 20. Zail Singh had certified the innocence of Jarnail Singh on the floor of the Parliament when he was released from custody on October 14, 1981.

Jarnail Singh's much hyped visits to Delhi, Nanded Sahib in Maharashtra and other places were patronised by Zail Singh even after the intelligence and security organisations had furnished ample evidence on the priest's involvement in terrorist activities and target assassination. His visits to Delhi were marked by a few queer developments.

I was tasked to keep discreet but intensive watch on the activities of Jarnail Singh. The usual mechanism of deploying HumInt and TechInt were achieved without much fuss. But Zail Singh personally dictated the trickiest task. He wanted me to record the speeches and discourses of Jarnail Singh and carry the tapes personally to his residence. My colleague Ajaib Singh performed the job with appreciable alacrity. But the most difficult task was to carry the tapes to the residence of Zail Singh and wait till he finished listening to the lengthy harangues of the rabidly communal priest.

Zail Singh's evenings belonged to himself. The burly Sikh was usually prostrated on his rope knitted poor man's cot with the usual whisky glasses by his side and a massive masseur all over his oily body. He did not speak any kind of legible English and my Punjabi was as atrocious as was Swahili to a Greek. A student of language and philology, I picked up the language in all its forms in 1983, soon after my posting to the Indian High Commission in Canada. But way back in 1980-82 the loveable rustic home minister conversed in Punjabi and I replied in Hindi. He was surprised to meet a strange police officer, who was not a connoisseur of whisky. His rustic simplicity had charmed me, though I was conscious that below his skin he excelled in political manoeuvres. That dusky side of his character was caught in a camera on a night when he visited Gurdwara Bangla Sahib and was closeted with Jarnail Singh for over an hour. No one in Delhi expected the Union home minister to

prostrate before the priest turned goon and compromise the security of the country. I believe Indira Gandhi was not amused to witness the blazing evidences of her home minister's acts of indiscretion.

She was further frustrated by reports on a couple of visits of Zail Singh to the residence of Amteshwar Anand, including a visit on the day he was elevated to the Rashtrapati Bhawan. Zail Singh enjoyed a special bond with Sanjay and his wife's family. I had not forgotten the scene when the wily Sikh leader had bent down to touch Sanjay's feet soon after he was administered the oath of office at the Ashoka Hall in 1980.

I believe Indira Gandhi had directed her internal intelligence chief to file a complete profile on Zail Singh's relationship with the Anand family. As the chief of the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau I added my input to the broad-spectrum report, the contents of which were not of endearing nature. His elevation to the Rashtrapati Bhawan, however, could not insulate Zail Singh from the ferments of Sikh politics and the love and affection for the family of Sanjay Gandhi's wife. He had never developed a liking and respect for the '*hawai kaptan*'; the pilot turned Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

In my discussions with the political luminaries who surrounded Indira and a few questions she had fired at me during a meeting on horse trading in Haryana and discussions on the bleak election prospects in Delhi I gathered an impression that the Prime Minister of India had reached the tethered end over the style of functioning of her home minister. The openhearted rustic Sikh had no idea when to disengage from soured political operations. His hunger for the hot seat in Chandigarh had made him oblivious to the facts that the jinn of Sikh separatism had burst out of the bottle crafted by him and his one time mentor Sanjay. The leaders of Indira Congress had reopened India's big fault line in Punjab and Pakistan had already started wading through the muddy waters.

Indira had realised the gravity of the situation and she sincerely wanted to put her home minister behind some restraining cage. The most convenient cage was the President's Palace over the Raisina Hills. Indira had succeeded in caging her blundering political troubleshooter but she did not have any strategic idea to get out of the hell fire of Sikh militancy started by her son's creation. The hellish fire finally consumed her.

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I was often consulted on the election scenario in Delhi. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) was due to go to the polls for electing its councillors in May 1983. By that time Rajiv Gandhi was in full command of the backroom operations of Indira Congress and the government run by his mother. He had emerged as the second most powerful political figure.

Rajiv and his aides worked on a foolproof strategy to resurrect the party's sullied performance in Andhra Pradesh and Haryana. His office prepared a list of candidates in which most of the followers of Sanjay were sidelined. M.L.Fotedar prepared another list in consultation with his coterie of acolytes. The followers of Sanjay prepared a list of their own and made desperate efforts to attract Indira's attention.

My company directed me to study the desperately contradictory lists and to prepare one that could ensure a respectable contest against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidates. The BJP was expecting a thumping victory and shaking up the rocking foundations of Indira Congress. The party banked mostly on Hindu backlash against Indira's inability to contain the fire of Sikh militancy. They were poised to exploit the local issues and the raw memories of emergency excesses. The media was against Indira and she had very little space to take cover.

I prepared a composite list after discreet consultations with the factional, caste, community and

religious leaders and leaders of different linguistic groups. Such an operation could not be done in complete secrecy. This was not a novel task. The Intelligence Bureau had been usually tasked for vetting electoral lists and for studying prospects of the ruling parties. Similar is the practice in the States where the state intelligence branches and the CIDs are tasked to study the prospects of the ruling party. The Indian democracy has refused to discard some of the vestiges of the past. The custodians of democracy have rather added on new armours to maintain political hegemony over the system.

The politicians sniffed my scent in no time. They thronged around me with requests to accommodate their candidates. Leaders like Jagdish Tytler, H.K.L Bhagat, Jagdish Anand, Jagpravesh Chandra and Bhagwat Jha Azad, a minister in Indira's government, milled around my residence at Bharati Nagar. Some of them even tried to shower on me financial and other material benefits. My stark decision to remain poor and a struggling intelligence operator saved my soul. I refused to harvest gold out of the political quagmire in which I was put by circumstance at a critical moment of Indian history. But it had become impossible to maintain privacy of my family life. Most of the factional leaders lingered on at my home and were often invited to the luncheon or dinner table.

I must admit that the entire field machinery of the Intelligence Bureau was mobilised to help Indira Congress to win the minor but crucial municipal elections. R.K. Dhawan acted as the point man and I was advised to cooperate with him unabashedly. I did what was expected of me and I have reasons to believe that I did my job exceedingly well to the annoyance of the coterie around Rajiv Gandhi and M. L. Fotedar. There were irresponsible talks about 'Dhawan-Dhar' magic that won the crucial election for Indira Congress. Nothing was far from the truth. I did not do anything that an intelligence operator in my position was not supposed to do. It was an in thing and I did not dare to remain out of the in-circle of the day. Was there a choice? No. There was no choice, unless I preferred to rot in an insignificant corner of the IB or don the uniform again only to be haunted by the Marxists.

A faction in Rajiv coterie and the lobby headed by Fotedar and V.S Tripathy duo were left with bruised wounds as the candidates selected by them were not given electoral nomination by the party. Some of the Sanjay acolytes were given preference over choices made by Rajiv's friends and Fotedar faction. These apolitical politicians had initiated the process of 'collecting fund against election ticket.' They had no place to hide their faces.

That's what made them to gang up and influence Rajiv Gandhi to demand my scalp. The perverted argument that I had given preference to Sanjay's men had influenced Rajiv. It did not matter that Indira Gandhi cleared a winning list prepared by me on behalf of the Intelligence Bureau and she had scrupulously followed some of strategies suggested by me. They were in no position to dump R.K. Dhawan, not as yet. But he too was considerably marginalized.

The only option left to Rajiv acolytes and Fotedar-Tripathy axis was to punish me and weaken Dhawan. I have reasons to believe they were responsible for removing me unceremoniously from the key post of SIB Delhi and to substitute me by a relative of V.S. Tripathy, the officer whom I happened to replace at the Russian counterintelligence desk.

I was not hurt by the decision to pull me out. What were the bureaucrats for if they were not subjected to such pulls and pressures, especially in a system in which the intelligence machinery was an integral part of the masters of the day? I was hurt by the manner I was haunted out of the office of the SIB. J.N. Roy (Kohima colleague) was originally posted as my successor. But this was shot down by Fotedar lobby on grounds that Roy was associated with Shah Commission. He was removed within three days. The final choice fell on a relation of V.S. Tripathy.

My successor was ordered by V.S. Tripathy to 'take over' the office in my absence. He did so with

vengeance, remodelling my office room within two days and taking possession of all secret and top-secret files. The day I went to hand over charge he was gloriously seated in the remodelled room. I declined to hand over charge to him and passed on some of my sensitive human assets to my former deputy.

In the meantime T.V. Rajeswar tried to help me by offering a posting to Dacca. I declined the offer on grounds that my family in former East Pakistan had played prominent roles during the independence struggle. My cover posting to Dacca would not remain under cover for more than seven days. The R&AW wanted to make some cosmetic change to my name to camouflage my identity. I politely disagreed with the funny practice of the external intelligence organisation. Rajeswar himself was posted out as the Lieutenant Governor of Arunachal Pradesh.

I hanged in a limbo till Indira summoned me in September 1983 through R.K. Dhawan. She exhibited extreme kindness, enquired about my wife and children and finally thanked me for assisting her in Delhi elections. As I stood up to say goodbye to the Prime Minister she asked me to stay put and asked if I would like to accept a posting to the Indian High Commission in Canada. I was dumbfounded by the gesture. I had never gone to her and Dhawan with my bag of humiliation and decided to fit myself in the new desk job I was offered.

She was the first to say goodbye and wish best of health and prosperity for my family and me. I walked back into the room of R. K. Dhawan and was told to wait for my orders to join the ministry of external affairs on deputation. I have no doubt that R.K. Dhawan had taken initiative to rescue my career and reputation. I thanked the friend, who himself was being pushed to the walls.

I was overawed by the gesture, though I did not appreciate the decline in her political career and her faltering actions on different fronts. Did Sanjay's death affect her unique capabilities? I presume it did.

That was my last meeting with the much loved and hated lady Prime Minister of India, the last link with India's freedom struggle and the last of the intellectually and philosophically inspired Nehrus.

We boarded a flight for Ottawa on October 22, 1983, despite opposition from a section in the MEA and last minute obstacles created by a coterie in the PMO.

I did not expect a foreign posting and had never lobbied for it. I enjoyed operational intelligence. But my family was thrilled over the unexpected posting. I too reconciled to the idea of remaining out of India for a while and allow the things to cool down. Very little I did know that India would never be the same after Indira was forced to a corner to order Army action into the Golden Temple and achieve physical riddance of the Frankenstein created by Zail Singh and her son Sanjay.

Punjab had again sucked me into its orbit when I returned to India in 1987. I was straight away pushed into the orbit of intelligence operations in Punjab. That is a different story that will like to relate in greater details.

The three years that I served in the IB's subsidiary unit in Delhi had transformed me to a cosmopolitan intelligence operator from a tribal area specialist. I had lost my moral innocence in Manipur itself, but Delhi's grill fire had taught me that this mythological and historical city had changed very little. It thrived on conspiracy, thuggery and merciless power struggle. The format of governance had perhaps changed, but not the style. The ethnic and religious flavours of the high-strung players had evolved to history. But there was hardly any difference between the durbars of Jehangir and the Viceroys and that of Morarji Bhai and Indira Gandhi. Sanjay had filled in the gap left by some of the lesser day Mughals, who believed more in fencing with scimitar than the weapons of statecraft.

The bureaucrats too had not changed for the better. They were typified by durbar protocol,

worshipping the deity in power and carrying kirsch under their sleeves. Like minuscule wiring inside power motors they performed the functions of intricate connectivity between the politicians and the social powerhouses like the criminals, caste barons and industrial tycoons. The resultant juice flowed both up and downstream.

There was no place for independent players at the top and near-top layer of the system. Indira had added the new concept of 'commitment' in the bureaucratic system. Jawaharlal and Lal Bahadur did not tamper with the system and its nuts and bolts. They had carried out a few cosmetic changes to the inheritance they were endowed with by the British system. None of them had tried to indigenise the system to make it more compatible with the democratic and secular system of the Republic of India.

Indira had the vision as well as the strength. But her infallible faith in the eternal continuity of her dynasty had blinded the vision that she inherited from Jawaharlal. She and Sanjay had tinkered with the system and had done nothing to arrest the inexorable slide. A small functionary like me, placed at a key position had very little option but to swim along with the tide. Most post-independence bureaucrats were not born with lion hearts and inviolable will. They had to coat themselves with different varieties of Teflon.

I too had gathered Teflon coatings, but of a different kind. I had carried out certain immoral and illegal orders. I acted against the spirit of democracy and constitutional sanctions. But it must be remembered that I belonged to an agency, which was, and still is, beyond the pales of democracy and constitutional liberalism. This organisation is run according to its own rules and whims of the masters of the day. I acted as a Roman while I was in Rome.

But I had not allowed personal corruption to sully my soul. Intelligence operators and certain varieties of bureaucrats are bound to trample the constitution and law of the country unless they are made accountable to the elected representatives of the country, through overseeing committees of the Parliament. They will continue to dance to the tunes of the masters of the day till the political system in the country brings these organisations under specific Acts of the Parliament.

But I had not lost my admiration for Indira Gandhi. History had given chance to the leaders outside the Nehru-Gandhi family. But they had wasted that mandate by quarrelling like wayside simians for the spoils of power and office. She was still the tallest amongst the dwarfs. But her faith in injunctions, infallibility and intrigues had weakened her faith in democracy. She had a chance to offer India a modern political and administrative system. But she too had allowed the history to tumble through the degenerating process. She preferred to thrive on degeneration rather than fork lifting India to the standard of developed democracies of the West. But I still believed that in the absence of the Indian genius to throw up a more sustainable leadership she was the best choice, though a fog of disillusionment had started descending inside me.

Perfection is an idea. It is hardly achievable. My second tenure in Delhi offered me the opportunity to learn more tricks of the mysterious world of TechInt. I was fascinated by the immense potential of the use of electronic gadgets in generating intelligence and in denying intelligence to the inimical forces.

IB's inventory of the cute miniatures of video, audio, and radio equipments was very limited. It did not have access to satellite communication, interception and imagery. We were yet to encounter miniature cameras, scanners, copiers and bug busters. The restrictions imposed by the government on import of these items of intelligence generation baffled the people in the trade. But the baboos and master processors in the Union Home and Finance ministry often feigned that they were the best assessor of the national security requirements. Most of the proposals did not even go past the joint secretaries. The Director, Intelligence Bureau, can be imagined as a crude and spooky crook, but he is

the most helpless person in matters of administrative and financial powers. The politicians and the top bureaucrats never allowed to that useful bedroom spook to have its own wings.

But inventory limitations had not restricted my cravings for innovation. The TechInt operations against assigned targets involved intricate innovation. But the most important innovation involved a top leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). He was a very conscious person and in active touch with a Delhi based USSR intelligence operative. Most of his meetings with the diplomat used to take place in his personal car, an innocuous looking Fiat. His obliging driver had offered us access to the car for two hours. That was good enough to plant a long-life radio transmitter in his car. We had uninterrupted access to his conversations with the Soviet diplomat for about three months. But Indira Gandhi did not favour the idea of declaring the Soviet intelligence operator a persona non grata. I have reasons to believe that she had some 'friendly chat' with a top Marxist leader. That had taken care of a possible ugly diplomatic row.

At one point of time in 1982 Indira wanted the Parliament office of a particular ruling party minister to be bugged for sifting out intelligence nuggets about a possible coup against her. I opposed the idea of violating the sacred precincts of democracy. But I was overruled by my command and directed to implement the project with utmost care. It did not involve any intricate operation. One of the IB officers on deputation to the security staff was tackled and access was gained into the target office. A compatible receiver was stationed in a nearby 'friendly room'. This had offered important intelligence nuggets that Indira thought were vital to weeding out Maneka sympathisers from her proximity.

I did enjoy the mud in which I was thrown and asked to swim. It offered me innumerable scope to hone up my intelligence tradecraft. But the most important benefit that I achieved did not involve money and position. It involved my ideological bearing.

The partition pains had pushed me closer to the Hindutwa protagonists. I did not attend Shakhas, but I had developed friendly relationship with a couple of RSS leaders and at least two Jan Sangh leaders from Bengal. I had built up a hate-Muslim diaphragm somewhere inside my cranium. My journey through Manipur to Delhi and the overwhelming experience in Assam had not totally washed off that diaphragm. I still hated the Muslims. I still considered that my 'holy duty' was to destroy Pakistan, the fountainhead of Islamist bigotry.

My Delhi tenure helped me in developing a better appreciation of the Muslim community, their problems, aspirations and frustrations. My friendship with a non-descript Muslim scribe of Gali Qabristan near Turkman Gate offered me deep access into the frozen Muslim community in the ghettos around the Jama masjid, Nizamuddin, Okhla and several other urban villages in south and east Delhi. He offered me a better tour than William Dalrymple had offered to his readers later in 1993 in his fascinating work of literature-*City Of Djinnns*.

The Muslim world in the walled city was partly frozen in the past and partly mingled with the flow of social evolution. The community strictly followed the infallible injunctions of the Books and *fatwas* and believed ardently in the prescriptions of the past. Adaptation of changes in the religious and social prescriptions was frowned upon if not stoutly opposed.

To me it appeared that most of the common folks had accepted several social practices, which were distinctly Indian, if not of Hindu origin. Indian identity of certain social practices is necessarily not of Hindu origin, though my RSS friends tend to identify 'Indianness' with Hinduism. It is sufficient to say that soil, air, water and the people of India were not originated out of the Vedas. The waves of civilization, which traversed past the Indian subcontinent and sedimented down to the bones and marrows of the people, have generated a unique 'Indianness'. These are common heritages of the

Indian people. I did not find any inhibition in the Muslim community in and around Delhi to adopt such 'Indian' social practices in their daily lives. My later experience in other parts of India convinced me that the Indian Muslims are an integral part of our civilisation. I did not fail to notice that a certain section of the Muslim clergy, intellectuals and politicians were as eager to assert the distinct Islamic identity of the Muslims as my RSS friends were assertive about existence of Hindu molecule in everything Indian. Both these extreme groups were averse to accept the facts that the flow of human lineage was capable of creating and adopting social and behavioural values, which were distinctly different from the purist enunciation of religious dogma.

I am grateful to Gali Qabristan friend and other Muslim friends for offering me deep access into the Muslim community and the psyche of a people precariously hanging between the unique unified field of 'Indianness' and the uncertain cliff of Islamist fundamentalism.

EIGHTEEN

A FALL GUY AMIDST FALL COLOURS

Canada has never been a melting pot; more like a tossed salad.
Arnold Edinborough.

The top External affairs mandarins were not enthusiastic over my unexpected selection for the coveted posting. They had one personal security officer to the PM to oblige, who later adorned the post of Lieutenant Governor, Delhi. Most of them and a few key bureaucrat-watchers in Delhi were at a loss to comprehend the meaning of my secondment to the MEA. How could the PM change her choice? I refused to divulge the secret. That worried the speculators more. I enjoyed their discomfiture. The jealousy-reddened political and bureaucratic adversaries tried their best to dig out some skeletons from my cupboard. There were none. The fattest bank account that I had in Delhi stood at Rs. 21,000, bare enough to support our trip to Canada. I had to borrow an amount of rupees 20, 000 from a service friend. I have reasons to believe that some unseen hands at the PMH had silenced the last minute barrier-builders. It could be of R.K. Dhawan.

The briefing sessions in the Ministry of External Affairs were not designed to prepare a rank outsider like me for the charmed diplomatic environment in a Mission abroad. I was simply told that as a Counsellor I was borne on the strength of the Bureau of Security headed by G.S. Bajpai, Joint Secretary (Personnel), and an old IB hand. I was simply required to perform open duties that included liaison with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on security matters and I was not supposed to dabble in intelligence generation. The R&AW had an elaborate outfit in Canada and their undercover officers manned key posts at Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver.

I looked forward to a relaxed assignment after the high-strung and bone-grinding stint in SIB Delhi. I hadn't had a single day off and was under grinding pressure for over 18 hours seven days a week. The resultant tension had affected my health and I had contracted diabetes mellitus. The prospect of a tension free tenure and availability of advanced medical facilities propped my hopes up.

The Air India flight to Toronto via London was our first trans-Atlantic journey. We reached Ottawa on October 22, 1983, and were temporarily lodged at Chateau Laurier, the historic hotel next to the Canadian Parliament block. The first snow flurries of the season enchanted Sunanda and the kids but reminded us that we were ill prepared for the severe Canadian winter.

The High Commissioner, Mr. Shiva Ramakrishnan, a lateral entry to the Foreign Service from the field of journalism, was stricken with cancer and I could see him only once at his residence for a briefing session. Standing at the last post of his life Shiva Ramakrishnan had a simple piece of advice for me.

“You’ve joined the Mission at a crucial period. Sikh militancy is on the rise. I’m not happy with the performance of the R&AW officers. I’ve been briefed about your expertise in the field. Prepare for another tough battle.”

“But sir,” I reminded the High Commissioner, “I’m on an open assignment. I can’t indulge in intelligence generation.”

“You can’t get a divorce from your profession. I’m assigning the information and publicity desk to

you. Start working under that cover.”

“Please brief me about the job requirement.”

“You won’t need detailed briefing. Penetrate the Sikh community, make friends in the Gurdwaras and win over important community leaders. Maintain your cover carefully.”

The High Commissioner expired soon after my meeting with him. K.P. Fabian, the Deputy High Commissioner and my course mate helped me in settling down at the new station. His friendly attitude helped me in counterbalancing the hostile demeanour of the R&AW officer, originally from Indian Forest Service.

The Head of the Chancery, Ashok Attri, a young IFS officer had fixed up a home for us at Country Place on the Prescott Highway, well outside the city limits. I was given to understand that Ashok had obliged a fellow Punjabi shaven Sikh by renting his house. The inconvenience apart I abhorred the idea of living in a home owned by a strong protagonist of Sikh separatism. We lived in the house for a couple of months and later I forced the Mission to change over to a Chinese owned home near Hog’s Back, on the bank of Mooney’s Bay.

The work environment was far from satisfactory. Fabian was a nice routine personality having a flair for pro-active diplomacy. His access to the Indian community was limited to mostly Ottawa based professionals and social charmers. Several strata of the Indian diaspora did not normally care for the Indian diplomats except for occasional visit to the chancery for visa or passport renewal. And there were the socialites who derived self-glorification by rubbing shoulders with the members of the diplomatic corps, sipping late night whisky and attending national day functions.

The Indians were not a wholesome lot. They were organised on linguistic and parochial lines. The Tamil, Telugu, Malayali, Punjabi, Bengali, Hindi speaking north, central and western Indian people had crafted out distinct cultural cobwebs for themselves. They were mostly busy with their own community affairs. By 1983 end the Punjabi community had undergone a vertical and horizontal split. The Sikhs generally reorganised themselves around the Gurdwaras and displayed proclivities of supporting the separatist movement in Punjab. The Hindu Punjabis tilted away towards the Hindi speaking north Indian conglomerate. They decided to start a Hindu temple in Ottawa, as opposed to the construction of a Sikh Gurdwara. The chasm of Indian parochialism was as deep in Canada as it were in India.

The Indo-Canadian Association, a supposed apex body of the people of Indian people in Ottawa, was basically dominated by a stratum of leadership reminiscent of the moneybag fringe in India taking control of public institutions. They veered around the Indian diplomats with a view to shining up their own images, which were not altogether glittering.

The Indian diaspora in the rest of the Canadian provinces was not different. British Columbia has had a history of sizeable Sikh presence. They were prominently settled in BC cities like Vancouver, Kamloops, Williams Lake, Prince George, Burnaby, Surrey, Richmond and Abbotsford. Their presence in Prairie cities like Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer (Alberta), Regina, Pasqua, Lumsden (Saskatchewan), Winnipeg, Selkirk (Manitoba) were more noticeable than the presence of other Indian communities. The prime Ontario cities like Ottawa, Toronto, Greater Toronto, Hamilton, London, Guelph and Kitchener etc did boast of a sizeable presence of Sikh population. In addition to the ‘Little India’ locations in Toronto and Vancouver the hardworking Sikh community was dispersed in several interior cities and towns. Their lives veered around the business centres and Gurdwaras.

The crème of the Indian community were highly visible. But the ‘fringe’ Indians represented by the service sector, taxi pliers, oil, agriculture, forest and lumber, steel and other manufacturing industries were not visible to the Indian Mission. They earned their bread, attended the Gurdwaras, relished the

langar (community) food, listened to *shabad kirtans* and *Gurbanis*, read the Gurmukhi journals and listened to the audiotapes of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. A little later in early 1984 Bhindrawale's videotapes were shipped out from Punjab, the UK and USA. This category of Sikhs did not bother about the presence of the Indian diplomats and cared very little what they did have to say about the real ground situation. Some of them had come to believe in the slogan of a separate Sikh homeland.

It was not easy for me to settle down on my job. The Deputy High Commissioner was superficially sensitive to the Sikh problem. He sidetracked the Punjabi IFS officer, Attri and heavily depended on the R&AW representative, Sundar Kumar. Kumar, in real life Sundar Kumar Sharma, was not attuned to sensitive responses to a supercharged situation. His capability of churning the human mind and his social connections was crude. I did not have the experience of working ethos of the R&AW. But I presumed that the intelligence organisations all over the world depended on certain common tradecraft mechanism and honed up special skills according to specific job requirement.

Besides dropping out the 'sharma' family title Sundar had no other cover to camouflage his clandestine activities. His daughters used the 'sharma' family title in their schools and colleges. The Canadian Mounted Police and later the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) did not require long bargepoles to fathom out the shallowness of his cover.

Sundar did not welcome my presence in Ottawa and my first assignment as Counsellor Information and Publicity did upset his applecart. The job given to me was challenging. I had at my disposal one home based and two Canada based Indian staff in running the well stocked but badly indexed library, reading room and in bringing out the '*India News*', a weekly bulletin prepared and printed in the Mission. The absence of secretarial staff was a genuine impediment. A few local hands of Indian origin helped me out. Unqualified support from them made my tenure meaningful. Singaram, the man of all seasons, helped me in sprucing up the '*India News*' section.

I was the boss of three India based security assistants, sepoys on deputation from paramilitary forces. My experience in India about the social, official and hierarchical status of the police constables had left an indelible impression that 'the system' treated them as bonded serfs. My expectation that in a civilised country like Canada and in the elevated office of the High Commission the constables would be more humanely treated was belied. The fact was more horrible than fiction. They were made to live in hole like accommodation and were treated as domestic servants by the Mission officials. I managed to earn the ire of my colleagues and, gratitude of the junior functionaries by closing the tap on 'domestic duty' except at the residence of the High Commissioner. But that helped me to enhance the security ambience in the High Commission.

The battlefield inside the Mission was well defined. The fields in the far horizons were smoky and blurred. The vague concept of 'community relationship' did maintain a fragile hanging bridge between the Mission and the large Indian community spread over the vast territory of Canada.

The Indian Consulates in Toronto and Vancouver were supposed to maintain community relations and sell India to the Asian Indians and the Canadians. But the degree of interaction and cultivation were limited to national day celebrations, religious and cultural functions. The Asian Indian community in Canada was as fractured as it was back in their land of origin. They did not look upon the Mission as a bridge to their homeland. The degree of interaction depended on the personality of the chief of the Mission. Things had improved considerably after S.K Malik and J.C.Sharma took over at Toronto and Vancouver respectively.

It took me three months to list all the associations of the people of Indian origin in the ten major provinces. The territorial and ethnic provinces of Yukatan Territory, Northwest Territory and Nunavut did not have any significant presence of Asian Indian people.

I had before me a daunting task. Besides usual linguistic, ethnic and parochial divide the Asian Indian community suffered a major three way split. The Bhindranwale bang had generated loud echoes in Canada. A vast majority of the Sikh population had started establishing a transcontinental network encompassing the separatist elements in England, continental Europe and the USA.

It is often alleged that the People of The Book turn to inflexibility and fundamentalism at the slightest provocation. The history of evolution of the civilisations bears enough testimony to this paranoiac tendency. Way back in Indian Punjab, the illiterate rural Jat Sikhs from the Doaba, Majha and Malwa regions were swayed away by the hate campaign of Bhindranwale. But, I was amazed to witness the metamorphosis amongst the highly educated and cultured Sikh gentry in Canada and USA. They had started believing in the separatist iridology and their activities were entrenched in the Gurdwaras. Illiterate *granthis* and *pathis* had assumed the roles of interpreters of the divine will of the *Sadgurus* (holy Gurus), who spoke through Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the new *sant-sipahi* (saint warrior). A few Dam Dami Taksal brand priests did not even hesitate to compare the priest from Rode village with the revolutionary tenth Guru Gobind Singh, the last of the *sant-sipahis* of India.

The hubs of separatist activities were more manifest in the Ross Street, Malton Road and York Street Gurdwaras in Toronto and Surrey, Richmond, Kamloops and New Westminster Gurdwaras in British Columbia. Kuldip Singh Kohli, a coal trader in West Bengal, who spoke Bengali, very well, headed the agitating Sikh community at Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Jagjit Singh Chauhan, who piloted a so called Government of Khalistan in exile, and the US based Sikh leaders owing allegiance to World Sikh Organisation (WSO), formed the other three arms of the Khalistan movement on either side of the Atlantic.

A couple of important Sikh separatists who had committed heinous crimes in India had found safe haven in Canada. Talvinder Singh Parmar, Inderjit Singh Riyat of the Babbar Khalsa, Satinder Pal Singh Gill and Pushpinder Singh Sachdeva of the International Sikh Youth Federation had found Canadian ignorance and tolerance conducive to promote separatist activities. They took advantage of the aggravated Sikh sentiment in India and had managed to capture the management of some of the important Gurdwaras.

Fabian was uneducated about the Sikh psyche and the issues involved in the ongoing Punjab imbroglio. Some mishandling of the situation had resulted in Fabian's manhandling by the agitating Sikhs at Winnipeg. I also happened to face angry demonstrations in London and Hamilton (Ontario) and Montreal (Quebec).

The situation, however, considerably improved after S.J.S. Chhatwal, a senior diplomat, assumed charge at the Ottawa Mission. A shaven Sikh, Chhatwal had the advantage of speaking the language and merging with the Sikh milieu. Under his guidance I took a crash course on reading and writing Gurmukhi and speaking *thet* (pure) Punjabi spoken in the *majha* area of Punjab. Sardar Harinder Singh, an aged India based ministerial staff coached me well and within three months I could read and write the language. I was soon to discover that the language of the rugged Punjabis was no less sweet than my mother tongue, Bengali. In fact I was charmed by the sweetness of the language. The admixture of Persian and Urdu had added a unique texture to the language that could express a lot in limited vocabulary. The common bondage of Sanskrit made my task easier. With the language barrier gone I suddenly discovered that the Punjabi vernacular media published from Toronto, Vancouver, New York and California had tonnes of intelligence to offer. After all open and published materials constitute 60% of the information pedalled as collected, collated and cooked intelligence by the professionals. I did not have, anymore, to depend on the mercies of Ashok Attri, the other Punjabi

diplomat in the Mission.

I discussed the priorities of the Mission with Chhatwal. A seasoned diplomat as he was, Chhatwal advised me to prioritise my task in the flowing fashion:

- Penetration of a few selected Gurdwaras.
- Cultivation of a few identified targets amongst the most vocal section of the Sikh community.
- Penetration of the Punjabi print and electronic media and control of the print and electronic media operated by the non-Sikh segments of the people of Asiatic and Indian origin.
- Creation of a few clandestine human assets in the 'lumpen' segment of the Sikh workforce in Canada, who were more drawn to the separatist leaders and hate-preaching priests.
- To reach out to the Indian community with saturated supplies of audio and videotapes on current affairs in India and specially filmed tapes on the atrocities committed by the Bhindranwale goons.
- To convert the '*India News*' to a quality publication with the help of a newly acquired fast printing/copying machine.
- To meet the Canadian Foreign Office mandarins and the RCMP point men at regular intervals to brief them about developments back in India and to share whatever '*open*' information the Indian Mission could cull out from the community through '*open*' means.
- To target the mainstream Canadian print and electronic media and sell the Indian side of the story.
- To maintain ironclad cover and not to betray my involvement in intelligence generation.
- To befriend key diplomats in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka Missions with a view to reaching some targeted members of the Pakistan Mission.
- To generate a few 'friends' amongst the Canadian Members of Parliament.

The prioritised task list was shared with Joint Secretary (Personnel) in the MEA and he approved of the line of action. Gaurishankar Bajpai, an officer seconded from the R&AW, was not happy with the system of information sharing by his mother organisation. He too, like Chhatwal wanted to build up his own pool of intelligence and top up his portion of the cake with cream and cocoa. I did not mind as long as my cover was not blown up. However, I kept the Director Intelligence Bureau informed of all the developments and intelligence input. I could not trade my loyalty to my mother organisation for my transient comfort in Ottawa Mission.

The list was too unwieldy for a one-man army and a lone General. Chhatwal was not in the habit of saying no. I too hadn't learned the use of negative language when it came to professional work. I saluted the General and accepted the task with a brave heart. Chhatwal favoured me by posting a regular MEA borne secretary at my disposal and a lady clerk to take care of my routine commitment in the I&P section of the Mission. He was gracious enough to share with me a little fund from his discretionary budget, a rare gesture by any senior diplomat. This was a great help, as I did not have access to the 'secret service fund' enjoyed by my colleague from the R&AW.

I must admit that Sunanda, my wife too pitched in a big way by cultivating the wives of the targeted community leaders, host country and third country diplomats and Canadian MPs and media persons.

So, our expectation of a 'honeymoon posting' had vanished. We were again rooted in for a bitter struggle. It was a challenging struggle to transform the sleepy Mission to a pro-active spearhead. Our

job was rendered more hazardous after Operation Blue Star and Wood Rose back in the Punjab.

The Canadian political and diplomatic corps was more obsessed with the set theme of violation of human rights in the Punjab. They were yet to wake up to the menacing threat of terrorism. India was still a suspect in Canadian eyes. The propaganda machine of Pakistan and a few Islamic nations friendly to it were more active than we were in influencing the Canadian opinion makers. They poured in more money to oil their propaganda machine and they had found ready allies amongst the 'hurt and bruised' Canadian humanitarians and the misled Sikh population.

The USA and Canada were still enamoured of the Cold War ally Pakistan and its frontline involvement in Afghanistan. Sikh terrorism and the festering sore in Kashmir were viewed as failure of Indian statesmanship and diplomacy. They were yet to wake up to the truth that Sikh militancy was a by-product of Pakistan's 'unfinished agenda' of partition and a vast quantity of resources pumped in Afghanistan to humiliate the Red Bear were being siphoned down to the Punjab militants.

The West was careless in using the Islamists to recreate Russia's Vietnam in Afghanistan. The CIA, MI6 and Nationale de Securite and other ally intelligence outfits freely collaborated with Pakistan's ISI. This was the historical ground where the USA sowed the seeds of its Frankenstein, Osama bin Laden.

The Reagan-Mulroney bonhomie did not only pitch for free trade and economic cooperation. The Conservative Canadian government almost blindly toed the Cold War initiative of its major partner. Moreover, the multicultural society of Canada was tuned to absorb the politics of protestation and democratic defiance. They were not expected to react in a manner that Delhi expected of them. The situation changed vastly after the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the sabotage of Air India Boeing 747 over the Atlantic. The Indian point of view on Sikh terrorism did gradually sink into psyche of the Canadian government and its security and intelligence agencies.

I was not any Cinderella to be pushed into the uncharted wild forest in Canada. I was acutely aware of the capability of the RCMP and the CSIS to monitor the movements and activities of foreign diplomats. Their job was made easier after Operation Blue Star, when the Chancery premises and our homes were put under physical presence of the RCMP. We were made to carry an armed security in our cars. Obviously our phones were on the hook of the RCMP and the CSIS. Surveillance on our movements and intelligence investigation of our 'frequent social contacts' were expected of the Canadian security and intelligence organisations.

I maintained an inscrutable straight face and liaison with my security point man in the Ministry of External Affairs on Sussex Drive and the RCMP counterpart in a designated meeting place. Later I had occasions to interact with the India desk in charge and the CIDA officials when I switched over from I&P to the political desk. But my undercover activities, strictly outside the charter of my assignment, continued uninterrupted.

I started with the up coming Ottawa Gurdwara on Prescott High Way. My training in Indian classical music and percussion instruments came to help. I made it a point to be there on most Sundays to attend and often participate in the *keertan* (devotional songs) and share *langar* with the Sikh gentry. The *ardas* (final prayer) was usually critical of Indira Gandhi, especially after the Blue Star and death of Bhindranwale. Some of the couplets were pretty offensive in nature. But I preferred to live with it and share the anger of the Sikh community over the destruction of the *Akal Takht* (seat of temporal power) and their demand for a separate homeland for the Sikhs. The audiotapes containing fanatical discourses of Bhindranwale were accompanied by display of photographs of the martyrs (slain terrorists).

The Hindu Punjabis had ceased visiting the Gurdwara out of mutual hatred and security

considerations. They took initiative to construct a Hindu temple near Uplands, on way to Upper Canada Village. I provided discreet support to the venture and helped the organisers in raising funds. But I did not agree with their idea of boycotting the Sikhs and stop attending the Gurdwara. My tactics paid off well when S.J.S.Chhatwal joined the Mission. He picked up the fragile thread spun by me and utilised his Sikh identity to the fullest extent.

My resolve not to allow the ambience of hatred to firewall my professional initiative gradually endeared me to a section of the vocal Sikh community. I was granted access even to the extremist controlled Ross Street and Malton Road Gurdwaras in Toronto and Surrey and Westminster Sikh temples in Vancouver. The Sikh community in Edmonton, Regina and Winnipeg accepted me without reservation. Even the Bengali speaking Sikh of Winnipeg, Kuldip Singh Kohli, a close associate of Talvinder Singh Parmar, did not hesitate to have luncheon meetings with me. It was well nigh impossible to win over militant figures like Talvinder, Ajaib Singh Bagri, Satinder Pal Singh Gill, Labh Singh Rode (nephew of Bhindranwale) and scores of other hardened separatists. I did not aim that high too. The smooth access into the Sikh community had facilitated identification of targets close to the leaders of the Babbar Khalsa, World Sikh Organisation and International Sikh Youth Federation. At least two Punjabi language newspaper editors were ready games to cooperate with a view to isolating the mad fringe in the Sikh community and to putting an end to free 'importation' of criminalized militants from India to the peaceful and prosperous Sikh community in Canada. The militants later gunned down one of the editors for his suspected links with the RCMP and the CSIS.

It would be a vain claim to assert that the Indian High Commission had achieved complete penetration of the core of the Sikh militants. It was not impossible to carry out technical operations in a foreign country. But the MEA was not willing to override the R&AW and sounded a discreet advice that the High Commissioner should only depend on human assets. But I had managed to plant a micro tape recorder on one of the close associates of Labh Singh Rode, the ISYF chief, and get some of connectivity between the Sikh militant outfits in Ottawa and Toronto based Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) operatives of Pakistan. The Government of India had later shared some of these evidences with the Canadian authorities and Labh Singh was forced to leave Canada and seek refuge with his ISI mentors in Lahore.

It was altogether a different story with the Babbar Khalsa protagonists like Talvinder Singh Parmar, Ajaib Singh Bagri, Ripudaman Singh Malik and Surjan Singh Gill. Talvinder had finally fled India in 1982 in the wake of his involvement in heinous crimes. The Babbar Khalsa had always regarded Pakistan as a natural ally. They were opposed to Dam Dami Taksal brand of purist Sikh prescriptions and drew inspiration from the Kurd and Islamic Fidayeen rebels. Talvinder had visited Pakistan in 1979 and had struck a clandestine deal with the ISI. Under the patronage of the ISI the Babbars had organised some British Columbia Sikhs to support the hijackers of the Indian Airlines aircraft in September 1981.

Talvinder's outfit International Babbar Khalsa acted through Surjan Singh Gill, a Canadian Sikh of Malayan origin, to establish networking with Jagjit Singh Chauhan (London), Ganga Singh Dhillon (USA), Dr. A.S. Sekhon (USA) and Karnail Singh Gill, an Ottawa based revenue department employee of the government of Canada. Criminals like Sewa Singh Lalli and Tarsem Singh Babbar later joined this network.

Talvinder's activities took sinister proportions between 1984 and 1985. His involvement with experimentations with IED in rural localities in British Columbia had drawn attention of the RCMP sleuths. His masterstroke was to plan the downing of AI Boeing 747 Kanishka on June 23, 1985, and bomb explosions at Narita airport in Japan. Two more colleagues of Talvinder, Manjit Singh Kohli of

Winnipeg and Inderjit Singh Riyat of Vancouver had played important role in these heinous crimes. Later the Hamilton conspiracy case, involving planned attacks on Indian aircrafts, demonstrated that the Babbar were determined to carry out acts of violence against Indian targets in Canada, the USA and UK.

I achieved a partial access into the core cadre of Talvinder through a talent based at Calgary. The High Commissioner provided the sinuses of the operation and I had succeeded in inducing the Calgary man to shift temporarily to Burnaby, near Vancouver city. He attained a place of prominence in a local Gurdwara and earned Talvinder's confidence. He was later deputed by Talvinder to consult a Sikh flying trainer who operated at Sudbury, Ontario. I have reasons to believe that the flying instructor was not in any way involved with the downing of AI Boeing 747. He had shared with me the information that a close associate of Talvinder had evinced keen interest in flying mechanism of giant transcontinental birds. I had shared this information with Delhi well before the June '85 massacre in the air.

He was the person who tipped me off in early 1986 about the possibility of use of the Safdarjung Flying Club by the Sikh militants for crashing an explosive loaded aircraft on the nearby residence of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. This input, strengthened by other internal inputs had led to the closure of the amateur flying club operating out of the next-door airstrip.

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Cultivation of the diplomats from Bangladesh Mission did not pose a serious problem. The High Commissioner, a General in Bangladesh Army, was associated with the freedom struggle. I hadn't had the opportunity to encounter him during my forays to the 'Mukti Bahini' training camps in Cachar-Sylhet border. But he was pretty indulgent to a fellow Bengali speaking diplomat and favoured me with his analysis of the security scenario in the subcontinent. He was deeply concerned over the spread of the ISI tentacles in Bangladesh and spread of religious fundamentalism. His friendly dialogues helped to collect valuable data on a key diplomat in Pakistan High Commission, whose exquisitely beautiful lady wife was born out of wedlock between an English father and an Assamese mother. Besides Urdu she could fluently speak Bengali and Assamese.

This was a valuable tip. While Sunanda befriended her on the University Club network, I used my fluent Assamese and Bengali to rekindle in her the memories of Guwahati and Calcutta. The nice human being in her was as beautiful as her exterior appearance. On one occasion when we were visiting India on home leave she did not hesitate to choose us to send some gift to her aunt in Calcutta. Her husband was later posted in Dhaka and we had a final friendly meeting in Calcutta.

Her '*unconscious*' revelations helped me to identify two ISI operatives, one in Ottawa and the other in Toronto. Thereafter I did not find it difficult to 'exploit' the services of tow journalists of Indian origin to cultivate the undercover Pakistani diplomats and ferret out useful information.

My other friend in Bangladesh Mission was another Mukti Bahini veteran. I had chanced to meet him at Silchar in early 1971. As a young captain of the East Pakistan Rifles he had rebelled against the Pakistani genocide and switched over loyalty to Mujibur Rahman's Awami League. Our rusted acquaintance flourished into friendship and our common interest in 'fishing expedition' had taken us to the shores of Thousand Island, Dow's lake and Meach Lake on Gatineau National Park. We two Bengalis, for whom rice and fish bowl represent the better part of the heaven, did not find it difficult to strike a relationship that had transcended the diplomatic limitations. It is needless to say that as a trained professional I possessed the better expertise to peck into his subconscious mind. I benefited

immensely from this 'fishing friendship'. He later rose to the rank of Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh.

We had boarded the trans-Atlantic flight in October 1983 with the fond hope of enjoying the winter snow, fall colours and the quiet social ambience of Canada and take better care of the kids. But the work bug invaded our privacy there too and I was again sucked into the vortex of 'intelligence activities', which was the assigned prerogative of my R&AW colleagues.

My misery was toned down considerably with the arrival of a wonderful couple from the MEA, Manilal Tripathy and his wife Shashi Tripathy. Manilal, an Oriya Brahmin, was married to a Punjabi Jat, Shashi. But they made a delightful couple and an efficient team in the office. Mani, the new Deputy High Commissioner took over a lot of my burden and Shashi shouldered the I&P portfolio. I was assigned the cover job of Counsellor Political. Ashok Attri, a career diplomat, was supposed to take over the Political desk. He was naturally hurt by this arrangement. But we never allowed our friendship to falter at the mundane shores of petty office assignment. He continued to be the Head of the Chancery.

The new assignment helped me to devote more time in pursuing my 'other activities'. In perspective, I feel that the High Commissioner had intentionally made this delicate change. It gave me better access to some of the Canadian parliamentarians, intellectuals and opinion makers. This did not involve 'intelligence generation'. The delicate task was related to selling the Indian version of the Sikh imbroglio and to convince the Canadian leadership that India was a victim of Sikh terrorism and Pakistan's proxy war.

June brings in its wake, in Delhi and the surrounding tracts of Haryana, Rajasthan and Punjab scorching heat, dust storm and drought. But June 1984 had ushered in an unprecedented failure of Indian statecraft, internal security machineries and secular political process.

Run out of all options and her well-known uncanny sense of strategic evaluation and manipulation Indira Gandhi had reached a dead end in the blood sodden Punjab. Sikh politics had often presented unexpected surprises but no one in India ever doubted the folksy patriotism of the Sikhs. Post emergency political manipulation and the strategy of matching Akali fundamentalism by unleashing Bhindranwale brand of fanaticism by Sanjay Gandhi, Zail Singh and other players in Indira's court had generated a unique field of force that was not purely a Sikh issue. The master players in Delhi had failed to calculate the impact of calculated nurturing and nourishing of Islamic fundamentalist forces by General Zia-ul-Haq, President Reagan and their Cold War allies in the West and Middle East. That Pakistan would stoke Sikh discontent and reorient its thrust in Kashmir was made sufficiently clear by the military junta in 1979. Unmindful of the tectonic geo-political shift Indira had allowed her near and dear ones to play with fire. Her new managerial team spearheaded by Rajiv Gandhi too had failed to invent strategic moves to deal with the Punjab imbroglio without declaring an all out war on the symbols of Sikh faith. The Army was called on June 2 to aid the civil authorities in the Punjab. The Indian state had for the second time mobilised a professional army to fight its own people. The first such engagement had started in the North East.

I received a call from an Amritsar based friend who lived in Galli Jallianwala Bagh next to the Golden temple and the historic ground where a British General had mowed down hundreds of Indian freedom fighters in a planned action of genocide. He gave me almost a running commentary on the deployment of the armoured and cavalry columns and gun positions. Could anything be done to save the Golden Temple? He asked. I advised him to pray and take care of himself and his family. I also told him that Army in civil action is a blind and injured lion. It behaves according to its own animal rules.

I briefed Fabian and advised him to interact with the Canadian authorities to augment security around the Chancery premises and residences of the diplomats. He waited, for good reasons, for June 7. Delhi had pushed the Indian state to a new precipice of tectonic chasm. For a while our communication links with the Canadian Sikh community were disrupted. Even the sympathetic Canadians were baffled by the military option used by Delhi. But we had managed to bounce back and re-establish toehold inside some of the Gurdwaras and reopen dialogue with a few Sikh leaders.

But a great impasse was created when Indira Gandhi was shot dead by her Sikh security guards on October 31, 1984. The shell-shocked world woke up to a greater shock when Hindu mob owing allegiance to Indira Congress killed thousands of Sikhs in Delhi and other places in India.

I received two calls from Delhi on the 30th October night at around 11.30 p.m. (Canadian date and time). The first caller was a friend of mine in Indira Gandhi's personal office at 1 Safdarjung Road (not R.K.Dhawan). He broke the news of Indira's death at about 10 a.m. Indian time on October 31. The next call came around 7.30 a.m. on October 31 (Canadian date and time) from our family physician, a Sikh doctor, who lived in a lane behind Gurdwara Balasahib, behind Sarai Kale Khan. His neighbourhood was attacked by an Indira Congress mob. My doctor friend requested me to call up someone in Delhi police to rescue his family. I was not aware that the most shameful act of Indian drama was being enacted under the very conniving eyes of Delhi police. Finally I rang up a Muslim friend and requested him to rescue the aged doctor and his family and to shift them to the safety of Muslim majority Jama Masjid area. Thanks to the instrument invented by a Canadian that helped me saving the lives of six innocent Indians, who preferred to worship their God in a different manner.

My understanding of the dynamics of creation of the Bhindranwale phenomenon and its tragic consequences did not inhibit my commitment to the job I was assigned. I had come to know Indira Gandhi under difficult circumstances. I had developed a rational respect for her nationalism, patriotism and her peculiar sense of attachment to the country and its people. Perhaps she was the best that the post-Nehru India could invent for itself. She was rejected and was again called back because the other pack of political jokers had miserably failed to give any semblance of governance to the problem-ridden country.

Indira Gandhi's assassination and mindless killing of the Sikhs added an altogether new dimension to the functioning of the Mission in Ottawa. Movements of the diplomatic and non-diplomatic staff were severely restricted. Our families were made to maintain a low profile in the social circuit. For a while the RCMP maintained discreet watch on the schools where our children studied. Armed guards were placed at our residences.

It appeared that the forced polarisation between the Indians of Hindu and Sikh origin had suddenly developed an unbridgeable chasm. Very few Sikh members of the Indian community turned up for diplomatic parties and most of us were barred from the Sikh homes and gurdwaras. New barriers were created between the Mission and the Sikh community.

The High Commissioner summoned me to the Mission on November 3, a Saturday. Manilal, the Deputy High Commissioner and Shashi, his wife and Counsellor were present too. I drove through the season's first heavy snow and was closeted with the three senior professional diplomats for over three hours. A few pertinent issues discussed included upgrading the Mission's physical security and generation of intelligence.

The High Commission ruefully lamented that the R&AW representatives in Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver were not sharing intelligence with him and he was to depend on handouts that he received through the MEA. He reiterated the earlier scheme that he had drawn up for covering Sikh militancy in Canada and requested me to accelerate the process of generating intelligence.

I hesitated to accept the added responsibility and requested that the R&AW representative should be separately briefed to attend to the urgent needs of the High Commissioner. I was overruled on grounds that most of the briefings given by him were insipid and did not contain hard intelligence.

I was not enamoured with the professional performance of R&AW first secretary in Ottawa. The Toronto representative, a retired Army officer, went about his job as if he was deployed on trench warfare. He was busier in preparations for settling down in Canada or the USA after retirement. He was not in a hurry to antagonise the Sikh community by being truthful to his department and country. His inefficiency was well compensated by the Consul General, a career diplomat.

However, Gurinder Singh, a young Indian Police Service officer, in Vancouver proved to be a professionally sound person. But the systemic wrong wiring inhibited him in sharing his intelligence input directly with the Consul General and the High Commissioner. Fortunately for the Mission the situation vastly improved after J.C.Sharma, a career diplomat took charge at Vancouver.

I do not intend to disclose the details of the intelligence operations that were carried out between Mani, Shashi and me in deference to the niceties of diplomatic protocol. But we did a lot and reached appreciable penetration in the key Sikh inhabited cities in Canada. Certain friends were developed in Chicago, New York, California and Seattle who supplemented the coverage of the World Sikh Organisation and Council of Khalistan. A few journalists of Indian as well as the US origin helped me out to stretch south beyond the political boundaries of Canada.

Rajiv Gandhi's succession was heralded by the general elections in December 1984 and for a while he emerged as a young charismatic leader often compared to JFK in the western hemisphere. But witch hunting that is peculiar to Delhi's durbar politics witnessed the disgraceful removal of Dhawan, the powerful aide to Indira. He was again made to walk over the fire and stigmatised as the person at whom the 'needle of suspicion' pointed out, as a suspect in the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Manipulation of the judicial luminaries is not uncommon in India and Justice Thakkar lived up to the expectation of the machinations of some of the courtiers of Rajiv Gandhi, especially Arun Nehru and M. L. Fotedar. It caused tremendous pain to my family and me. We had developed friendship with the 'trouble shooter, dirty manipulator and corrupt person', as his critics and a section of the media severally described Dhawan. He could be anything, I was ready to concede, but I never believed that he could be a part of the conspiracy that killed Indira Gandhi. My bosses in Delhi advised me that I should desist from contacting Dhawan on phone as he was 'contaminated'. It meant that he was under HumInt and TechInt surveillance.

In early April 1985 I stumbled against a piece of 'uncorroborated information' that the ISYF, Canada chapter and the International Babbar Khalsa were planning some spectacular show. Discreet probe in quarters closer to Satinder Pal Singh Gill, Avtar Singh Koonar and Kulwant Singh Nagra of the ISYF and Ripudaman Singh Malik, Talvinder Singh Parmar and Ajaib Singh Bagri of the Babbar Khalsa raised reasonable doubt on two important security considerations. The first one involved attack on Rajiv Gandhi's residence from a truck mounted three inch mortar. The second suspected threat pertained to sabotage involving a civilian Indian aircraft.

The information was shared with Delhi and the High Commissioner personally briefed the Canadian foreign office. A sleek worded demarche was also despatched to the Canadian authorities. It was not known then to us in the Mission that the Canadian intelligence had also access to prior intelligence on the likely attack on Air India planes. It appeared to us that the security experts in Canada were still not motivated enough by their political masters to swoop down on the Sikh militants. The Canadian Human Rights lobby and a section of the media were still doubtful about the nature and extent of 'Sikh terrorism' in India.

But their fanciful deliberations on human rights violation against the Indian Sikhs received a severe jolt when Canada based Sikh militants carried out the dastardly act of sabotage by blowing out AI 182 from the skies over Cork, Ireland on June 23, 1985, killing all 329 lives on board.

I received a call from a London based friend at about 04.45 (Canadian) on 23.6.85 asking me if I had heard the BBC broadcast about the AI 182 crash. I jumped out of the bed, tuned in the TV and the radio and gathered sketchy information about the disappearance of the flight from Heathrow radar screen.

I woke up the High Commissioner and the Deputy High Commissioner and shared the information with them. I was asked to rush to the residence of the High Commissioner immediately. Later I visited Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver to make preliminary enquiries about the act of sabotage. The shocked Indo-Canadian community and the Canadians could not bring themselves up to the truth that some people of Indian origin settled in Canada had really carried out the dastardly act.

The investigation was later formally taken over by the CBI and the Canadian police. I assisted them from within the limits imposed on me by my status in Canada. Under instruction of the High Commissioner I shared with the RCMP, from time to time, such information about the air-sabotage that could be pedalled as open information and information received from India. In the Mission we had succeeded in gathering good intelligence about involvement of the Babbar Khalsa and other Sikh militant elements.

The International Babbar Khalsa had carried out the sabotage with meticulous planning. On June 22nd Canadian Airlines had booked a passenger M. Singh from Vancouver to Delhi. He was supposed to take the AI flight at Toronto. His luggage was booked but he did not travel. The suitcase was later transferred to AI 182 for Delhi, though the actual passenger did not show up. The flight that carried the baggage of elusive M. Singh finally left the Canadian port at Montreal at 17.10 GMT. It disappeared from the radar screen at about 18.13 GMT over Cork, Ireland.

The Babbar Khalsa also planted another bomb to sabotage the AI flight from Narita to Delhi. A piece of baggage belonging to Lal Singh was booked by the Canadian Airlines flight from Vancouver to Narita. It was supposed to be shifted to a connecting Air India flight a little later. The elusive Lal Singh did not travel by the Canadian flight. The bomb exploded at about 07.13 GMT on ground at Narita killing two Japanese handlers, just an hour ahead of the unfortunate AI 182.

The intelligence input generated by me about the conspiracy and preparations were shared by the High Commissioner with the Canadian authorities. All that I can reveal is that in the year 2000 the Canadian authorities again approached me to give them expert advice about the remaining culprits, besides Inderjit Singh Riyat, incarcerated in UK and Talvinder Singh Parmar, who was killed in police encounter in India. It took 15 long years for the Canadian police to arrest Ripudaman Singh Malik, Ajaib Singh Bagri and Hardiyal Singh Johal and charge them for downing the AI flight. These arrests followed my visit to Canada in June 2000, 13 years after I left Canada on conclusion of my tenure. It was my last tribute to the departed souls of 330 victims of AI flight-329 passengers and my Vancouver based friend Tara Singh Hayer, a journalist, who was gunned down by the Sikh terrorists in 1988, for the precise crime of betraying his '*quam*' and collaborating with the Indians. I happened to meet him last in November 1987, when my services were requisitioned by the High Commissioner to generate intelligence during the visit of Rajiv Gandhi to Vancouver session of the CHOGM. This valiant Indian did not fail me then too. But he paid a heavy price for opposing the insane bunch of terrorists, who formed an integral part of Pakistan's proxy war against India.

We visited India on a short stint of 'home leave' in 1985 winter. Rajiv Gandhi was riding the crest of popularity and for a while it appeared that this one Nehru-Gandhi was the correct choice for Indira Congress and India. I was aware of the harassment and persecution meted out to my friend Dhawan. Rajiv Gandhi had removed the 'loyal servant of the family' on suspicion of his linkages with the killers of Indira Gandhi and the contrived Thakkar Commission was manipulated to pronounce a jaundiced verdict against him.

Dhawan was the loneliest person in Delhi. India's political and bureaucratic who's who had abandoned him. His Golf Links home was put on surveillance and his phones were on tap. I visited him while on a morning stroll, covering my face with a cape. But my camouflage did not fool the IB watchers. I was summoned to the North Block and advised not to keep company of the 'enemy of the Gandhi family'. I refused to oblige my bosses and told them that my friendship had nothing to do with my official work and my personal bondage did not militate against my loyalty to the government and the country. I proffered the same advice to Vincent George when he tersely 'requested' me to shun the company of my old friend. Fortunately the watchers of the 'establishment' did not bug me thereafter.

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My involvement in intelligence generation in Canada militated against the terms of my tenure. It pleased a few but irritated many. The funny incident of withdrawal of the total R&AW set up from Canada in 1986, at the request of the Canadian authorities exemplified the seamier side of inter-departmental relationship and cooperation between the prime Indian intelligence organisations.

In July 1985 I was graced with the posting of a private secretary to assist me in my work. The nice guy appeared to be too nice and submissive to be borne on the rolls of MEA's baboodom. The High Commissioner dismissed my initial suspicion that he might be a plant from the R&AW. But I had failed to figure out the gracious action of the MEA, who had refused to provide me with a secretarial staff for about last two years.

That the R&AW was heading for a crash was discernible in mid 1985. Karnail Singh Gill, an important leader of the Canadian chapter of the World Sikh Organisation, was not fond of fraternising with the Mission staff. He appeared in my office a little before the AI episode and requested for Indian visa. I directed him to Sundar Kumar, the consular officer and escorted him to my colleague's room. Karnail paused for a while and broke into an exclamation. He had undergone Indian Forest Service training at Dehradun with Sundar Kumar. The dialogue continued somewhat in the following line:

"Aren't you Sundar? When did you join the Foreign Service?"

"Do I know you?"

"Don't kid. You're the same Sundar Kumar Sharma, my course mate at Dehradun? What are you doing here? Are you in the R&AW?"

"Sorry. I don't know you. I am not a Sharma. I never attended forest service training. I belong to 1968 batch of the IFS."

Karnail's visa was not serviced, as it was a referral category case. His name figured in the black list and he was not supposed to be favoured with visa. But the damage was done. Sundar Kumar's cover was blown up and he was identified as an R&AW officer.

Col. Grewal, the R&AW representative in Toronto, committed the other act of blatant indiscretion. A former Army officer, Grewal had drifted into the R&AW through one of the secret paramilitary

forces controlled by India's external intelligence organisation. At the fag end of his career he was preoccupied with the obsession of settling his children and himself in the USA. I could not vouch on his competence, as an intelligence operator, but that he was not properly exposed to finer nuances of tradecraft was apparent from his style of functioning. The Canadian Sikh community was ready to accept an Indian Christian and Muslim face but the Hindus and visible pro-government Sikhs were as allergic to them as red rug to bulls. Grewal was not trained to operate as a low-key intelligence agent. He preferred to function in paramilitary fashion.

Grewal invited one of his targets, an editor of a Punjabi vernacular weekly, to a luncheon meeting at a downtown restaurant, not very far from the Consulate premises. The CG S.K. Malik and I had earlier noticed the editor, a rabid supporter of Khalistan movement for being in touch with certain ISI operatives located in Toronto. The clever editor enjoyed the luncheon and recorded his conversation with Col. Grewal and gave somewhat wide publicity in his paper. Grewal's cover was blown up.

The incidents were brought to the notices of the High Commissioner, Joint Secretary (Personnel) and I happened to personally brief the Secretary R&AW during my home leave to Delhi in early 1986. Under normal circumstances both the officers should have been posted out of Canada under some ruse or other. But the Cabinet Secretariat did not listen to friendly advices. On the other hand I was baffled to be briefed by the High Commissioner that my intelligence operations were causing concern to the R&AW bosses in Delhi. Reports forwarded by me and the HC received better appreciation from the PMO, MEA and the IB.

But I was not at all prepared for the biggest surprise when the Canadian government declared the entire R&AW set up in Canada persona non grata (PNG) and requested their immediate withdrawal. It came as big shock when my private secretary Shyamsundar too was declared a PNG. It dawned on me that the secretary was either an R&AW plant on me or he was won over by Sundar Kumar. I probed into the matter and was surprised to know that Shyamsundar was 'bought over' by Sundar Kumar at a monthly 'fee' of C\$400.00. He religiously passed on to his extra-departmental employer copies of all intelligence documents that I dictated to him. It was a unique way of intelligence generated by my R&AW colleague sitting in the next room.

The Canadians did not punish Shyamsundar for betraying his parent department, the MEA. He was compromised on several occasions while accompanying Sundar Kumar for 'agent meeting' in not so cleverly selected rendezvous. I interrogated Shyam, in my capacity as the 'security officer' of the Mission. He readily admitted to have fallen for easy cash and bonus Scotch. The findings were shared with the HC and other slotted recipients in Delhi.

The R&AW, I was told, had finally reached a conclusion that I was responsible for exposing their representatives in Canada. It pained me but I was more amazed by the monumental ostrich back in Delhi, which preferred to burrow deeper into the sand instead of looking straight into the problem. Not a single senior officer of the R&AW cared to visit Canada to analyse the causes for the debacle.

We left the Canadian shores in July 1987 with a sense of fulfilment and an emptier pocket. The common belief that foreign postings fill up the coffers of the poorly paid officers did not shower manna on me. We invested some money in acquiring an apartment home in Delhi and the rest were spent on bringing up the kids and living the life of a diplomat. Lack of dough did not embitter me. I was happy with my professional performance, educational achievement of the kids and betterment of health of my wife. She, more than me, had earned the friendship of a large number of white and Indian Canadians. This relationship continued even after we settled down in Delhi.

I do not intend to write an ode to Ottawa and in praise of the Canadian people. The city, way back in 1984, looked like a well-composed picture postcard. While my work filled in my professional

cavities the cultural milieu and the open hearted friendship of the Canadian people enchanted us. The bountiful nature of the vast nation with sparse population had many wonders to reveal and many colours to imprint everlasting portraits in the gallery of my cranium.

My relationship with Canada did not snap with my posting out. I was again summoned to visit Vancouver in early October 1987, to help generation of intelligence during Rajiv Gandhi's visit for the CHOGM meeting. I think I discharged my duties satisfactorily but for an unexpected hitch. My presence in Canada, on a questionable errand, not sanctioned by diplomatic protocol, was compromised by a queer development. The RCMP and the CSIS confused me with my namesake, M.K. Dhar, a reputed journalist, who lodged in the same hotel where I was billeted by the Consul General. The journalist friend sniffed around, for valid reasons, to gather stories about the Sikh militants. The CSIS had hooked up his and my phones to their juice boxes and intercepted our communications. The minor irritant was sorted out without any embarrassment to the High Commissioner and casting any shadow over the event for which we were gathered at Vancouver.

I enjoyed the error of judgement but felt a little gurgling inside my stomach when T.N. Seshan, the untrained security watchdog called me to a corner and wanted to verify my credentials as an intelligence operator. His inflated ego and self-righteousness had blinded his inner vision that enabled normal people to recognise deserving virtue in human beings around them. He had bullied around his way and made the Indian and Canadian security officers gesticulate at his back. But he chanced to belong to the charmed circle of the Prime Minister and was better known as the hammer and bulldozer man. I did not want my assiduously built up intelligence career to snap simply because an untrained sniffer did not like my smell and was prone to baring his teeth sans any provocation. Timely intervention by the High Commissioner, S.J.S. Chhatwal, rescued me from the holiest of the holy, who had refused to look straight into my eyes. In my estimate he was an utter pseudo turned bully, who roared a lot but snapped at the slightest intimidation.

NINETEEN

BACK TO THE BRINK OF FAULT LINES

The middle of the road is all of the stable surface. The extremes, right and left, are in the gutters.
Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Eisenhower is a star performer on the theatre of history. He earned the right to view a road from any angle he felt conducive to his march to victory. However, for a lesser mortal like me even the middle of the road is not stable. The gutters are usual places where history tends to throw a creature like me when he is out of tune with the symphony of time.

I was not sure if I was thrown into the right or left gutter on my arrival back to India from the frying pan in Canada. July 1987 was not the best of time to be in Delhi. The blazing summer and a scanty monsoon aside India was again forced to walk over the hellish fire of political instability, stink of corruption and ethnic unrest and insurgency. It appeared that some psychological toxin had infected Rajiv Gandhi, which forced him to fritter away the tremendous goodwill he had earned as a 'clean' man. He fretfully emptied the basket of sympathy that was showered on him by the grieving people of India. I often suspected that the Nehru-Gandhi genes contained certain contradictory chemical combinations that forced even Indira Gandhi to be vanquished when on a winning spree. She simply did not know when and where to stop. Rajiv Gandhi was not spared the genome twist.

Many political analysts have questioned the dynastic succession of Rajiv. They forget that Indira Congress had the right to choose a leader who could keep his mother's party together and keep happy the power barnacles attached to it by distributing the spoils of office. People who confuse Indira Congress with the Indian National Congress of post-independence days obviously have been caught in the time-wrap. The new Congress was not even a clone of the past one. It was a mutant.

Whatever it is, Rajiv had started with a positive note. He walked past the ashes of his mother and the rubbles of the holiest places of the Sikhs and concluded the historic accord in July 1985 with Sant Harchand Singh Longwal, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader. The accord, however, did not neutralise the terrorist fringe of the Sikhs, who had by that time walked into the trap of Pakistan and its dreaded tool, the Inter Services Intelligence. The Sikh diaspora also did not accept the accord and kept on conspiring with the Pakistani establishment to give the terrorist movement a contrived colour of 'independence movement'. It appeared that certain global capitals were not concerned over the predicament in which a scheming neighbour, Pakistan, which was emboldened by its success in Afghanistan, pushed India to the precipice of crisis. Its newfound friendship with the Cold War adversaries of the USSR had added muscle and operational expertise to its rulers. While in Canada I had gathered a feeling that the White House and its allies were supportive of the Pakistani dictator. The West was not yet ready to appreciate the pains of terrorism, because they were yet to be hit by the fanatics. Canadian attitude had undergone some changes after the Sikh militants downed the Air India flight, in which hundreds of Canadian citizens had perished.

Sant Longwal's assassination and landslide victory of the SAD faction in the ensuing state assembly election had failed to solve the Punjab tangle along the contours of Rajiv-Longwal Accord. The Punjab sore had transformed into gangrene and Pakistan sponsored proxy-war continued

unabated.

Failure to implement the accord had rendered S. S. Barnala, the chief minister, a persona non grata with the Akalis as well as the terrorists. The latter reoccupied the Golden Temple complex and tore down the rebuilt *Akal Takht*. Once again they brought in weapons inside the gurdwara and were in full control of the complex by March 1986. The spectre of violence gripped entire Punjab and the terrorists struck as far as in Maharashtra where they killed the former COAS, General Vaidya.

The assiduously concluded Assam Accord too had started faltering. Though it had brought the cycle of violence in Assam to a temporary halt and brought in the Assom Gana Parishad, the political front of the All Assom Students Union, the accord had spawned several new agitations with violence and secession as the core meteor. Agitation by the Bodos for a separate Bodoland and the Nepalis for a Gorkhaland State in West Bengal had kicked off new controversies only to prove that the political geography of India was yet to satisfy the ethnic minorities, who were once clubbed with the majority ethnic, racial and linguistic groups. Many observers suspect that Indira Congress promoted the Bodo and Gorkha agitations with a view to containing the Ahom parochialism in Assam and the Marxist power base in West Bengal.

Signing of the Mizo Accord with a tired Pu Laldenga was the only accord that satisfied the ethnic aspirations of the broader Lushai tribes. However, the Kashmir accord signed in November 1986 with the National Conference of Dr. Farooq Abdullah that envisaged power sharing and the subsequent excesses committed during the state assembly elections in 1987 had, in fact, triggered off fresh cycle of violence. This time around Pakistan was free from its commitment in Afghanistan and it did not lose time in turning the flow of the *Mujahideens* and weapons from its western border to the eastern flank. The humbling of the Red Bear and near collapse of the Cold War iron curtain had emboldened Pakistan to aspire for a final solution of the unfinished agenda of partition. The fire triggered off by the mindless denial of democratic rights to the Kashmiris in 1987 haunted Rajiv and the successor governments. In fact, Kashmir had taken the centre place in Pakistani psyche and international Islamist terrorism, often called as global jihad campaign, had become an integral part of Pakistan's state policy. The Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan had assumed the role of an exporter of terrorism to the Balkans, Muslim majority units of Russian Federation, Central Asian territories, and northern Africa besides its umbilical enemy India. The USA and its allies were yet to comprehend the exact colour of the political soul of Pakistan that was hijacked by the Army Establishment. Terrorist and Islamist outfits patronised by the USA during the Afghan war had made Pakistan a permanent bacterial colony. The West was yet to wake up to the reality that international terrorism is an indestructible colony of bacterium. It could infect their society as well. India too realised the truth much later.

Rajiv Gandhi had failed to comprehend that accords are imposed solutions more often contrived by tired warriors. They tend to resume the war after a little strategic rest. The Assam accord too did not douse the fire in the disturbed state. A section of the AASU broke away from the AGP after being disillusioned by non-implementation of the key clauses of the accord and dismal performance of Prafulla Mohanto government. Inspired by some left extremists and insurgent elements in Nagaland and Manipur they reactivated the United Liberation Front of Assom (ULFA) and soon launched a violent separatist movement. Pakistan and certain inimical elements in Bangladesh did not ignore the new tongues of fire. They stoked it like they had earlier nurtured and nourished the insurgency movements in Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura.

The spree of accord did signify Rajiv's good intentions. But he and his advisors mostly succeeded in treating the symptoms and not the diseases and the sick patients of India in Punjab, Kashmir,

Darjeeling Hills of West Bengal and Assam. The insurgent forces in the North Eastern states of Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura continued to bleed the nation heavily.

Rajiv's woes were aggravated by a spate of 'scandals'. The tongues of scandals that engulfed Rajiv were preceded and accompanied by his deteriorating relationship with President Giani Zail Singh. Ostensively infuriated by Rajiv's lack of confidence in him on crucial matters like the spate of accords the wily politician almost staged a coup against the elected Prime Minister of India. Arun Nehru, Rajiv's crooked cousin, V. C. Shukla and powerful lobbies that ranged from industrial houses to thirsty and hungry politicians, ably assisted him. In fact, certain accounts attributed a plotted coup by the Reliance Industry of Dhirubhai Ambani to replace Rajiv by Arun Nehru. They were indeed close during the days of bonhomie when Arun collected funds for Rajiv's political campaign. Dhirubhai was known to be a kind financier behind many a successful politician in India.

The removal of V. P. Singh from finance ministry to the Defence soon after the Operation Brass Tacks fiasco was reportedly triggered by flaming disputes between Dhirubhai's Reliance Industry and Nusli Wadia's Bombay Dyeing. An otherwise competent finance minister and a man of utmost integrity, V. P. Singh had needled the Reliance Industry, which enjoyed support from several Indira Congress stalwarts and reigning bureaucrats. Nusli Wadia, a grandson of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, on the other hand depended only on a few 'crusaders', Ramnath Goenka, Arun Shourie and S. Gurumurthy, all connected to the *Indian Express* group and the Hindutwa party, the RSS and its 'Parivar' (family) members.

Corporate war and its impact on politics is a global phenomenon. In 1980 Dhirubhai had arrived on the industrial and economic scene of India with a bang. That was the cut off point when Congress and its ministers and a few bureaucrats were trapped in the glue of Ambani allurements and helped the budding industrialist to begin his journey to the Fortune 500 Club. By 1986 Dhirubhai Ambani was in a position to influence the Indian establishment machinery in an unprecedented way. He had gained foothold inside Indira administration through political bureaucrats like Pranab Mukherjee and a number of obliging professional bureaucrats headed by Nitish Sengupta and N.K. Singh. By around 1986 Dhirubhai had understood that India was his for bribing and buying. The barriers between his ambition and India systemic sandbars had totally disappeared, thanks to willing collaboration of certain politicians and bureaucrats.

The first scandal to explode was the Fairfax affairs. The US based detective company was allegedly hired by V.P. Singh to investigate a number of Indian industrialists and important personalities like Amitabh Bacchan and his brother Ajitabh. A key letter purported to have been initiated by V.P. Singh was suspected to have been forged by Ambani operatives. The incident enraged Rajiv and V.P. Singh was removed from finance to defence ministry. The masterstroke opened Rajiv's inner gates to Ambani and Wadia was finally pushed back to keep company of the truth seekers in the *Indian Express* Group.

Little did Rajiv know that his defence minister, a man of impeccable integrity and high political ambition, was not likely to remain content licking the Fairfax wounds. The Howaldt Deutsche Werke (HDW) submarine deal initially contracted when Indira was the defence minister in 1981 blew up as a serious scandal. Rajiv and his coterie were not ready to allow the memory of Indira to be sullied by a fresh investigation into the HDW deal. Moreover he was not ready to drag Venkatraman, the Vice President and the forthcoming Indira Congress nominee for the Presidential slot, to any controversy. Knowledgeable circles very close to Indira Gandhi, nonetheless, whispered that Venkatraman was involved in the HDW pay off. The HDW controversy proved to be the proverbial last straw on the camel's back. V.P. Singh resigned from Indira Congress. It might have had allowed a whiff of fresh

breather to Rajiv, but his 'Mr. Clean' image was sullied irreparably.

April 1987 did not usher in a sweet spring for Rajiv. It blew in fresh fire of scandal; this time from the shores of Sweden, over the controversial Bofors Howitzer deals. It refused to weather away, in spite of an infamous JPC report and subsequent investigations. The mega scandal had not only rocked the nation. It also rocked the political foundations of Rajiv Gandhi and Indira Congress. The party was defeated in a series of parliamentary by-elections and the return of V.P.Singh to the lower house of the parliament from Allahabad had, in fact, initiated the process of collapse of Indira Congress as a potent political force.

The Bofors deal was concluded when Rajiv held the defence charge, like his mother did when the HDW deal was struck. The stories of complicated maze of transfer and retransfer of the kickback amount only wrapped Rajiv up in the proverbial grandma's wool ball. He could neither get out of it nor did he try to pin down the real culprits. This inability had unfortunately pointed the needle of suspicion directly at him. The shadows still haunt some slices of the conscience of the nation. (Delhi High Court exonerated Rajiv in 2004).

However, I was not at all concerned, as an intelligence operator of the IB, with the mega and super mega scandals that rocked the nation. I was thrown back on dusty Delhi and my immediate concern involved scouting out a suitable home, a school for my second son and a somewhat peaceful desk for myself. I wanted to be with my family and to forget my harassed days in Canada.

But destiny and boss desired otherwise. On the seventh day of my reporting to Delhi, I was directed to join the Punjab Operations Cell. Two competent officers of the IB were already ably oaring around in the blood poodles of Punjab and I wondered what made my boss to toss me in the cross pedalling of the existing oarsmen. I anticipated some clash of interest and disharmony in personal style of functioning. The arrangement was something like sharing a woman by two husbands, which was possible only in a mythological story. The senior officers already entrenched in the affairs of the Operations Cell had developed vested interests. They obviously did not like me fall on their laps from nowhere. How could two Generals be in charge of the same command? It was an absurd arrangement that had finally led to certain bitter consequences. But, I was there and, was required to fin around in the blood poodle of Punjab for my professional survival.

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I beg the indulgence of my readers, those who care to read, to allow me to have a little detour before I revert back to India's uniquely crafted killing fields of Punjab.

I did not land in Delhi at the end of journey to disillusionment. But I was, nonetheless, disillusioned with the affairs of the nation. I adored Indira Gandhi in spite of her later day aberrations. The emergency excesses had left deep scars in me and as a politically conscious and oriented person I could have not have lived with it but for the buffoonery of the Janata Party leaders and their unconcern for the people of India. I despised the dynastic aspirations of Indira Gandhi and believed that she had done a great disservice to the nation by stymieing the political party she headed and by subverting the constitutional, legal and the bureaucratic system that were responsible to give the people assurances of stability. She and Sanjay had changed the political and administrative morality of the country for all time to come. They ushered in the most devastating negative revolution, as against the pioneering sacrifices of Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and Subhash that constituted the fulcrum of the positive revolution of twentieth century India.

Rajiv Gandhi, the first apolitical Prime Minister was no revolutionary and visionary. But it was

expected that he would really guide India into the twenty-first century, about which he talked so loudly. No doubt he had opened up a couple of windows to the new brave world but he was the very person who had allowed the corporate world to infect the bones and marrows of the nation. If Sanjay was responsible for polluting the political system and allowing cohabitation of crime and politics beyond repair, it was Rajiv and his advisers who had opened up the nation's conscience to the robbers and plunderers who passed by the name of corporate houses. The Reliance Empire did not have to look back since they succeeded in penetrating the political and bureaucratic scions of the nation. No niche of the Indian system was left untouched by the wizard of money and industry.

Gujarat has presented India with several mythological and historical heroes, including Lord Krishna, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Sardar Ballabhbhai Patel and Dhirubhai Ambani. They had excelled in their own spheres of activities. Krishna had plotted the grand Mahabharata war, Gandhi had piloted the Indian independence, Patel had consolidated the gains of Indian independence and Dhirubhai Ambani had set the course of twisting and bending the Indian political and administrative system to offer India one of the biggest industrial houses. In their own way all four of them were unique, and so unique is a later day chief minister of Gujarat who engineered communal carnage only to win an election to the state legislature. Nevertheless, of all the illustrious sons of Gujarat I always rated Dhirubhai as the most important modern day Chanakya, who corrupted everybody by applying his unique technique of shredding human values, constitutional propriety, and legal concepts of administration in his unique marching machine.

Rajiv's progress through the pilgrimages of scandal and error of judgement and alleged corruption had disappointed me. It was unbelievable that a man who dreamt of flying with the winds of the 21st century was suddenly grounded by snags, which often raised doubts that he himself was responsible for some of the aspects of the 'reign of error'. A steeled country had decisively hit back against Sanjay's 'tughlaq shahi'. Indira was given another chance to perform a political penance by a wise nation. She did not. Rajiv too failed to put the country back into the air despite the fact that countrymen had given him unlimited flying fuel, a massive electoral mandate.

The country was catapulted back almost to the days when Jayaprakash Narayan had initiated his social revolution. This time around there was no JP. It was doubtful if a VP (V.P. Singh) could substitute him. Indira Congress was on the verge of another journey through the black hole. But there were no star clusters in the opposition that had started orbiting the new JP, the raja of Manda, V.P. Singh. Most of the hungry jackals were around to bite deep into the flesh and soul of the nation.

I had never known V.P. Singh. I still do not know him. I derived knowledge about the ingredients that went in the making of the man who was about to revolt against Rajiv Gandhi from a few acquaintances in the 4th estate including Prabhu Chawla. He was yet to take charge of the *Indian Express*. Rayan Karanjiwala, an advocate, and Bhurelal the indomitable bureaucrat with a Don Quixotic streak, had filled in some of the gaps. My clear-cut assessment was that VP was a fighter who did not know the terrain, enemy, allies and his own weapon holdings. He did not even have the philosophical commitment of JP. His eyes gave out an impression that he was not a steady person to lead a complex nation. But he was there to challenge the family party of Rajiv Gandhi and his quiver basically was filled with '*people's aversion to another corrupt regime and another reign of error*'.

It was different from the reign of terror of Sanjay Gandhi. Rajiv had simply succumbed to the machinations of his corporate aides and allies and bad political managers. His friends in the intelligence fraternity tried to please him, instead of warning him about the distant roaring of thunder and tsunami. He lacked the grit of his father and the acumen of his mother. His vision was as deep as that of Jawaharlal, but his comprehension of the political and bureaucratic machineries was

appallingly poor. I pitied the falling hero because I believed that given time and more opportunity, he could pilot India to the new age. I was, therefore, yet hesitant to applaud the new honest but politically naïve messiah.

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At this critical point of time my Benarasi RSS friend again contacted me. He wanted me to meet Lal Krishna Advani and Professor Rajinder Singh. I had been to the austere headquarters of the RSS at Keshav Kunj but not to attend *Shakhas* and to be indoctrinated by the Hindutwa pundits. My faith in Hindutwa is of a different kind. To me it means unity and equality in the Hindu society and building solid nationalist base amongst the Hindus. I believe that one can be a staunch Hindu without hating a non-Hindu fellow Indian. Hindutwa and Bharatiyatwa are not synonymous.

I declined to meet Advani as he was under human and technical surveillance of the Intelligence Bureau. As a towering opposition leader he could ignore the IB, the pliant agency that he commanded for six years. But I could not take the risk.

Interaction with the RSS friend convinced me that the Sangh Parivar was ready with a new blueprint of action. Its association with the JP movement, partnership in the Janata government and subsequent developments had convinced the ideologues that its temporary tryst with power had not succeeded in enlarging its vote bank and the BJP and the RSS cadres were disillusioned with the leadership. Power had eluded them not by the whiskers but by light years. The Indira Congress in 1980 parliamentary polls exploited this state of disarray when the BJP and RSS cadre sided with the disgraced party in several cluster of constituencies.

The BJP had no concretised an economic agenda and the RSS was still immersed in its archaic concept of regeneration of economy through Bronze Age tools. Its political philosophy was unable to weld with the concept of a secular India. Its leaders vaguely spoke about Akhand Bharat, cultural unity, security threat from Pakistan, unceasing flow of Bangladeshi nationals and corrupt practices of the ruling party. The slogan '*gali gali mein shor hai Rajiv Gandhi chor hai*' (there is noise in the lanes that Rajiv Gandhi is a thief) is ascribed to a prominent RSS activist. But this arsenal was not good enough to trounce Rajiv Gandhi and march closer to the South Block.

V.P. Singh was an uneasy ally. He was not unwilling to derive support from the RSS and the BJP but was not ready to compromise on the basic concepts of the constitution. He was a committed secular leader with a penchant for clean administration. He was not exposed to the education that whiffs of power are more polluting than the fumes of fossil fuel. The messiah of honesty had chosen a wrong point of history to deliver his message of purity to the Indians. He had forgotten that between the original Gandhi and the latest imitation of Gandhi two more Gandhis had succeeded in changing the face of India for all time to come. The original Gandhi lying uneasy in the grave was perhaps squirming at the quixotic valour of his vain incarnation.

The strategy of the Sangh Parivar clearly hinged on arousing a decisive Hindu fervour and the ready target was the 'Babri Masjid' in Ayodhya, a historical city with mythological halo, where Lord Rama, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, was born to Dasharatha and Kaushalya. The mechanism of the new campaign was worked out with meticulous care.

My RSS friend, after having enlightened me, requested for advice and help. I was too busy with my Punjab assignment but agreed to meet a dynamic man in his forties called K. N. Gobindachariya, a RSS '*pracharak*' and Rajinder Sharma, another self-effacing stalwart of the Sangh Parivar. I was not averse to meet the RSS leaders. Though not a formal member of the *parivar* I was always attracted to

the Hindu organisation out of the faith that only it could unify the fractured Hindu society by fighting against the social discriminations as old as the Vedas (*Purusha Sukta* etc).

By around 1987-88 my meetings with them revolved around dissection and analysis of the political scenario and sharing of 'information', which belonged to the realms of strategy of Indira Congress, informal survey and microanalysis of the potential vote banks. I had taught them the tricks of vote-bank accountancy by correlating caste with right social programme and economic policy. A little later, around the end of 1988, Uma Bharati, Ved Prakash Goel and his son Piyush visited me regularly. My home had become a hub of activities of the BJP and RSS activists.

My disillusionment with Rajiv Congress was not solely responsible for my tilt towards the BJP. I never ceased to be a political animal, despite the fact that I had joined a covenanted service. Politics was an ingredient of my H₂O. As far as my political proclivities are concerned I often suffered from split personality. The proverbial squirrels never ceased fighting inside me. I had started with hating the Congress for reasons that were related to humiliation heaped upon my father, a revolutionary freedom fighter. The same hatred had pushed me nearer to the RSS and Jan Sangh and had made me hostile to the Muslims.

I was drawn to Indira Gandhi after I realised that she was the only dynamic leader around to pilot the country after some of the Janata leaders mocked the people's mandate and looted the country like reincarnated gangs of thuggies. I had given her some ideas as to how to win over the disaffected and disillusioned RSS workers to congress fold for the limited purpose of electoral success.

I was, in fact, not pitching in for the BJP. My understanding was that V.P. Singh interlude would stretch for at least five years before the BJP could make a decisive bid for power. In the meantime my hands were full with the affairs of Punjab and the new ambience in the Intelligence Bureau.

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The Intelligence Bureau could by no stretch of imagination imitate the corporate work ethics and the 'coterie culture' of Rajiv Congress. It inherited and emulated a pyramidal structure with plenty of functional autonomy, may be anarchy, to the lower and tertiary building blocks. It has always been a queer admixture of police and intelligence ethos; often more police than intelligence. However, great transformations were taking place in this traditionally conservative organisation. Rajiv and his cousin Arun Nehru attended to some of the crying needs of the resource starved organisation. Some teeth were provided to the counter-intelligence wings. But its resource level continued to be far below that of the comparable world class intelligence organisations like the CIA, MI5, MI6 and the next-door ISI. Some cosmetic efforts were made to modernise the tools of technical intelligence production and to strengthen its ElInt capabilities. But these ended in cosmetic exercises, except visible accretion of some vehicles, alphanumeric pagers and a few Motorola VHF hand-held sets. The political breed was not yet ready to arm the IB with the sinews of real-life war against internal and external threats. I had often felt that they were not keen to see a real powerful organisation, more powerful than the ambitions and acrobatics of the political breed.

These cosmetic changes did not affect IB's basic dependence on HumInt. M. K. Narayanan, the Director, had revived the aspects of 'operational approach' in dealing with the Punjab problem. This was not an innovation. This was successfully tried in the North East but had lapsed into disuse. This time around the 'operations' desks were separated from the analysis wings and were empowered to run conventional and unconventional operations to combat Pakistan sponsored militancy in Punjab.

He is credited with the revision of the training aspects and widening the vision of the technical

wing of the Intelligence Bureau. Like the young Prime Minister Narayanan too bubbled with enthusiasm and welcomed constructive changes. But, some senior colleagues felt that he suffered from a couple of deficiencies.

His lower commands were still moored in the traditional bondages to old-fashioned intelligence collection and dissemination technologies. The cutting edge level continued to suffer from inadequate pay packet, stagnation and the age-old boorish tradition of abject submission to the hierarchical bosses. They were yet to be freed from police psychology and given new veneer to empower and enable them to operate at all conceivable levels of national and regional activities. Morale was deplorably low.

The most dramatic deficiency arose from the personal transformation of M.K. Narayanan. A simple, open minded, work-alcoholic and intellectually sharp Narayanan was trapped by the corporate culture around the Prime Minister. He added on to his personality some borrowed flashes from some of the coterie members of Rajiv.

Narayanan believed, like his political master, to run the affairs of the organisation with the help of a carefully selected coterie. There were, under his dispensation, three categories of middle and upper level operatives: the kitchen helpers, the utility personages and the hanging-peg passengers. While he depended heavily on the immediate coterie, he did not succeed in earning true admiration of the two categories. I felt that Narayanan had distanced himself from the grassroots.

I did never belong to any coterie in the IB. Perhaps I missed out the benign smiles of the coterie catalysts because of my prolonged field assignments and my propensities of asking inconvenient questions, maintaining my 'operational independence' and refusal to mimic the ambience of abject submission to the power wielders. I believed in controlled functional autonomy, operational flexibility within the given briefs and personal detachment from the 'consumers'. I was prone to support a cause with an ideological approach and not any persona, never sheepishly.

I had always appreciated the intellectual sharpness of Narayanan. But I failed to ingratiate myself with the coterie around him and approve of his incautious support to the 'reign of error' of Rajiv Gandhi. As a subordinate 'Bureau' of the Ministry of Home Affairs the IB had no functional independence and we, the operational functionaries of the agency, had to carry out illegal orders of the 'consumers.' But, even at the height of Indira Gandhi's power some of the leaders of the organisation had zealously guarded certain niches of the IB. Sanjay had trampled these down. But this time around these niches were voluntarily surrendered to the coterie around Rajiv.

Most coterie members hated me. They hated me for my independent views and non-conformity with the corporate ambience in the organisation. They distrusted me because I was supposed to be still 'loyal' to the old Indira-time elements. They were yet to be aware of my deep liking for the RSS.

However, developments in the political and national lives and the changes inside the agency did not deter me from devoting my loyalty and professional skill to the task I was assigned. But I started with a big handicap. A competent team headed by Kalyan Rudra headed the Punjab Operations Cell. They belonged to the inner coterie of Narayanan. The team was oriented to obey and follow the existing leadership. My arrival was not liked either by the leaders or the workforce of the cell. A gadfly isn't tolerated on the toast. I felt the heat and suspicion and the hostile ambience temperature. Gradually the Operations Cell was bifurcated and I was left to fend for myself with inexperienced manpower and nothing else. It was an unfair deal and I smarted under professional humiliation. How could two different personalities with different work-ethos and styles work in the same problem area? The puzzle baffled me.

I did not, at that point of time, understand the strategic move of the Director Intelligence Bureau.

Very often the two cells crossed each other's undefined territory and jeopardised asset generation and manipulation. For a period of time the ambience heat infected the lower functionaries, who were forced to observe the 'Laxman rekha' (restraining line) drawn by their controlling officers. We often functioned in isolation and almost crashed against each other, rather with not too sublime thuds and catastrophic consequences.

But there I was, thrown on the gaping national fault line of Punjab. My partner in the Operations cell and a couple of others sincerely believed that such fault lines, either inherited or created by the thirsty and hungry politicians, could jolly well be filled up by dead bodies, bodies of innocent citizens and citizens turned terrorists. I did not subscribe essentially in the state policy of filling up the follies of fault lines by dead bodies, in the name of restoring law and order and the rule of law. My experiences in the North East and in Naksalbari had convinced me that fault lines can only be filled up by prudent fusion of political, administrative and economic measures. Smoothing of the roughed up frills of cultural linkages often helped in less counting of body bags.

To some of my colleagues 'operation' meant generating actionable information and associate with the police to physically eliminate the terrorists. On a number of occasions innocent youths were picked up in police style and mercilessly interrogated. They often disappeared; killed and dumped in isolated and mass graves. I was vehemently opposed to such fusion operations in connivance with the police forces. I felt that the IB should work on two plains: generating tactical intelligence to be used by the police and devising strategic approaches that could lead to lasting solution of the human problem and healing of the fault line. These differences continued from day one.

In any case, I was there, caught between the gaping gorge of the Punjab fault line. I was supposed to churn out positive results though the pulling ends of the ropes were beyond my control. But I was not in the habit of saying die, before I exactly died. The old buccaneer of the North East peeped out of its slumber once again.

TWENTY

INSIDE BLAZING PUNJAB

The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well meaning but without understanding.

Justice Louis D. Brandeis.

It is necessary to briefly recount the lay of the ground after Operation Blue Star, assassination of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Longwal Accord. Punjab is a classic example of political misperception that national fault line can be repaired by the use of force alone. Blue Star had succeeded in killing Bhindranwale and his close associates but it did not quell the singed psyche of the Sikhs. The Bhindranwale followers had dispersed inside Punjab and elsewhere in India. Those who had gone over to Pakistan were picked up by the ISI and psychologically and logistically armed to continue the acts of terrorism. It was a low cost and low intensity proxy war. The Indian system had offered Pakistan with a unique opportunity to shift its theatre of proxy war from Indian North East to North West.

Soon after Surjit Singh Barnala was handed over the reins of Punjab the Bhindranwale followers started reappearing in small groups. The Army and the paramilitary forces launched operation 'Munda' to mop up the 'militant' youths. But the exercise turned out to be counterproductive. It forced a number of youths to escape to the safe ISI niches in Pakistan. Barnala had miserably failed to contain the stem. By early 1986 Rajiv Gandhi faced a phalanx of militant organisations with the Dam Dami Taksal as the top cone of a tectonically instable pyramid.

While the faction ridden AISSF continued to be the fertile breeding ground, the other prominent groups included: the Babbar Khalsa (Pakistan based Sukhdev Singh Dassowal and Sukhdev Singh Sakhira and Talvinder Singh Parmar groups), Khalistan Commando Force (Cheheru), Khalistan Liberation Army (Tarsem Singh Kohar), Jarnail Singh-Babla gang (killer group of Sant H.S. Longwal), Mathura Singh gang (killer of Lalit Maken, General Vaidya etc), Roshan Lal Bairagi gang, Khalistan Armed Police, Khalistan Liberation Force (Tat Khalsa-Avtar Singh Brahma), Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan (Manochahal), Mai Bhago Regiment (Bibi Bhag Kaur) and Mata Sahib Singh Commando Force (Harsharan Kaur) etc. The list is fairly long and Sikh propensity for spontaneous splitting like nuclear particles had given rise to several factions in the KCF, BTFK and KLF etc organisations.

The need for formation of a common political umbrella for the militant groups was emphasised by the foreign-based militant organisations like the WSO, ISYF, International Babbar Khalsa and their mentor, the Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan. This was made possible by a strategic move by the Dam Dami Taksal. The meeting on 5-6 January at Gurdwara Gurdarshan Prakash at Chowk Mehta of the top terrorist leaders was presided over by Baba Thakur Singh, acting *jathedar* of the Taksal. It was decided to appoint a five-member Panthic Committee (Committee of the Faithful) to guide the 'Sikh Panth' and to act as political umbrella of the terrorist groups. This momentous decision was sanctified in a '*sarbat khalsa*' (general congregation) meeting held inside the Golden Temple, for which Major General Narinder Singh (Retired Indian Army) was made security chief and Dalbir

Singh, a retired journalist was entrusted with the task of drafting the resolutions. The Panthic Committee was reconstituted at this meeting and Bhai Jasbir Singh Rode, a nephew of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was appointed the *Jathedar* of the *Akal Takht* in place of Kripal Singh.

The Panthic Committee was a motley collection of militant leaders who had very little knowledge about the complicated aspects of statecraft, geopolitical peculiarities and the arts and science of guerrilla warfare. Around this time Gurjit Singh, the AISSF leader, returned from Pakistan with messages that Pakistan was unhappy with the progress made by the militant groups. The Panthic Committee was also pressurised by the foreign-based demagogues to declare 'Khalistan' as the independent home state of the Sikhs. That vital decision was finally taken at a meeting at the Golden Temple on April 28, 1986, which was attended by amongst others by Dr. Sohan Singh, a former director, health services and a relation of Sardar Swaran Singh, one time minister in Indira government. The formal announcement was made on April 29. The developments in early 1986 had given opportunity to the Sikh terrorists to reoccupy the Golden Temple and adjacent buildings. The Barnala government failed to stem the rot and the holy precincts was turned into torture and killing chambers. The terrorised people of Punjab were forced to turn to the terrorist outfits for adjudication and for mere permission to breathe and live. They were subjected to double jeopardy: indiscriminate killing by police and paramilitary forces, and, harassment and torture and ransom demands by terrorist outfits.

The state government, though demoralised and haunted by the secessionist activities of the rival Akali factions and low moral of the police and the administration, did respond well to the terror wave. Rajiv Gandhi too responded fast by ordering NSG action inside the Golden Temple premises after the Panthic Committee had proclaimed 'Khalistan'. He had again ordered the launching of 'Operation Mand' to flush out the terrorists from the Mand (riverine) wetland area.

He had already played the peace card through Ragi Darshan Singh and a Jain preacher Sushil Muni. These efforts yielded more sounds than results.

However, another Sikh leader, Buta Singh, the Union Home Minister, further compounded Rajiv's predicament. Buta Singh, like his illustrious predecessor Giani Zail Singh nursed the ambition of adorning the cape of power in Punjab. A 'low caste' Sikh he was despised by the upper caste *Jats* and *khatris* (warriors). The upper caste Sikhs were ready to accept any Indian but, in their language, a '*chuda*' (night soil carrier) as their leader. Rajiv Gandhi, rightly or wrongly, had failed to appreciate the caste realities in Punjab.

Though the administrative and police forces in Punjab were highly subverted and the judiciary almost stopped functioning, the new police leader J. F. Ribeiro did a commendable job. In 1986, about 80 top terrorists were engaged in action and 1525 terrorists were apprehended. The daunting old young police officer escaped an assassination bid but refused to give up. Ribeiro had finely blended the ingredients of tough policing and political approach.

The political forces were in disarray and most of the Indira Congress, Shiromani Akali Dal and Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) leaders were aligned to one or the other terrorist groups. Fathoming of loyalty had become an impossible task.

I was, as a rookie operator, assigned the task of grappling with the dual process of making peace sans the bullet and tracking down and neutralising the terrorist leaders. The other important tasks involved exposing the involvement of Pakistan, terrorist safe havens in Nepal and terrorist cells in other parts of India.

Intelligence operative's performance details in an insurgency and terrorist infested terrain is often replete with nuggets of bravery. Such acts of bravery and achievement are often accompanied by body

bags, bodies of the slain terrorists and those of the frontline soldiers.

I would like to skip the macabre details of the killings, which have been better portrayed by other chroniclers. But I must share with my readers that 'operations' conducted by me did not involve mindless killing of innocent village folks, youths and mass burial of suspected terrorists. I would rather like to refrain from commenting on the 'heroic' performances of my colleagues and that of a section of police force. I did not endorse their policy of killing own countrymen in the name of fighting terrorism, when other options were not totally exhausted. I firmly believe in curing the internal national ills through constitutional means and not through military might. We have been blatantly wrong in stamping social unrest as mere law and order problems.

I preferred the peace route to the 'elimination route', as I firmly believed that terrorism in Punjab did not grow overnight. It resulted from political intransigence and indulgence in competitive fundamentalism by two historically inimical political forces: the Congress and the Akali Dal. Indira Congress stalwarts like Zail Singh, Buta Singh and Sanjay Gandhi were responsible for bringing Jarnail Singh to the centre stage. They played with fireballs at a crucial point in history when the western Cold War partners and Pakistan were engaged in a last ditch battle against the ailing Red Bear. Zia, painted in the blackest brush by the western powers for human rights violation, was given a hurried white coat of paint and used as the frontline partner in the war against the USSR. A couple of petty political operators had failed to analyse the depth and extent of socio-economic paradoxes haunting the Punjab peasantry and the unemployed youth. They refused to recognise the fact that General Zia-ul-Rahman, a Jullandhari Punjabi, was just readying his arsenal to exploit the new Indian fault line. He was keen to get back to Jullandhar, the supposed industrial capital of an independent Punjab. Why not? Had he not succeeded in humiliating the USSR, a much bigger power?

The immature political kids and bandits in Delhi, who played with the Punjab fireballs during Indira Gandhi's second tenure as well as Rajiv Gandhi and his corporate whiz kids, had failed to fathom the Punjab obsession of the *muhajir* Military President of Pakistan. Zia's family were Arains from Jullandhar. He reposed greater trust on fellow *majha* (central) Punjab *muhajir* (refugee) Muslims of Jat stock. General Arif was his Vice-chief of Staff and General Akhtar Rahman, a fellow Jullandhari headed the Inter Services Intelligence. Another Jullandhari Arian, Lt. General Faiz Ali Chisti, headed Zia's Operation Fairplay that ended the capricious but democratically elected government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. It was no wonder that the *majha* area of Punjab received greater attention from Pakistan during the height of the movement, though the high priest of violence hailed from the *malwa* (lower) region.

Way back in 1982 I had reported on a meeting between Zia and some of the Sikh pilgrims to Nankana Sahib from India and England. The Joint Director overseeing Punjab desk had killed that 'sensational' report in his famous cooling chambers. This time around too, I had drawn attention of my bosses to the queer Jullandhar factor that loomed so large on the deteriorating Punjab situation. I had the right to inform my bosses but I did not have the right to be informed about the policy decisions framed by them, and also, I did not have the right to ask if such policy decisions had taken into account all available data. In the new dispensation such questions were treated as sacrilegious audacity. Things have not vastly changed since then. Small Hitlers very often rule the IB.

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Though he was a fickle minded person, I believed Rajiv Gandhi was keen on simultaneous pushing of the peace and war process. I was summoned to his residence sometime in early November 1987, just

four months after my induction to the operations cell and was grilled about my acquaintance with the Punjab problem. My face was not unknown to the Prime Minister. He placed me at the correct slot and asked me if I knew Sushil Muni. I feigned ignorance. I had known the so called *muni* (saint) at a different point of time in a rather unsavoury context, when I was asked by the PMO way back in 1981 to investigate a charge of molestation of a politician's wife by a person aspiring for sainthood.

The new PM directed me to see him.

I met the Muni at his illegally constructed ashram on government land at Shankar Road (status as of 1996). In cahoots with Buta Singh, the Union Home Minister, the Muni had roped in Tarlochan Singh Riyasti, a veteran politician, for influencing a section of the terrorists. I gathered a clear perception that Muni Sushil was not loyal either to the PM or to the HM. He was loyal to himself and was angling for three steps towards nirvana: money, membership of the Upper House of the Parliament and a Padma award.

I had known Riyasti, a freedom fighter and a politician of good repute, from my earlier dalliance with the Punjab imbroglio at its formative stage. He had used my facilitation to get closer to Indira Gandhi and her private secretary R.K. Dhawan. He had elaborately briefed me about the machinations of Zail Singh and his open hostility with other senior Indira Congress leaders in Punjab. In fact, way back in 1982 he helped me to enter the precincts of Gurdwara Gurdarshan Prakash at Chowk Mehta, the dreaded abode of the militants.

Sushil Muni again introduced Riyasti to me and I was briefed about a new peace initiative, which was exclusively initiated by the veteran freedom fighter. In our private discussions Riyasti gave me to understand that he was in touch with a young group of Khalistanis and they were ready to meet the Prime Minister. To my horror I discovered that Riyasti had not even discussed the 'operation' with the Prime Minister. In fact, he was not allowed by Buta Singh to meet Rajiv Gandhi and insisted that he should only operate through Sushil Muni. The die was cast and I could not breach the barriers imposed on me by service restrictions. I did not have that kind of informal relationship with Rajiv Gandhi that I enjoyed with Indira Gandhi and Dhawan. But I knew something sinister was cooking up at the PM's back. I wondered as to how the DIB could agree to launch Riyasti operation! It appeared that my boss too had succumbed to the hierarchical pressure and I was directed to bring the militant leaders to Delhi for a meeting with the PM. In plain language the operation was thrown on my lap at the last moment as my other colleague in the Punjab operation cell backed out for reasons known only to him.

I reached Bhatinda at about 0100 a.m. with two departmental officers and a professional friend. My rendezvous with Riyasti was fixed at 0430 at a park frequented by morning joggers. Dressed in a jogging suit I hustled into the empty park, where Riyasti was the only soul to jog around. The hood of his jogging suit covered his face. We talked while jogging and approached a car with its ignition on. Riyasti's personal driver Mangal Singh was on the wheels. He drove us to a house two blocks away from Gurdwara Nanaksar, where a group of youths dressed in white and saffron *cholas* (Sikh religious dress) were busy in animated discussion. I was introduced as xxxxThapa, a journalist of Nepali origin. Someone, I believe it was Harinder Singh Bhatinda, tried to verify my knowledge of Nepali language. I passed the test and was accepted as a real journalist when I produced a faked Press Information Bureau (PIB) identity card. I carried a couple of faked identity cards that described me as a doctor, pisciculturist, horticulturist and even a BBC stringer.

But all the boys were not amused by my assumed identity. One of the youths, a lanky one with flowing beard, drew a .45 Mouser and aimed at me. He searched the cloth bag that hung from my shoulder. He drew blank and was persuaded by another lanky youth to step back. He introduced

himself as Atinderpal Singh, a journalist turned separatist. The others present were, Gurjit Singh, chief of Dam Dami Taksal backed AISSF, Avtar Singh Brahma, chief of Tat Khalsa and Khalistan Liberation Force and Gurdip Singh Bhatinda, a follower of Jasbir Singh Rode, the incarcerated militant appointed *jathedar* of the *Akal Takht*. It was an impressive gathering. Atinderpal was suspected to be involved in the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Brahma was the reigning king of the 'liberated' Mand area of Majha and Malwa regions of Punjab. He was wanted in a number of mass massacre cases. Gurjit Singh, related to the family of Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale, visited Pakistan a couple of times and was regarded as the linkman between the militants and the ISI.

I was supposed to take them to Delhi for a 'peace meeting' with the Prime Minister. We started after hot cups of spiced tea were served and the youths said a prayer. We managed to cross over to Sirsa in Haryana before daybreak. We were received at the inspection bungalow by Kalyan Rudra, chief of the operations desk, and made a brisk dash for Delhi after a hurried breakfast.

The youths were lodged in secured rooms of Sushil Muni's ashram. The Muni accompanied by his lady secretary wanted to interact with the youths. They refused. Later a suggestion came that they should meet Buta Singh, the Union Home Minister. This too was turned down. Gurjit Singh severely admonished Riyasti and me and warned us with severe consequences. But, I was not in favour of the PM meeting this motley group of terrorist factional leaders. They were not assessed and they had not yet spelt out the conditionality and modality of the intended talks. Sushil Muni called me aside and offered me a cash incentive and requested me to convince the youths to meet Buta Singh at least. Avtar Singh Brhama dismissed my halfhearted proposal on the plea that they had no intention to meet a low caste Sikh.

I was given to understand that the PM was keen to meet the youths and initiate peace talks. He was not against the idea of reaching a limited accord with the terrorist youths brought to Delhi. I expressed serious reservations. The youths did not represent the top echelon of the fractured terrorist movement. The reconstituted 1st Panthic Committee, the top leaders of the Khalistan Commando Force, Babbar Khalsa and the Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan etc, were not involved in this initiative. Moreover, no one was sure about the attitude of the Dam Dami Taksal. Jasbir Singh Rode and other militant appointed high priests were lodged in Tihar and Patiala jails. Mohkam Singh, a top Taksal protagonist, and Gurdev Singh Kaonke, the acting *jathedar* of *Akal Takht* were behind the bars. The known ideologues of the fractured movement were yet to be contacted. The bloody movement was not yet ready for a peaceful settlement. They were being egged upon by the ISI and militant Sikh diaspora to prepare for a prolonged struggle.

The jam lock was somewhat broken after it was agreed that Satish Sharma, an aide to the Prime Minister and the Director Intelligence Bureau would meet them. I don't think the arrangement had pleased the home minister. I had no illusion that he would activate his linkmen in the underground to discredit and compromise the Jat Sikh youths who had spurned the offer to meet him.

The discussions conducted in the presence of Sushil Muni were not intended to evolve a clear contour for future talks. Atinderpal Singh spelt out certain conditions, which were not vastly different from the Anandpur Sahib Resolutions of the Shiromani Akali Dal and certain salient but unfulfilled clauses of Rajiv-Longwal accord. Their demands included declaration of general amnesty, release of all detainees and rehabilitation of the surrendered terrorists.

It was agreed that Tarlochan Singh Riyasti and I would meet them at an appointed place and date somewhere near Ludhiana. Gurjit Singh also demanded an initial financial grant of Rupees two million and it was agreed that the amount would be delivered at Ludhiana.

Before I escorted the terrorist youths back to their den somewhere near Muktsar I was summoned

to the inner chamber of Sushil Muni by him and was requested to strongly recommend his case for a Padma award. Pettiness of the man in white robes stunned me. I mumbled out something and readied myself to navigate the terrorist youths back to their den through police and paramilitary infested route between Delhi and Muktsar.

Gurjit and Brahma were known killers. They were different from the insurgents I happened to encounter in the North East. Though touted as ideologically and religiously fired patriots these terrorist youths preferred to fire bullets to firing words. I was not unconcerned over my safety and that of two professional associates, Tej Prakash Kaushik, a dismissed policeman and administrator of Muni's ashram, and Ajay Vali, a Kashmiri advocate.

We left Delhi around midnight and crossed over to Punjab after ten hours of non-stop drive. Somewhere near Lambi village we were stopped by a group of armed youths owing allegiance to a faction of the Khalistan Commando Force. Gurjit fished out four AK 47 rifles from a hidden chamber of the car they were travelling and accosted the raucous youths who demanded an explanation of presence of 'Indian dogs' in one of the cars of the cavalcade. Riyasti pushed me down to the floor and asked Atinderpal to interact with the armed group. We were allowed to proceed after Gurjit Singh vouched that we were representatives of the BBC and were being taken to a secret rendezvous to interview some top 'panthic' leaders. That was too uncomfortable a close shave. We traversed through the length and breadth of Punjab before returning to Delhi via Amritsar, Ludhiana and Ambala.

Before I give a tour of another bold peace initiative of Rajiv Gandhi I should acquaint my readers with the tragic end of the initiative code named Operation Needle. I had a premonition that Rajiv Gandhi's home minister was deeply involved in promoting his own agenda in Punjab, which did not always follow the furrow cut out by his leader. He had not taken kindly to the objections raised by the terrorist youths to his overtures to meet them in Delhi. In fact, he did not have much regard for Tarlochan Singh Riyasti, a veteran nationalist leader of Brahminical origin.

The Ludhiana rendezvous, where Riyasti and I were supposed to carry Rupees two million for Gurjit was fixed at the outskirts of the city and we were duly notified. We were given to understand that some leaders of the Panthic Committee and representatives of the KCF and Dam Dami Taksal were invited to the meeting.

Riyasti flew down to Delhi with a view to collect the amount. He waited for two days. I shuttled between my bosses and Riyasti and was finally directed to see Satish Sharma. He hummed and chummed for a while, produced a lot of cigarette smoke and finally managed to hang a smile on his face and tell me that the Prime Minister was not aware of any such deal.

I smelled a foul play and refused to accompany Riyasti to Ludhiana. By that time I had known some of the top terrorist leaders. They were more fired by vengeance and thirst for material gains than 'Sikh patriotism'. Riyasti had no option but to attend the Ludhiana meeting. His existence was like that of a small fish in the bloodied waters of the Satluj and Beas. I could afford to fall back from the precipice. He could not. Riyasti left Delhi with empty promises and was killed by Gurjit Singh. He and his driver Mangal Singh were burnt alive inside their car. I was given to understand that Gurjit had gone mad not only over the money but deliberate leakages of his trip to Delhi by some highly placed sources in Delhi. A little bit of investigation by Bhim, Riyasti's son, and me brought out startling facts. The details of the secret visit of the terrorist leaders to Delhi at the invitation of the Prime Minister were leaked out to a few members of the Panthic Committee by a member of the Rangreta Dal, another underground outfit launched by the Union Home Minister. That was the height of treachery-to Rajiv Gandhi and a small fry like me, if not the nation.

It was impossible to explain the intricate nuances of the situation to the Prime Minister, as I did not have direct access to him. I shared my concerns with my bosses and was advised to mind my own business. La affaire Operation Needle convinced me that Rajiv Gandhi was surrounded by hungry sharks and he was left with little option but to keep on swimming till he was devoured by his wilier political associates. He was a well-intentioned person but was not acquainted with the intricate texture that went in making Indian politics so complicated and dirty. Like all the Nehru-Gandhis before him he suffered from one cardinal deficiency: his eardrums were very sensitive. It was not difficult to make him believe something that he would not like to believe under normal circumstances. He had closed down almost all the windows to his mind under tremendous pressure of mounting scandals and rapid erosion of political base.

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Around the same time I received a feeler that an important Punjab terrorist incarcerated in Delhi's Tihar jail wanted to meet me. Tihar was not a strange place for me. I had visited that overcrowded jail to interrogate Charles Sobhraj, the celebrity killer and chameleon, and Maqbool Butt, the JKLf leader, who was later, hanged. At the height of Akali Dal agitation I had the opportunity of interacting with Prakash Singh Badal and G.S. Tohra inside this very jail.

I visited the jail on my own initiative as an exploratory exercise. Conducted to the maximum-security cell by a friendly jail official I was surprised to meet Jasbir Singh Rode, a nephew of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and the militant appointed *jathedar* of the *Akal Takht*.

We settled down over a cup of overly milked and spiced tea and discussed about the prevailing scenario in Punjab. Uneducated in conventional sense Jasbir appeared to be a simple person whose faith in the separatist tenets of his uncle had started wearing thin. He was tired of the prison and longed to be back home and to the '*gaddi*' of the *Akal Takht*.

After some progress I was accompanied often by my controlling officer Kalyan Rudra. After three rounds of discussion I submitted an Operations Project Report (OPR) that outlined a fresh round of peace negotiation with the Panthic Committee headed by Gurbachan Singh Manochahal and Dam Dami Taksal, headed by Baba Thakur Singh. The project was approved and the Prime Minister designated Satish Sharma as the pointman for liaison with the IB and the target individuals. I was very effectively guided by Kalyan Rudra, and abundantly assisted by Tej Kaushik and Ajay Vali. My request to keep Buta Singh and Sushil Muni out of this operation was accepted by the DIB and the PMO. But the second request to associate P. Chidambaram as the pointman of the cabinet was turned down. For some reason or other we were saddled with Satish Sharma. I could not trust the shifty and catty eyes of the man, but he was there, a mighty friend of the Prime Minister.

Thereafter, I started a delicate process of subversion of the psychological diaphragm of Jasbir. I managed to spend a couple of nights inside his cell and softened up the already waning embers of separatism that once burned like wild fire. We worked over a blueprint of action and as a first step the PMO allowed the IB to transfer three terrorist appointed high priests from Patiala jail to Tihar. They were flown in a special flight and were lodged in adjacent cells. This was done to allow the 'Dam Dami Taksal appointed' religious leaders to consult each other and reach consensus to hold peace talks with the government of India.

Having achieved the initial success we were accosted by the insurmountable problem of obtaining the blessings of Baba Thakur Singh and Gurbachan Singh Manochahal. T.P. Kaushik and Ajay Vali were given the task to carry a letter from Jasbir to Thakur Singh and I was assigned the task of

approaching Manochahal. Our emissaries obtained the approval letter from Thakur Singh after a great deal of deliberation by the feuding factions. A virulently secessionist faction headed by Mohkam Singh opposed the idea of talks with the government of India. He tipped off Dr. Sohan Singh, Wassan Singh Jaffarwal, 'General' Labh Singh and a few other armed militant leaders. But it was expected that the wishes of Thakur Singh and Baba Joginder Singh, father of Bhindranwale would prevail.

Establishing contact with Manochahal turned out to be as impossible as meeting the Gabriel. He headed a fiery band of armed terrorists and operated in the general area between Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Patti. A journalist friend, who doubled up as a stringer for the BBC and operated a photo-studio in the parameter-shopping complex of the Golden Temple, helped in establishing a tangible contact with the leader of the Panthic Committee and the head of the Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan (BTfK).

I was driven blind folded to a *behak* (a firm cottage) between Sirhali Kalan and Patti around two in the morning. We met the 'dreaded' terrorist in an underground bunker that was well stocked with ISI supplied Kalashnikov rifles, grenade firing rifles and machine guns. Over a glass of buttermilk and mortared and fried maize we discussed the letter written by Jasbir. Manochahal was in no mood to give a written commitment. His views were pretty clear. The militants were divided and area chieftains controlled their individual armed groups. There was no centralised command. For the first time we came to know from the horses mouth that Pakistan was not happy with the performance of the Panthic Committee and wanted better indoctrinated leadership to take over the command of the movement. I persuaded him to scribble a cryptic note allowing Jasbir to go ahead with the talks, subject to approval of the Panthic Committee, Dam Dami Taksal and a consortium of top terrorist leaders.

We parted company after about three hours and I was blindfolded before being driven back to Amritsar by the journalist friend. I had occasions to walk into the dens of top terrorists earlier in my life. But way back in seventies the Naga and Meitei insurgents were more chivalrous and observed a war code of their own. But the insurgent groups in Punjab rarely observed such chivalrous code of conduct. They were maddened by communal and religious hatred and vengeance, which acted as killer toxins. No room was given and they did not expect the state to spare the bullets.

It was left to me to negotiate the terms for releasing Jasbir Singh Rode, Kashmir Singh, Savinder Singh and Jaswant Singh, the militant appointed *Akal Takht jathedar* and the high priests. After prolonged *bargaining* the following points were charted out for the approval of the Prime Minister:

- Release of old, ailing and minor Sikh detainees from Jodhpur and other jails;
- To arrange installation of Jasbir as the *Jathedar* of *Akal Takht*;
- To provide adequate weapons to enable him to drive out the killer gangs entrenched in different rooms of the '*parikrama*' of the Golden Temple and other secret locations;
- Release of Gurdev Singh Kaonke, the acting *jathedar* of *Akal Takht*;
- To facilitate Jasbir's free movement with a view to contacting the top militant leaders for consultations;
- Formation of negotiation committees by the Panthic Committee and the government to hold peace talks;
- To set up temporary camps for the surrendered militants and to arrange for their rehabilitation in useful vocations;
- Holding of a *Sarbat Khalsa* at Bhatinda on the Baisakhi day (April 13) 1988 for announcing the final settlement with the government of India and formal scrapping of the

declaration of Khalistan;

- Time bound surrender of arms by the militant groups; and
- Declaration of a special economic package for Punjab and immediate handing over of Chandigarh to Punjab.

The ten-point formula was submitted to the Prime Minister in early January 1988. I was deputed to meet the leaders of the Dam Dami Taksal and a few members of the Panthic Committee to discuss the formula.

This time around I was assisted by Capt. (hon.) Harcharan Singh, Jasbir's uncle, Rajdev Singh Barnala, who was elected to the parliament in 1989 and Harjinder Singh, a very well meaning young associate of Jasbir from village Ramdas.

The formula was acceptable to the majority of leaders of Dam Dami Taksal. A minority faction headed by Mohkam Singh opposed it. At least three leaders of the Panthic Committee and militant leaders like Atinderpal Singh, Avtar Singh Brahma, and Gurbachan Singh Manochahal too approved the formula. The latter, however, insisted on a ceasefire agreement to facilitate free movement of the leaders for consultations. Baba Joginder Singh, father of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, agreed with the formula. But Wassan Singh Jaffarwal and 'General' Labh Singh opposed the idea. Surprisingly some opposition was faced from Gurjit Singh, though he was married in the family of Bhindranwale. Gurjit's recalcitrance was not surprising. He was in direct touch with the ISI operatives.

However, things did not shape on the expected lines. Rajiv Gandhi must have had discussions with his ministerial and bureaucratic aides on the formula. The appointment of Satish Sharma as the point man was a big blunder. His knowledge about Punjab was limited to the accented Punjabi he spoke. He was not at all interested in seizing the opportunity and helping his friend out. An apolitical politician, Satish Sharma was more interested in gathering more than sufficient hay while the sun shone. It was a great disappointment to interact with Rajiv Gandhi's point man. I felt the absence of R. K. Dhawan, who understood politics better than seasoned politicians.

Sardar Buta Singh could not be blamed for possessing the uncanny but catty sixth sense. That was the essence of his survival game in politics. Our efforts to keep him and Sushil Muni out of the negotiations were simply frustrated. The Intelligence Bureau was bound by systemic protocol to regularly brief the immediate boss, the home minister. With Buta Singh in the picture the elegant and fascinatingly dressed secretary of Sushil Muni, a femme fatale, was not supposed to be in the dark.

I was summoned to the official residence of the home minister and was remonstrated for handling a dangerous operation at his back. My defence was very simple. I received my orders from my boss and he was the golden end of the link-chain that connected the prime intelligence organisation with the government. He did not like the answer and directed me to keep Sushil Muni informed. I opposed the idea vehemently as I was a mute witness to the earlier mismanaged operation in which Tarlochan Singh Riyasti lost his life. I was not ready to offer my neck to the chopping block, where sex, greed and black machinations received priority over national interest.

Satish Sharma, Buta Singh and Sushil Muni were not enough to spoil the broth. The Punjab Governor, Sidhartha Shankar Ray, was keen on trying his Calcutta day's Naxal elimination experiment. A section of the state police and administration too was opposed to the idea of losing a lucrative means of earning extra bucks at the cost of human misery. Some of these elements connived with a section of senior Delhi politicians and stiffly opposed the idea of negotiations with a nephew of Bhindranwale. To top the woes of the government a section of officers in the Intelligence Bureau too opposed the operation, simply because it was being accomplished by a non-coterie adventurer and not by them. This group of Intelligence Bureau officials, headed by A K Doval was aligned to the

action plan of home minister Buta Singh, Governor Ray and the Police chief K.P.S. Gill.

The IB itself was divided from within.

In fact, Rajiv Gandhi's control on the divergent elements was minimal. He did not work on a centralised blueprint for his latest 'peace initiative' and his political and bureaucratic brain trusts were not unified under one single command. Therefore, the peace initiative was very often jarred and jolted by forces from within and without.

Briefly returning to the Punjab police and administration I must comment that the top command and various links in between firmly believed that brutal suppression was the only remedy to contain acts of terrorism. In the process they indulged in planned and unplanned killing of innocent youths. They detained the villagers informally and extorted money for releasing them. Even women were not spared.

Use of force is an integral part of anti-insurgency operations. But that has to be tempered with various layers of civil administration's healing touches and political sagacity. The police acted for earning their daily bread and much more. But the politicians did not behave like statesmen. They too believed in living from hour to hour. They did not plan for the long-term measures that could heal the wounds permanently.

I have a feeling that in a country where constitutional liberty is the essence of democracy all such state actions should be tempered with human rights considerations and constitutional guarantees. Some politicians and bureaucrats can treat the country as their private chattel. Has there been a human rights accounting in the Punjab? No. Therein lay the wide gap between proclaimed democracy and constitutional liberty.

Not everyone in the Sikh militant movement was enamoured of Bhindranwale's family. The Dam Dami Taksal's preponderance in the peace initiative was not acceptable to the SGPC and the SAD. A section of the hardliner Sikh intellectuals headed by Dr. Sohan Singh and most of the leaders of the Sikh diaspora were opposed to the idea of a peaceful settlement.

Cardinal opposition came from the Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan. Pakistan had conveyed to Wassan Singh Jaffarwal (rehabilitated by Prakash Singh Badal in 2001), Dr. Sohan Singh and some of the KCF and Babbar Khalsa leaders that they were ready with free supply of arms and ammunitions and advanced communication technology to help the Sikhs in their war of liberation. An emissary of Dr. Sohan Singh (now rehabilitated) was contacted by Pakistan at Kathmandu and was given a sizeable monetary incentive for sabotaging Delhi's peace initiative. The idea to supersede the 1st Panthic Committee and form a more stridently militant 2nd Panthic Committee too was mooted by Pakistan. Dr. Sohan Singh and the hardliners had fallen to the Pakistani trap.

The militant movement in Punjab was highly criminalized by 1988. The Bhindranwale toxin was replaced by the lure of easy money, banditry, sex and land grabbing. Most of the militant leaders had managed to amass wealth and property in and outside Punjab. A section of the law and order machinery too had fallen for easy gains. They were not interested in ending the cycle of violence.

In fact, I was swimming against several opposing currents amidst preparations by the state government to launch a decisive operation against the terrorists entrenched inside the Golden Temple complex. The situation prevailing in Punjab countryside called for drastic police action and K.P.S. Gill was prepared with his battle order.

Rajiv Gandhi's peace pigeon was made to flutter through an air surcharged with cordite and cluttered with flying bullets. Contradictory forces had haunted the operation from day one. But I was assigned to a thorny job and was supposed to conclude it successfully.

This is a classical example of how the entire machinery suffered because of lack of

institutionalised control on the executive segments by the apex constitutional bodies in the country.

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The final nod from the government to release Jasbir Singh Rode and the three high priests came in end February 1988, and they were released on March 3. A statement in the parliament by P. Chidambaram followed this that the release was part of a bigger peace initiative. But we had lost the element of surprise and had allowed the opposing forces to strengthen their battlements. Pakistan had already stepped in to frustrate the peace initiatives by literally opening up the sluice gate flooding Punjab with sophisticated weapons and explosives.

Amidst loud cacophony in the media Jasbir Singh and his party were flown in a special DC3, escorted by Kalyan Rudra and me. At Amritsar airport they were received by a huge assorted gathering of militants and AISSF members and were driven straight to the Golden Temple. They were housed in a couple of rooms above the '*parikrama*'. Before their departure they were supplied with a sizeable quantity of licensed non-prohibited bore weapons and ammunitions.

Jasbir's arrival was greeted by volley of automatic fire in the air by the holed in militants. It was difficult to determine which group fired out of jubilation and which one out of indignation. Jagir Singh and Nirvair Singh, two killer representatives of the KCF and KLF, were opposed to the arrival of Jasbir. Their disapproval was demonstrated by an attempted assault on the living quarters of Jasbir. This was repulsed by the combined forces of a section of the holed in Babbar Khalsa and armed followers of AISSF and Dam Dami Taksal. The police forces occupying the higher positions at Brahmbuta Akhara and other buildings observed the queer developments in the temple complex.

From the beginning of 1988 Jagir Singh had started behaving like the Bhindranwale of 1983-84. Assisted by a criminal turned terrorist Nirvair Singh he held court, dispensed justice and ordered spot assassination of the dissenters. Most of the dead bodies were either dumped in the gutter or thrown into the basement after treating the corpses with lime and salt. Soon after Jasbir's arrival in the Golden Temple, Jagir Singh had succeeded in cobbling up an opposing group with help from Malkiat Singh Ajnala, Gurjant Singh, and Nishan Singh, etc. A huge consignment of arms and ammunitions was also received from Pakistan.

Jasbir Singh Rode's *tajposhi* (crowning) as the *jatherdar* was done on March 9 in a glittering ceremony attended by second rung members of the Panthic Committee, Dam Dami Taksal, AISSF, KCF, KLF and the BTFK and others. P.S. Badal, the eminent Akali leader was present too. The Babbar Khalsa maintained a scrupulous distance, as it did not approve of the hegemony of the Taksal brand of Sikh rituals. A few SAD and SGPC leaders were conspicuously present to crown the new *jathedar*. It was a day of victory and it was day of the beginning of defeat.

A *kharku* (militant) friend owing allegiance to a faction of the KCF called me aside to a lonely patch inside the Jalianwala Bagh. He guided me to the residence of a factory owner Satnam Singh Kanda and told me that two messengers had reached Amritsar from Pakistan with a message for the Panthic Committee and a few selected senior ideologues. He also gave me to understand that an emissary of Dr. Sohan Singh had left for Kathmandu to receive instructions and cash support from the ISI operatives. His warning was clear: Jasbir experiment of Delhi was doomed to fail. Too many powerful forces were against a peaceful settlement and the latest scion of the Brar (a caste) family was surely not the real deliverer.

As we prepared to leap on to the next assignment of facilitating establishment of firm contact between Jasbir Singh Rode and the members of the Panthic Committee we faced insurmountable

problem of eluding the ever-vigilant operations by K.P.S. Gill and shadow operations by my IB colleagues. While I was supposed to throw dust in their eyes I was also enjoined the duties of feeding the police chief with live operational intelligence. It was a cruel game of wit. I was sure that Gill was in the know of the essence of the peace operation I was handling. His enormous moustache could not hide his wary smiles that he often threw at me.

Both the governor and the home minister declined to declare a particular area near Govindwal as a safe zone. Satish Sharma suddenly became incommunicado. The Prime Minister was beyond my reach.

A section in the Operations Cell of the IB too adopted a hostile attitude. Mr. A. K. Doval headed that group. He was more inclined towards killing the terrorists than advancing the peace process. In the process, several Punjab observers alleged Doval collected ransom money and money for sparing lives of the villagers. It was not difficult to fathom their designs. It's not that I did not try to draw attention of the DIB. But Mr. Narayanan was not in a position to remedy the obstacles, coming from politicians and bureaucrats. Regarding Doval he said his trusted officer was a Dervish.

The militant groups holed up inside the temple complex had, in the meantime, started erecting fortifications and bunkers at all conceivable defensive and offensive positions. Certain reports received from intelligence moles lodged in the '*parikrama*' indicated arrival of fresh weapons and explosive devices.

K. P. S. Gill too deployed his machine gun positions after scanning the ground position from aerial photographs. His strategic deployment was much more scientific than the frontal attack during Operation Blue Star. He was ready for his kill. The Prime Minister too evinced keen interest in working out the blueprint of Operation Black Thunder, a meticulously planned action to flush out the terrorists from the Golden Temple and adjacent buildings.

Pressured by one scandal after another and a simmering revolt in the party the Prime Minister was tempted to give war a better chance over peace. War is a spectacular event that catches common men's imagination. Violence around thrills them as long as the violent acts do not touch their homes. Peace is a tortuous process, mostly misunderstood and often misinterpreted as weak-kneed attitude of the government. Rajiv required something spectacular, peace of the grave and not peace of the souls. He was painfully indecisive after having taken the bold step of releasing Jasbir Singh Rode and after facilitating his installation as the *jathedar* of the *Akal Takht*.

It was as clear as daylight that the peace initiative was jinxed. Rajiv's political colleagues and bureaucratic hierarchy were not in favour of ushering in peace, as it would have frozen the flow of illegal dough to their pockets.

My request to abandon the 'peace operation' was turned down and I was given two important tasks: to facilitate meetings between Jasbir and the Panthic Committee leaders and to build up armed resistance against the hardliner militants holed inside the temple complex. Wasn't that contradictory to the emerging pattern of police action? It was, but the government decided to function in a self-defeating contradictory manner.

Our attempts to establish the Panthic Committee leaders fructified partially. The terrorist and police ambush parties critically challenged us several times. On one occasion our Suzuki van was ambushed by a gang headed by Wairyam Singh Bhurenangal at a lonely stretch of canal road between Barwala and Gharyala in lower majha area. They stopped firing after Jasbir ventured out of the van and spoke to them. We were escorted to a bunker to meet Kanwarjit Singh, Gurbachan Singh Manochahal and Dalwinder Singh, all members of the Panthic Committee. They were ready for initiating 'peace talks' with certain riders. Their demands included: immediate ceasefire, safe

passage out to the terrorists holed inside the temple complex and nomination of a mutually acceptable team to establish contact with the factious leaders of the armed bands. Manochahal gave broad hints that he was ready to lead the 'panthic' delegation to negotiate with the government.

I was advised to wait for the considered views of the government, especially the home minister and the Prime Minister. I waited in vain. Certain sources inside the armed militant groups advised me that a top leader in Delhi had sent out words to a selected band of KCF, KLF and AISSF leaders to stonewall the peace efforts. Punjab grapevine pointed the doubting fingers at Buta Singh and Governor Ray.

My second assignment to send in weapons to Jasbir Singh Rode to enable him to fight the recalcitrant terrorists inside the temple complex was also delayed by Delhi's chronic indecision. The final nod was received in March end and I carried the weapons in a special flight to Amritsar. These were hidden in a couple of fruit baskets and were carried by my operational associates and me to Jasbir's Golden Temple den. The weapons supplied to him were intended to arm a dedicated 'shaheedi group' (suicide squad) of 15 people with a view to staging a coup against the gangs headed by Surjit Singh Penta, Malkiat Singh, Jagir Singh and Nirvair Singh, etc.

In this venture too I faced opposition from my colleague and a political leader. The colleague had a man from the Babbar Khalsa installed inside the '*parikrama*,' He tipped off the groups headed by Jagir Singh and Malkiat Singh Ajnala. The Rangretra Dal of Buta Singh also widely circulated the receipt of weapons by Jasbir Singh Rode. I objected to this double play by the players of the same team. In reply I received advice to concentrate on my part of the job. What a bloody job it was!

Prior to this Jasbir was prodded to form a committee to remove the armed militants from the temple premises. The committee comprised Malkiat Singh Ajnala (KCF), Swarn Singh Khalsa (AISSF), Vishakha Singh (Babbar Khalsa) and Fouja Singh (KLF). This was violently opposed by Jagir Singh and Nirvair Singh. On this occasion Mohkam Singh accosted me in the corridors of the living quarters above the '*parikrama*' and warned of severe consequences if I did not abandon the divide and rule policy. His threat was accompanied by the touch of cold steel at my groin. Gurdev Singh Kaonke rescued me.

The plan to use limited force against the armed militants was put into motion and some unexpected support came from a faction of the Babbar Khalsa. The groups owing allegiance to Jasbir and the entrenched terrorists exchanged fire on three occasions in which three hardcore KCF '*kharkus*' (militants) were eliminated. We did not expect a single stroke victory but anticipated that Jasbir should be able clean up the holy premises before the Baisakhi festival at Damdama Sahib at Talwandi Sabo, near Bhatinda.

Kalyan Rudra and I met Jasbir and the high priests at the Keshgarh Sahib Gurdwara at Anandpur, at the residence of Savinder Singh. This time we carried two quintals of wheat for the family of the priest in which six AK47 were concealed. The weapons were meant to be used against a group of KCF headed by 'General' Labh Singh.

Our visit was designed to formulate a conciliatory speech by the *jathedar* of the *Akal Takht* that could prepare the grounds for the peace talks. The draft of the speech was examined by certain political leaders in Delhi, who insisted on open denouncement of Khalistan demand and withdrawal of armed resistance. This was not acceptable to the militant leaders. They pressed for a slow process to climb down from the high pitch militancy that was almost hijacked by Pakistan and foreign-based militant leaders.

The hardcore militant leaders' plan to hold a '*sarbat khalsa*' at Amritsar was frustrated by Jasbir Singh and us. He was prevailed upon to hold All World Sikh Convention at Talwandi Sabo Gurdwara

near Bhatinda on the occasion of Baisakhi festival.

The Punjab administration did not cooperate with our request to slacken police operations in and around Talwandi Sabo for a week. Some parallel reporting to Punjab administration by the IB prompted this unusually tough stand. This duplicity had hindered the movement of a few top militant leaders and they threatened to withdraw support from Jasbir Singh Rode. I received a note from Gurjit Singh that directed me to withdraw from the 'initiative' and to pay attention to my family's safety. Gurjit was one Sikh youth who had been seriously polluted by the ISI. I did not expect him to take a soft stand at Talwandi Sabo. I ignored his warning but did not lower my guard.

We decided not to allow the chance of peace slip away simply because Rajiv Gandhi was being short-fused by his home minister and some top level Punjab police and IB officers who favoured war over peace. Kalyan Rudra and I camped at a secret location near Talwandi Sabo Gurdwara guarded by armed youths supposedly loyal to Jasbir. We had kept a force ready nearby to rescue Jasbir if the terrorists threatened his life. Between us we requested Jasbir to strike a balance and not to annoy the terrorists. He was advised not to mention about Khalistan and give stress on return of peace and prosperity to the people of Punjab and to highlight the theme of forgive and forget as propounded by the Sikh Gurus.

Jasbir, the high priests and Gurdev Singh Kaonke played their assigned roles. But Gurjit Singh struck the most discordant note. His speech, read out by an AISSF youth, virulently supported the demand of a separate country for the Sikhs. The Talwandi Sabo show was a moderate success. While we scored a low-key victory by holding the conference in spite of opposition from the ISI, Punjab police and a section of the IB, the ISI succeeded in manipulating some hardcore terrorists to stick to their guns. Pakistan was not ready to surrender its strategic gains in the Indian Punjab. Unfortunately for India the top leadership did not comprehend the intricate games played by Pakistan. Some political leaders and bureaucrats and intelligence operatives played into Pakistani hands.

Jagir and Nirvair Singh, on the other hand, staged a spectacular show in the Golden Temple on the Baisakhi day. They unfurled 'Khalistan flag' and indulged in wanton firing from assorted weapons that created panic in the adjacent markets and residential areas.

The Amritsar and Talwandi Sabo developments made it clear that Delhi's Jasbir initiative hadn't taken off along the desired trajectory. I was fully convinced that Jasbir was not insincere. He walked strictly along the furrow drawn up by the planners. Rajiv Gandhi and his think tank wished to fly on a single damaged wing and half an un-optimised engine thrust. He had not acted upon some of the salient parameters of the 'operational arrangements' drawn up before Jasbir was released. The other wing and engine of the craft that he was piloting were revved and elevated in different direction. The state administration and the police forces were not properly sensitised and tuned to keep pace with the peace initiative. A section in the IB tried to fly in different direction. Rajiv's home minister Buta Singh played as much cunning a game as the one played by his illustrious predecessor, Giani Zail Singh. Rajiv Gandhi had failed to rein in his key cabinet functionary.

A competent police chief like K. P. S. Gill was not expected to tuck his tail and watch the killer gangs with a drooping moustache. He did what he was expected to do. Mounting pressure of the hardcore terrorist made it clear that they had two clear options: to settle for peace or to prepare for a decisive action. Most of the armed groups egged on by Pakistan and foreign-based Khalistani activists had opted for war.

Pakistan's game was not difficult to understand. After a decisive victory in Afghanistan it was readying to exploit another fault line in Kashmir. Unmindful of the strategic advantage enjoyed by Pakistan Delhi had reached another ill-conceived accord—Rajiv Farooq Accord that— provided for

power sharing between the National Conference and Indira Congress. The elections to the state assembly were blatantly rigged. Feroz had prepared himself to go the way Barnala had chosen in Punjab. His credibility had eroded beyond repair. July 1988 had witnessed terrorist type bomb blast in Srinagar and the Kashmiris staged a demonstration on August 17th on the occasion of Zia-ul-Haq's death. In fact by early September Pakistan backed terrorist had displayed that Kashmir was the main theatre, Punjab was a diversionary tactical tango. The year 1988 marked the beginning of direct infiltration into Indian Kashmir by the operatives of the Joint Intelligence North (JIN) of the ISI. Benazir Bhutto continued the process initiated by Zia, despite Indian PM's friendly overtures to the daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Peace is a more tortuous process than firing straight from the hip. Peace often requires more blood letting than war. But, history's finest threads are often woven by peace though war is more eulogised and than sung by poets and sopranos.

War begets war, especially when war is fought against our own people, the citizen of the country. An enemy can be kept permanently on the war list. The erring citizens cannot be. They are better vanquished by sagacious statesmanship combined with pragmatic political and administrative measures. I believed in this eternal truth yesterday in the North East and I still believe in the golden rule of peace prevailing over war; the winning of heart through peace. I thought I had succeeded in convincing the bosses in Delhi to give peace another try. The renewed peace process did not exclude use of force by the state authority and a new force gathered around Jasbir Singh Rode.

He had succeeded in forming a hardcore group of 25 Sikh youths and another 30 were expected to join him soon. But he did not have sophisticated weapons to arm his boys. The proposal to arm the boys of Jasbir was deliberated at different levels and it was finally agreed upon to recruit some willing fighters from among the Rai and *mazhabi* (scheduled caste) Sikhs and arm them under command of Dalbir Singh Dalla, an acknowledged leader of the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) and a follower of Jasbir.

I had visited certain areas in Ganganagar in Rajasthan and Ferozepur-Pakistan border areas to recruit some Sikh youths. Some volunteers from Dam Dami Taksal assisted me. The boys were transported to three secret locations around Anandpur Sahib and Ludhiana. They were supplied with few small weapons and were advised to wait for supply of Kalashnikov rifles. The plan, however, received a serious setback when Dalbir Singh Dalla was picked up by police from Ropar bus stand and killed in a faked encounter. The 'General' chosen by us was eliminated before he could take charge of his command. This one incident proved that my colleague in the IB and Punjab police were working at cross purposes. Delhi had spent huge amounts for forming a parallel armed group. Thier own Dervish destroyed it.

While I was directed to prepare for a new kind of war to bring in peace Delhi appeared to have come under conflicting pressure. Rajiv Gandhi's political discomfiture arising out of scandals, intra-party bickering, bad media and economic recession was compounded by conflicting signals that he sent out to Punjab. He was under tremendous pressure to liberate the Golden Temple from the clutches of the killer groups. His Hindu vote bank had turned antagonistic and he was supposed to act decisively to secure the Hindus and innocent Sikhs from the criminalized armed gangs.

The visit of P. Chidambaram to Punjab and his meetings at Amritsar, Ludhiana and Chandigarh had clearly unfurled the war flag. K. P. S. Gill was finally ready with his battle plan. He just required the order to press the trigger.

Such were the circumstances when I was told to fly in a special plane to Ludhiana with a consignment of Kalashnikov rifles to arm the 'recruits' raised by Jasbir and me. Accompanied by

three high priests and a posse of armed guards Jasbir waited at a pre-selected rendezvous on May 8th night. I was picked up by a cutout from Model Town area and taken to the den where Jasbir waited for me. The discussions were cordial and the food sumptuous. It was decided that I would transport the weapons to another hideout next night (May 9) for transportation to the 'camps'. A plan was worked out to arrange induction of 25-armed men inside the Golden Temple and Akal Takht and another 25 to the *sarai* (guest house) areas.

In an unusual move, Jasbir walked down to the car with me and whispered in my ear that according to his information a particular officer of Punjab state intelligence branch and an officer of the Intelligence Bureau were in touch with a group of Babbar Khalsa and KCF terrorists and had motivated them to engage the police forces in action. I took a little time to understand the finer nuances of the information. Clash between the security forces and the holed in terrorists could take place at any point of time. The security forces had their fingers on the triggers and the terrorists were a trigger-happy lot. The schizophrenic bunch of killers was made to believe that the bullets of the '*adharmis*' (non believers) would bounce back from the bodies of the followers of the Khalsa Panth. Most of them remained high on opium, marijuana and hard spirit. They did not require provocation to fire and kill.

Jasbir elaborated his point by adding that the agent provocateurs of the state and central intelligence were working at the behest of Buta Singh and were not keen on giving a try to the other approach. I comforted him by mumbling something and said good night.

Around 09.30 on May 9 I was taken to the rendezvous to finalise the modalities of shifting the weapons to the designated 'camps'. As we worked on strategic mobilisation of the 'force' and taking on the terrorists the telephone rang ominously around 11.45 a.m. Savinder Singh picked up the phone and reported with an ashen face that firing had started all over the Golden Temple complex and a Babbar Khalsa terrorist had hit a DIG of police. I was confounded by the information. The Babbar Khalsa group was supposed to be in touch with one of my colleague in the IB and was supposed to oppose the rabid KCF, KLF and BTFK elements. Was there a conspiracy? That's what Jasbir had earlier suggested.

About eight pairs of eyes, not very friendly ones, turned at me with loaded questions. Two armed guards quietly shifted to my flanks. I had, for a moment, experienced a sudden rush of adrenalin and moved my hand to the pistol hidden below my shirt. Jasbir stood up and directed the guards to leave me alone. He was of the opinion that the weapons should be stacked somewhere in Amritsar for later use and to disperse the 'camped' boys.

I rang up my desk boss in Delhi and was told that he was not aware of the facts. The police forces had resorted to firing after S. S. Virk, a deputy inspector general of police with the Central Reserve Police, was hit by terrorist fire somewhere on the western side of the temple complex.

Jasbir and other high priests wanted to leave for Amritsar immediately. I requested them to watch the developments and visit the temple city next day. I was given a safe passage out of Ludhiana by Jasbir's followers to proceed to Amritsar with the weapons that were meant for the 'peace corps' of Rajiv Gandhi. The operation turned out to be big joke and me, the ace of the jokers.

Operation Black Thunder had started in all earnest after S. S. Virk took the vital decision on his own to lead a reconnaissance party to a spot to the western flank of the temple where the terrorists were ostensibly constructing new defences above the 'prasad ghar' located between the main gate of the temple and the remaining edifices of the *Akal Takht*. Construction of 'defences' and induction of weapons had been going on for last few months. But the CRPF commander did not strategically plan the unfortunate incident that had sparked off the war shots and killed the peace process. There was no

command from the top (Delhi) to resist the militants from raising defences above the 'prasad ghar.' The decision to lead the reconnaissance party was taken by the CRPF DIG. It is believed that the survey could have been conducted by an 'agent' of the intelligence department and precise video footage could have been taken before sending out a police force.

However, a competent General as Gill was, he did not let the opportunity go by. He acted with surgical precision and added a glorious chapter to Indian policing. This one man and officer gave a wonderful account of his professional competence, in spite of the fact that the political and administrative ambience around was far from satisfactory. He had helped the politicians to win a vital war for the country that was started by a few power drunk people out of political skulduggery. Gill cannot be blamed to opt for the war process and not wait for peace to triumph. He was a soldier and he was expected to fire to douse fire.

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My association with Punjab imbroglio continued, in some form or other, till I retired. My relationship with Jasbir and a number of leaders of the Dam Dami Taksal and various terrorist outfits had transcended the limits of professional fences. I had discovered a reasonable, simple and trusting person in Jasbir Singh Rode. He aspired for political importance but was unfit for Akali strand of political somersaults. He is illiterate in a conventional sense. His knowledge of Sikh scriptures is near perfect. His worldview was narrow but he always dreamt to own a newspaper and practice journalism. He had really come to own one, but I was told that lack of business sense and government patronage had the paper run into the red.

This one peace initiative had offered me to know Punjab more thoroughly than I could learn about Bengal. The Jat Sikh community fascinated me and the rich civilisational and religious heritage of the brave frontier people taught me a unique lesson: all magicians do not know the art of playing with fire. Some, therefore, get burned. Indira Gandhi had forgotten her lesson in fire play and she had allowed her maverick son and political fortune hunters like Zail Singh to play with a flaming paraffin ball called Jarnail Singh Rode, crowned as Bhindranwale by Dam Dami Taksal. Rajiv Gandhi too had allowed another Sikh fortune hunter to meddle into the affairs of Punjab. His home minister Buta Singh did more harm to the nation than promoting its security by application and non-application of his contorted mind to the woos of the people of Punjab.

He did not take kindly my thorny presence in Punjab operations. I was summoned and made to stand before him and asked to give a full account of the arms and immunisations supplied to Jasbir Singh and his followers. The catch in his question was very transparent. We had supplied certain licensed weapons and a good number of 'unauthorised lethal weapons' from a secret source. I divulged only the figures of the licensed weapons, which were sanctioned by the minister himself and refused to admit that the government at any level had supplied 'unauthorised' weapons. He produced a piece of paper that quoted an unconfirmed story that the IB had supplied 69 'lethal' weapons to its operational friends. I spontaneously dismissed the report as a piece of concoction by certain elements opposed to the Union government. He dismissed the meeting rather annoyingly. I knew that my days in the Punjab operations desk were numbered.

My interview with the home minister was followed by two queer incidents. Sushil Muni accompanied by his lady secretary and an unknown Sikh face knocked my door. His proposal was very attractive. He told me, on the alleged authority of the home minister, that I should recommend release of two Sikh terrorists incarcerated in Amritsar Central Jail. I frequented that infamous jail to

meet Jasbir Singh and others detained there after Operation Black Thunder. The request of Muni was accompanied by an exhibition of a stack of currency notes carried by his secretary. The trap was very clear. Two terrorists named by Sushil Muni were close to the home minister and he could jolly well call the Director Intelligence Bureau and ask him to do the needful. I flatly refused to oblige him and called upon the last drops of humility to hang a broad smile on my face and escort the revered saint to the Mercedes that waited for him.

The other incident was more serious in nature. The Sikh terrorists had a thousand reasons to harm my family. I did not take any police protection and used total anonymity as the best security shield. The covers that I utilised in meeting some of terrorist leaders and members of Dam Dami Taksal were not foolproof. Once Wairyam Singh Bhuranangal, self-styled Lt. General of BTfK, detained me somewhere near Bhurenangal village for two nights. Kashmir Singh, one of the terrorists appointed high oriests, secured my release. Being in the front line I was aware of the possibility of being present at the wrong side of the barrel. It was a professional risk.

But two instances of attempted overrunning of my elder son by ‘terrorists’ had rattled my bones. The Sikh terrorists did not go about very subtly in targeting their enemies. I was a deemed enemy to many Sikh terrorists. They had the Kalashnikovs to fire on my family and me. What for this charade was? To send a message to me? By whom? The terrorists did not send friendly warning before pulling the triggers. I drew my own conclusion that some friends were getting mighty uncomfortable with me. I immediately arranged to shift to a more secured house at Bapa Nagar and availed of a static armed guard at home. Some personal security officers were provided to my family.

In the meantime I was promoted to next higher rank. I could not aspire to replace Kalyan Rudra, a very competent officer and a walking encyclopaedia on Punjab and Haryana. For the first time I requested a transfer out of Punjab Operations Cell and was finally relieved to join the Pakistan Counterintelligence Unit, with a rider that I would continue to assist in a few sensitive Punjab Operations. That was a fair deal.

TWENTY-ONE

FACING THE FIRST LOVE

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An infallible method of conciliating a tiger is to allow oneself to be devoured.

Konrad Adenauer.

I did not hate Pakistan and I was not obsessed with the umbilical neighbour, which was pathologically busy in erasing its sub-continental identity and to don on a Saudi Wahabi Islamist pyjama. Some of their political philosophers called themselves as the people of the Indus, to indicate difference from the Hindus, the people of the Ganga-Jamuna basins. This was a contrived discovery of Pakistan, dating back to the pre-historic era of Harappan civilisation and invasion by the so-called Aryans. But our friends in the West refuse to identify if they descended from the *Suras*, the presumed Aryans or the *Asuras*, the indigenous people or the people of 'Ahur mazda', the fire worshippers; who were from a different strain of the so-called Aryans. In any case our fiends in the Indus did not originate in the sand and oasis of Saudi Arabia. But no one can prevent human minds to invent philosophy. Hitler had his own philosophy, the philosophy of hate. Our friends on the Indus think that by inventing a philosophy of civilisation they can totally base the foundation of their nationality on a religion that visited the subcontinent much later in history.

However, I do not hate the people of Pakistan, who are even now made to believe that religion is the best *arrak* or Soma Rasa intoxicant, which is the toughest crazy glue. They refuse to recognise that we are the inseparable umbilical twins architected to separate identities by cruel history. Our strong ethnic and cultural bonds are impregnated with the same air, water and soil. We even share common genes, peculiarly common to almost all the sub-continental ethnic and religious groups.

The above is a pragmatic statement of fact based on historical truth. Indians, specially the Hindus, tend to transform even immediate history to mythology. At a spin of coin they replace the idols of their gods by the idols of politicians like Indira and Rajiv and film stars like Amitabh Bacchan and Shah Rukh Khan. They tend to burn their women and worship them as goddesses. Similarly they are adept in demonising the people they do not like.

Most of them have demonised the British Empire to add a mythical texture to the struggle for independence. They deified a few frontline survivors of the independence struggle and made serious attempts to immortalise a particular family. They forgot that the tired and greedy Congress leaders of 1947 as eagerly sought partition, as it was, by the suspicious and bigoted Muslim leadership. The tortuous course of history justified the partition but not the genocide that took place on either side of the border. The partition justified the contention of some Muslims, that there existed a conflict of civilisation. And it annulled the hackneyed slogan of secularism that has often been used by the ruling cliques as an instrument of 'social apartheid' that permanently segmented the Muslims from the Hindus. Secularism was taken to mythological proportions by reducing it to the concept of vote bank minorityism. The existing 'social apartheid' system in intra-Hindu relationship highlighted by the perverted caste system was again taken to the realm of mythology by Prime Minister V. P. Singh who used the hated tool to protect the hot seat he was catapulted to by an irony of history. Partition had

rendered Hindu-Muslim relationship more complex. The pendulum swung from hate to hug, deification and deionisation. That's what formed the foundation of India's Pakistan and Pakistan's India policy. When I was posted to the Pakistan Counter-Intelligence Unit (PCIU) I was, as most Indians are, conditioned to some extent by the historical biases.

However, I never believed in deification and demonisation. I did not consider Pakistan any more as a Muslim-Hindu issue. It had emerged as a geopolitical force having serious strategic bearing on India's internal and external security concerns. Pakistan was in a state of constant and spontaneous war against India, not as a Muslim country, but as an international Islamist entity. India has best of relationship with numerous Muslim countries. Enmity with Pakistan is not based on clashes between the Hindus and the Muslims. Pakistan too had lapsed into the realm of mythology in believing that Saudi Wahabi mandate was transferred to it from the ruling royal family of Saudi Arabia. They believed that Islam could once again unfurl its flag on the Sankarachariya hilltop in Srinagar and the ramparts of Delhi's Red Fort. They were driven by a distant dream, and I considered myself a soldier of history, who was deployed to snap that absurd dream.

This feeling did not arise out of my affinity to the Hindutwa establishments. Neither had I ever imagined that I could don on the mantle of a fanatic nationalist. This was a lesson of history that I had learnt at a great cost.

My job was fair and simple: to pilot the Pakistan counterintelligence unit and to understand Pakistan and its Establishment in appropriate geopolitical light. I had stepped into the PCIU with that frame of mind, which was fortified by my experiences of Pakistani proxy war in the North East and Punjab.

It was not another job for me. It was the dearest job I enjoyed most.

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Indo-Pakistan relations were not at their best in 1988. Pakistan's deep involvement in Punjab and Kashmir had soured up the diplomatic ambience. The Inter Services Intelligence under General Akhtar Abdul Rehman had its special units infiltrated amongst the Sikh and Kashmiri militant groups. The ISI had already set into motion its policy of encircling India by setting up new operational bases in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives and by strengthening the existing resources and collaborators in Bangladesh. Pakistan was poised for springing nasty surprises on the government of Rajiv Gandhi, who was busy battling 'scandals', gathering political clouds and a serious drought that had almost devastated the economy.

The sudden 'assassination' of General Zia in a dramatic plane crash on August 17, 1988, had many Pakistani and international fingers pointed at India being one of the prime suspects, the others being Al Zulfiqar, a fledgling 'terrorist' outfit run by Murtaza Bhutto, son of Z.A.Bhutto, Khad, the Afghan intelligence organisation, and even the CIA. It was undoubtedly an insider job and perpetrators in all probability had access to VX nerve gas manufactured by super powers like the USA and the USSR.

By the time I was saddled to the PCIU Benazir Bhutto had got the clearance of President Ghulam Ishaq Khan and top Army brass to emerge as an angel of democracy. Her rivals were adequately assisted by the ISI though. Rajiv Gandhi and his 'Pakistan expert' former diplomat and Dosco friend Mani Shankar Iyer hoped for opening up a fresh dialogue with the democratically elected prime minister of Pakistan. It was a genuine desire, but it was not tempered with statecraft and deeper insight into the historical paradoxes. Indian and Pakistani politicians often turn to peace overtures when they reach their tether's end in pursuing diplomatic course of action and low intensity war of

attrition and sporadic border shelling. Peace is often used as an offensive weapon by both the countries, though none of the establishment leaders on either side of the border has genuine hunger for peace.

Benazir's PPP had emerged as the single largest party with 92 seats in a house of 215. The IJI, a party floated at the behest of the ISI and a section of the Establishment, had secured 54 seats. The Armed Forces dithered for an agonising period before it decided to allow a democratically elected government to take over. It was natural for Benazir to embark upon another peace offensive to keep a part of political base happy and Pakistan's international financiers in good humour. She knew, as well as we in the PCIU knew, that the Pakistani Establishment wasn't really pining for a love-grid with India.

I am not sure if Rajiv Gandhi was properly briefed about the nitty-gritty of a tortuous peace offensive. The insincerity of his administration and immaturity of his 'Pakistan expert' was proved by the following incident.

Back in Delhi the expert operators of the Intelligence Bureau were unfolding an ISI backed major espionage thrust. HumInt, TechInt and surveillance had proved beyond doubt that Brigadier Zaheer ul Islam Abbasi, the Military Attaché of the Pakistan High Commission, was a cover ISI operative and he was personally engaged in running an espionage ring. His personal meetings with a former captain of the Indian Army were recoded by still photography and videography. The rendezvous points used by him were well documented. This particular catch was ready for 'pick up'.

Just three days after I joined the PCIU I was informed that an operation was planned to neutralise the Pakistani Brigadier at a prominently located rendezvous. I hurried through the fact sheets and pointed out that an eminently located RV should not be used to pick up a senior diplomat. I also discussed with my colleagues that the timing of the pickup was perhaps not correct. A new democratically elected government in Pakistan was likely to be installed in a day or two and the Indian Prime Minister should be allowed the elbowroom to stretch a friendly diplomatic space towards his Pakistani counterpart. I was overruled and was told that the Prime Minister and his close aides were in the picture and his 'Pakistan expert' had opined that the operation should be concluded, at any cost, before Benazir was installed. That would allow Rajiv to start with a clean slate. The argument was a faulted one. Benazir was not a dumb fool to judge the developments in Delhi out of the context of Pakistan's overall relationship with India. She was a probationer prime minister and was in no position to annoy the Army. Brig. Abbasi represented the fundamentalist fringe of Pakistan Army.

But who in the IB could go against the wishes of the bosom friend of the PM? We were made to fall in line.

I was shown a draft handout for Door Darshan and All India Radio, India's official TV and radio channel, which was to be issued immediately after Abbasi was picked up. I objected to this strategy. Normally in counterintelligence neutralisation operations the media is kept out of the picture. Delhi police briefs them much later, after the suspects are interrogated and the exact ramifications of the damage caused by the network are assessed. The IB is scrupulously kept out of the picture. I was told that the PM's Pakistan expert friend had ordered this course of action.

My boss was very close to the inner coterie of the PMO/PMH and he had discussed the operation with the top man. Rajiv Gandhi, I was told, was very keen to present the yet to be sworn in Prime Minister of Pakistan with a piquant surprise. I did not have the time to reflect over the professional exigencies that called for immediate conclusion of the operation. I was not sure what diplomatic benefit would accrue out of this. But, I later found out the same night that the Prime Minister badly

needed a booster to convince himself that neutralisation of Abbasi would give him an edge over his counterpart in Islamabad. Never before, I believe, the IB was pressured to conclude an important CI operation for giving doubtful political and diplomatic elbowroom to a Prime Minister, whose enthusiasm was not matched by his expertise.

On the fateful November 30, 1988, Brigadier Abbasi was to meet his Indian contact at XX Hotel to pick up certain sensitive military documents around 7 p.m. A trap was laid to capture him in the act of exchanging documents for money. It was a successful trap. Whatever he was, I must say that Abbasi was a naïve intelligence operator. Virtually the number three in the Mission, he was not supposed to run a sensitive intelligence operation by himself and was not required to attend risky RV meetings. Abbasi was a zealot and believed that his excellent performance in Delhi would fire up the rockets to boost him to higher hierarchical orbits.

He walked into the clumsily planned trap and was physically overpowered before he could be bundled into a waiting car. His Pakistani non-diplomat companion too was picked up. The driver of the Mission car escaped at high speed to inform the chancery officials that something had gone wrong.

Brigadier Abbasi had vehemently resisted his detention by the Indian intelligence agents. He and his attendant used hands and feet to clear their way and run out into the open. In the process he received a few blows from my hefty colleagues. Use of minimal force was necessary as the venue was a restaurant room of the hotel and manoeuvring space was limited. To allow Abbasi to run out to the open would have compromised the operation. We were left with no other option but to 'capture' the catch there itself.

I had deployed, against advices of the handling officers, a video camera to record the neutralisation effort. Abbasi had tried to break the camera too by hurling a commando kick at the camera operator. He was taken to the usual interrogation centre of Delhi police.

It was unfortunate that one of my colleagues had used unacceptable language and body force against Abbasi even inside the confines of the police post. It definitely militated against diplomatic protocol.

I busied myself with the basic task of informing the ministry of external affairs and requesting them to notify the Pakistani Mission about 'compromise of two of their staff' in an act unbecoming of diplomatic and non-diplomatic employees. Having done so, I notified a senior officer of Delhi police to arrange for interrogation and registration of appropriate first information reports in the case.

An interesting twist to the event was given by a TV news bulletin at 7.30 p.m. that announced the arrest of the senior Pakistani diplomat. The handout approved by someone in the PMO was passed on to the media soon after the news of the 'neutralisation' was conveyed to the PMO. That created a serious embarrassment. We hadn't yet finished search and interrogation and we were technically not sure about the identity of the individuals, as they did not carry identity cards. The news broadcast gave leverage to the Pakistani Mission. They immediately lodged protest with the MEA even before I could get in touch with one of the senior officials in MEA's Pakistan desk. The MEA reacted slowly and gave scope to the Pak Mission to complain about physical torture of their diplomat.

At about ten in the night I was summoned to the PMH to be grilled by the Prime Minister and his aides. The Director Intelligence Bureau was also present. It was a cruel and crucial moment.

I was asked piercing questions on the proprieties of handling the operation, alleged manhandling of the Pakistani diplomat, failure to inform the Pakistan embassy about the fact of the detention and untimely publicity over the electronic media. I did not fumble in replying that there was no manhandling and the IB could inform only the Ministry of External Affairs and was not supposed to go anywhere near the Pakistan embassy.

I expected the Director Intelligence Bureau, seated silently on the table to intervene and explain the position. He did not. He ordered conclusion of the operation and he should have been able to explain the things better in private to the PM. Instead I was grilled by a house-full of aides of the PM. Such incidents are unheard of in intelligence parlance.

All these years I had idolised M. K. Narayanan as a thorough professional. It's he who had decided to terminate the operation on a particular day, two days after I joined the PCIU. I did know precious little about the practical details of this operation. Narayanan's silence panicked me. Standing before the Prime Minister of the country I developed a feeling that the ground was slipping out from under my feet and my boss was not reluctant to sacrifice me to keep his position intact with the coterie.

Rajiv Gandhi behaved coolly. He was not flabbergasted by the rhetorics of his aides.

“Thank you for what you have done. But I should have been consulted.”

That was the ultimate I expected from the Prime Minister of the country. Who gave the final nod, if he did not? Did the DIB act on the promptings of the hirelings in the PMO? That was unlikely. I was shuddered by the thought that the beleaguered PM was so clueless about happenings around him. How could he be so naïve to assume that neutralisation of a Minister level cover diplomat would weaken the position of Benazir Bhutto? Normal political and strategic reflexes could have impelled the Army Junta to defer handing over power to Benazir.

I turned to him again and managed to say that part of the order was conveyed from his office.

Rajiv Gandhi raised his head again and said, ‘well done.’

That was a comforting gesture. I was frustrated with the behaviour of the Director IB. He failed to stand by his soldier at a crucial point of time, when the PM's aides tried to double cross his friend and political mentor.

All that I could do was to return to the police post with a serious concern over the attitude of my boss, and a pity for the son of Indira Gandhi. The Abbasi affair was another instance of his ‘reign of error.’ Elements of error were involved in timing the conclusion of the operation, the manner in which it was concluded and the serious communication gap between the PM, his aides and the intelligence chief. No assessment was obtained from the MEA about the likely reaction of the new Prime Minister elect of Pakistan.

I had witnessed similar lack of inter-agency coordination in Punjab operations and lack of control on the home minister. Rajiv Gandhi, a trained pilot, was supposed to possess an uncanny sense of timing and coordination. But very little of his training was reflected in his flying of the most complicated machine he was saddled to, the complex Indian nation.

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Before I make my readers to walk through the fault lines that Pakistan exploited to its fullest advantage, I would beg their indulgence to face a turbulent and a devastating tornado, which was initiated by Rajiv Gandhi again by a serious error of judgement. He was wrongly guided and advised by his double-crossing aides.

I have earlier mentioned about my close proximity to some of the RSS and the BJP stalwarts. By May 1988, the contacts and consultations took a brisk shape. Besides K. N. Gobindachariya, Deodas Apte, late Rajendra Sharma, S. Guruswamy, Uma Bharati, Ved Prakash Goyal and his son Piyush continued to visit my residence almost daily. I was introduced to Sushma Swaraj and O.P. Kohli. However, I could not develop their proximity for security reasons that I would not like to disclose. I

also kept deliberate distance from Keshav Kunj for similar reasons.

My wife was particularly fond of young Piyush, Gobindachariya, and Uma. They shared our family meal almost 4/5 times a week. We shared political analysis and strategy and discussed the ways and means, which could result in better electoral performance by the BJP. I must make it clear that I had no access to internal political intelligence generated by the IB. I did not steal IB's information. I had my own network that was capable of generating crucial information and assessment.

I happened to notice that the RSS and its family members had correctly noticed the vacant political space generated by sudden assassination of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi's lackadaisical performance. They did not discount the emergence of Vishwanath Pratap Singh (VP) as an alternative to Rajiv Gandhi and transformation of Indira Congress to its pre-1969 shape. But they did not take into account the crucial factor of slavish attachment of a section of Congressmen to the family of Motilal, Jawaharlal and Indira. In the absence of any other viable all India figure they had rightly opted for the Nehru-Gandhi family as the right vehicle to drive down to the armatures of the political power houses in Delhi and in the states. In fact, post-independence Congress minus Nehru-Gandhi family is an unthinkable political chemistry. That kind of a political test tube is not likely to germinate life force.

The RSS and BJP had, for the first time, drawn up a blueprint of action to emerge as the most viable political force and the simplest weapon before them was to reinvent the Hindu aspirations. Their piggyback ride on the JP movement had proved that the identification of appropriate vehicles and personalities could take them nearer to power. They had identified V. P. Singh as the new JP and planned out a war game for achieving ascendance of Hindutwa strategy.

Politically Rajiv Gandhi was not a complete bankrupt. Operation Black Thunder in Punjab had caught the Hindu imagination and they looked up to Rajiv Gandhi as a better planner and executor than his mother was. Black Thunder was a neatly executed operation, though it did not succeed in rooting out Pakistan backed militancy. It helped Rajiv to resurrect some of the Hindu support.

Rajiv Gandhi's next act to woo the Muslim vote bank was, however, not based on correct political assessment. The reversal of the Supreme Court judgement on Shah Bano case and passing of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill was said have been done to placate the Muslim vote bank. Many observers alleged that Rajiv had rushed through the legislation to placate the Muslim psyche that was seriously hurt after the Assam Accord, which envisaged deportation of Bangladeshi Muslims from Assam. On final count, the Shah Bano case action had sullied Rajiv's secular image and antagonised a sizeable section of the Hindu vote bank. The moderate and progressive Muslims too were not happy with him. Rajiv had rather proved again that Congress treated 'secularism and minorityism' as a 'policy of apartheid'—segregating a major religious group from the mainstream of the country.

This was preceded by the judgement of a lower court in Faizabad that authorised the unlocking of the disputed mosque at Ayodhya to enable the Hindus to offer worship to Lord Rama, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Rajiv Gandhi, to quote his estranged cousin Arun Nehru, had deliberately decided to play the Hindu card to offset the Muslim card he played in Shah Bano case. It was Rajiv's decision, according to the grandson of Nandlal Nehru, to facilitate TV broadcast of Hindus worshipping at the Ayodhya mosque.

Some political observers have commented that Arun Nehru was responsible for the Ayodhya fiasco. There are documented reasons (secret IB documents) to believe that the corporate manager did commit the blunder based on shortsighted assessment of the communal relationship between the Hindus, Sikhs and the Muslims. He was attuned to marketing strategy of manufactured products and

lived from day to day tally of the balance sheet. Statesmanship and national political strategy were not his forte. Rajiv had committed a big folly by depending on a faulted marketing strategy of his cousin.

The 'communal atmosphere' had come under severe strain. Around that time the state controlled TV had broadcast the serialised version of the Indian epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. This had tremendous impact on the Hindu psyche and the country witnessed a spontaneous resurgence of Hindu sentiments. The actor who played the character of Rama had campaigned for V. P. Singh in Allahabad by-election. The actress who portrayed the role of Sita was known to be a BJP sympathiser.

The communal imbroglio was compounded by the severe outbreak of communal riot in Meerut in early 1987. Rajiv's congress government in Uttar Pradesh performed precious little to quell the riots and the Hindu mobs and an allegedly partisan provincial armed constabulary killed about three hundred Muslims. Three Indias now harked at Rajiv Gandhi rather menacingly: the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh India. He did not know which way to go. His friend, the Director IB, had also failed to guide the confused and novice Prime Minister on correct lines. The latter preferred to swim with the PMH/PMO coterie. Rajiv's political judgement and strategic grasp was virtually paralysed by the turn of the events.

Two other major errors of Rajiv had eroded his credibility as a national leader. He and his troubleshooters that included a few senior officers of the Intelligence Bureau and the Research and Analysis Wing of the Cabinet Secretariat (specially its SSB wing) propped up the Bodos against the Assamese on the demand of Bodoland, a separate state for Bodo-Kachari people living in Assam and West Bengal.

The same trouble-shooters plus a fortune hunter journalist (who later became a MP from Darjeeling) had stoked the fire of unrest amongst the discontented Gorkhas of Darjeeling. The IB station in Patna was used as the forward base for troubleshooting in Darjeeling, simply because the IB station in charge was once upon a time district superintendent of Darjeeling and a close associate of some of the Congress ministers (he was later appointed a governor by the BJP government). In fact, Patna and Banaras were used as proxy-hub for Gorkhaland operation.

Some of us tried to intervene and point out that both the Bodo and Gorkha fires were likely to spread an unmanageable bushfire. I knew Darjeeling pretty well, perhaps better than any of the IB trouble-shooters, especially the Director IB and the Patna station chief. I offered my services to contact and contain certain Gorkha personalities to canalise the agitation to the advantage of the strife torn nation. But Rajiv's political aides, open market troubleshooters and intelligence abettors were in no mood to listen to sane advice.

The bounty of accords that Rajiv managed to reach had only helped in resurrecting two ethnic demons, which were later to spawn serious internal security threats. The Bodo machinations were left to the designs of another senior IB officer and the political gang headed by Hiteswar Saikia.

These developments etched in my mind a serious thought process. I concluded that Rajiv had closed all doors to saner advice and had surrounded himself by sycophants, who were more preoccupied with self-aggrandisement than serving the nation. Rajiv too, it appeared, was desperately trying to revive some of the Emergency day's ghosts. After having wasted the goodwill of the people by continuously erring on vital decisions he had reached the very end of the precipice. The more he erred the more inflexible he became.

No other Prime Minister of India was dragged by nose by the Intelligence Bureau, before and after Rajiv Gandhi. It displayed his immaturity, dependence on a coterie and fatal trust on intelligence

machinery. Incidentally, it should be mentioned that IB was responsible for decoding cipher messages of the LTTE. One Narasimhan was incharge of this operation. The messages of the LTTE could not be deciphered by him. M. K. Narayanan blindly trusted him. Some such messages contained clues of the LTTE plan for assassinating Rajiv Gandhi. The comical prologue of the story was: Narayanan was appointed as National Security Advisor by Sonia Gandhi and Narayanan rewarded Narasimhan by making him a Governor.

The state of desperation of the coterie of Rajiv Gandhi was better exemplified by an intimate incident that had rattled my family. I was not aware of the cartoon-drawing faculty of my elder son. A student of St Stephens he had drawn a few cartoons lampooning Rajiv Gandhi and got these published in *Indian Express*, supposedly anti-establishment news daily of the day.

Shubhabrata Bhattachariya, a seasoned journalist and a barnacle to the politicians in power, drew my attention to the budding genius at my home. Bhattachariya was not new in our life. I had known him since my days in the SIB Delhi as a professional friend and my wife had arranged his second marriage to a nice lady at a Karolbagh temple. He advised me to restrain my son. In spite of the fact that he had consumed a lot of salt from my hand and food cooked by my wife he presented the cartoons to an aide of the Prime Minister and recommended action against my son and me.

The same Bhattachariya had later volunteered to help out Rajiv Gandhi in the St. Kitts scandal, which tried to frame V. P. Singh and his son Ajeya. He and his wife were sent to St. Kitts on a presumed honeymoon, which was funded by an industrial house. The St. Kitts affair had exposed the most raw and inane nature of Rajiv Gandhi's concept of playing political games. He proved only a shade different from his brother Sanjay. As far as Bhattachariya was concerned I drew comfort from the fact that such are the frivolities of compulsive taxis like Bhattachariya in the fourth estate! They can be hired at any point of time. He is not alone in that competitive field. One has to discover and either enjoy or suffer these taxi rides.

The whispers of Bhattachariya produced the desired effect. I was summoned by an aide to the PM and directed to stop my son from lampooning Rajiv in the *Indian Express*. I declined to oblige and told him that my adult son was responsible enough to express his political views and I reminded that any harassment to him would invite legal action. The brave aide to Rajiv Gandhi had ticked me off as a persona non grata. I did not care. By that time I had decided to pursue my professional commitment to the PCIU, Punjab operations and upcoming commitments with the initial security and intelligence operations in Kashmir.

These incidents and the pressure on my family refashioned the political creature in me to tilt towards the forces of change, basically the RSS and the BJP. I have never suffered from the illusion preached by Gita that divine incarnations manifested themselves in Bharat whenever it faced crisis of faith. In the recent past we had disowned two such *yugapurshas*, legendary men, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and the warrior freedom fighter, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. I sincerely believed that neither Rajiv nor V. P. Singh had the intrinsic qualities of assuming the role of *yugapurasha*.

I never thought I possessed a messianic zeal like the *yugapurushas*. But I was essentially a political creature and I decided to act in consonance with the forces, which laboured to bring changes to the political structure. I could not prevent myself from detaching from the son of Indira and resolving to support the Sangh. It was my personal decision as a conscious citizen of India; not as an intelligence operative.

I did not know V. P. Singh. I did not believe in his messianic capabilities and political and economic vision, though I was impressed by his honesty and courage. My natural reaction was to

strengthen the only untested national political force, the BJP and I hoped that it would be able to give India a clean administration and open up the process of reinterpreting the 'apartheid' compartmentalisation in the Hindu society and modify the similar 'apartheid' interpretation of the concept of secularism.

My contacts with the RSS and BJP friends were strengthened by the above-narrated developments and we continued to work in the direction of augmenting the vote banks of the BJP and its deemed ally, Jan Morcha, floated by V.P.Singh. K. N. Gobindachariya, Piyush Goyal, Uma Bharati, Deodas Apte, S.Gurumurthy and Rajendra Sharma acted as emissaries of the BJP leadership. Bhurelal and advocate Rayan Karanjiwala often contacted me on behalf of V.P.Singh. But I declined their offer to meet the Jan Morcha leader and cultivate him before he took over the reins of the country. I was told that such pre-election meetings could be highly rewarding. Somehow or other I did not trust V.P.Singh's looks, which appeared to be shallow and shifting. In my perception he was not a stable person. I did not consider him as an alternative to Rajiv, but only a temporary pause.

My calculations were calibrated to draw a definable conclusion about the outcome of the 1989 elections. My informal non-IB team was mobilised and I started receiving feedback that Rajiv Congress was not likely to cross the 200 mark. I was not very enthusiastic about the political creatures around V. P. Singh, especially wily political animals like Devilal and Chandrashekhar. They were seasoned players in the politics of defection and affection and both suffered from burning ambition to grab the tattered crown of India. The Janata Party experiment was too ghastly for a country, which gasped for fresh political breath after a strangulating spell of emergency. I was not sure if the apparently well-intentioned raja of Manda, a son who had declined to recognise his own blood, would be able to recognise the blood-pulsations of the people of India.

I had consciously settled for the BJP and my friends in the RSS; not for V. P. Singh, a visionary without any vision. I suffered from the hope that the BJP could give a cleaner administration and provide greater security to the country. I might have been prejudiced because of my adolescent connectivity with the Sangh. Nevertheless, I reposed trust in the BJP and believed that they could bring stability to the beleaguered nation. I did not consider it as an act of betrayal against Rajiv Gandhi; I construed my action as a higher duty to the country. I might have been incorrect. Who knows? Only the arrow of time can pass a verdict, not any subjective outsider perception.

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My infatuation with national politics definitely violated the service rules and the rules framed by the government for the department/bureau of intelligence. My decision was my own. I was not influenced by any allurements. Rather I had offered my stable job on the line and had embarked on a course that definitely violated service rules and ethics of the agency in which I worked. Essentially a dormant political creature I did what my soul encouraged me to do. One of the squirrels had prevailed upon the other and I was there at the crossroads of history.

I knew what I was doing and was ready to face the consequences. My feeling for the country was greater than my loyalty to a boss who behaved like a doormat of the PMO.

However, dalliance with national politics did not hinder my commitment to chasing Pakistan and its intelligence tentacles in India and its neighbourhood. But the structural and functional assets of the PCIU that I had just taken over had dismayed me.

The Intelligence Bureau studied Islamist growth as a part of its study of the Muslim community in India in the context of communalism and spread of Pan Islamism. It did not have a separate analysis

desk on Pakistan. It still does not have one. Strategic, tactical and geopolitical studies on Pakistan were left to the Research & Analysis Wing and the MEA and exalted bodies like the JIC and the IDSA. Very little researched historical material was available on Kashmir, Punjab and North East in the analysis and operations desks on Pakistan and its military and intelligence institutions. Available materials simply related to running commentary on happening events.

The Afghanistan developments had spawned several Islamist *jehadi* organisations, which were being readied for the Indian theatres. We had very little idea about who they were and how they planned to exploit the festering fault lines in Kashmir and expand the network of proxy war. The concerned IB desks that handled Kashmir, Punjab, and North East functioned in total isolation, each one guarding its territory zealously. The concept of restrictive security was implemented with yogic discipline and religious fanaticism. Intra-desk exchange of data was abhorred as if these were pornographic overtures. In simple words, the Intelligence Bureau lived in schizophrenic compartments and refused to share data with sister desks. However, a few reasonable officers very rarely agreed to share titbits, after obtaining an affirmative nod from their boss men.

As a result Pakistan was covered in bits and pieces, whoever cared to cover the strategic enemy in the context of areas of interest of the territorial satraps. Pakistan was not studied as the fountainhead that aided and abetted insurgency and terrorism and promoted Islamist *jehadi* thrust inside India and aggravated the communal environ. It was neither a diplomatic nor a military problem. It was intricately related to the internal security concerns of India. Yet I found it difficult to lay hands on basic materials that could give me some mastery on the forward intelligence and sabotage and subversive operations run by Pakistan in India from its diplomatic premises in Delhi and Bombay and similar Missions located in the neighbouring countries.

The PCIU was primarily concerned with Mission based operations by the PDMI, the PAFI, the PIB and the ISI (*It is still not allowed to function as the main resource pool of studies on Pakistan*). The desk satraps claimed that they handled Pakistan, I presume, like blind men judged the shape and dimension of elephants. The state units of the IB, the SIBs and the CIOs either did not have organised counterintelligence units or they had some focussed units, which covered the US, the USSR and the Chinese activities. In the states like Kashmir and Punjab the IB units were basically concerned with the end product of Pakistani thrusts, fighting terrorism and chasing militant groups. No mechanism existed to plug the fountainhead of proxy war and deep penetration forward intelligence thrusts.

Anti-terrorist operations in Punjab and Kashmir had thrown up some crystalline ideas about the ISI backup stations in Nepal and Bangladesh. But the IB had no institutionalised mechanism to set up operational bases in the foreign countries. The existing state of information exchange between the IB, R&AW and the MEA was highly unsatisfactory. Diplomatic sensitivities stood in the way of IB's covert operations in the neighbouring countries. A proposal to allow the IB to station its operatives in the capitals of the SAARC countries was shot down; though in recent times a few IB officers are posted to some of the SAARC countries mainly on open security related assignment and not on cover intelligence assignment.

The IB was also not allowed to maintain its UCA-Unofficial Cover Agents-in these countries. Practical ramifications of the internal security concerns demanded that the Intelligence Bureau should be allowed to operate in the SAARC countries. But the national security planners, if there were any, did not apply their minds to this burning issue. The Joint Intelligence Committee, a supposed umbrella organisation, was not provided with any umbrella. It had degenerated into a sterile thesis drafting and defocused club for the elite chatterati. Its end products, often excellent, were not used either by the intelligence producers or the end users.

The areas of darkness were too many. The most important were:

- Lack of systematic study of the Pakistani intelligence organisations including the military intelligence units and the elite units like the SSG;
- Lack of proper accounting and auditing of the Pakistani nationals visiting and overstaying/melting down in India; lack of identification of the Indian Islamist organisations having questionable linkages with the Pakistani/Bangladeshi Islamist and fundamentalist organisations. The existing mechanism of accounting for the Pakistani nationals by the Foreigner's Regional Registration officer in Delhi and his counterparts in state capitals like Calcutta, Chennai and Mumbai and in the districts was awfully inadequate. The system, at many places, reeked with corruption;
- Lack of intelligence apparatus to monitor developments on Indo-Pak land and sea borders;
- Lack of intelligence mechanism to monitor the Nepal and Bangladesh borders and,
- Lack of intelligence project conceptualisation and appraisal for coverage of centres of intelligence/sabotage/subversion modules created by the ISI in different parts of the country;
- And lack of intelligence on 'modules' established inside India by Pakistan based *mujahideen* organisations and international Islamist terrorist organisations like the Al Qaeda.

I discussed the parameters of my thought process and my perception with my immediate boss, Suresh Mehta, an intelligence technocrat with a balanced and dignified head on his shoulders. He was enthusiastic but cautioned me to proceed with circumspection, as my ideas were likely to pollute the honey chambers of a couple of analysis and operations desks in Delhi and most of the regional intelligence satraps. This note of caution was necessary, as Mehta knew me too well as an eager Beaver, who refused to leave his wood un-chewed. I did honour his cautionary note with slight modifications.

It is difficult to share with my readers the details of innumerable counterintelligence operations that were undertaken to neutralise the Mission based Pakistani intelligence operatives. At one point of time, in 1989, the number of accredited diplomats working as Intelligence Officers (IO) was estimated at nine. There were about 18 non-diplomat IOs. They kept my team and me awfully busy. The PCIU had succeeded in locating and neutralising about five Mission based operatives and packing them back to their home bases in hale and hearty condition. But Pakistan always reacted with usual crudity and violence. Suspected Indian intelligence operatives were invariably mauled mercilessly and packaged with plenty of cotton and bandages.

Sometime in 1990 the PCIU was advised by the MHA and MEA to adopt a go slow policy in busting the espionage rings in usual style of catching them in live action. I was given to understand that Pakistani attitude of matching the Indian neutralisation achievements with the eye for eye principle had brought about intelligence drought in the R&AW. The MEA also felt the heat of angry demarches, loud protests and undiplomatic strong-arm treatment to the regular diplomats.

On my third year in the PCIU I was forced to adopt a 'passive neutralisation' policy by the government. It meant that the PCIU reserved the right to apply all the tradecrafts to unearth Pakistani penetration in vital sectors of Indian activities, neutralise the Indian connectivity and leave a leeway for the MEA to request Pakistan to withdraw the erring officials quietly. I was not sure if a country waging spontaneous direct and indirect war against India deserved that kind of diplomatic nicety.

Diplomacy is an integral part of the state policy, but on occasions diplomacy is required to be treated as the derma on a nation's face. It is often used to hide the truth and hedge strategic action

policy. But Delhi cannot be attributed to have used diplomacy as a tool to combat a compulsive warmongering neighbour, except in 1970-71.

The new term 'coercive diplomacy' coined by the BJP led NDA government in post 9/11/2000 situation was a nerve wrecking exercise of sterile brinkmanship that looked like a kid's tantrums aimed at emotional blackmailing of the international community. The guile of coercive diplomacy was not directed at peeling off the inner derma of aggression of the hostile neighbour. It was aimed at befooling the Indians at large and to cry wolf to the international community. It is evident that neither Washington nor London had taken these cries seriously and none of them had ticked off Pakistan and its ruler Musharraf. The USA and UK, as history testifies, act only on their respective national interests and not on woeful cries of maidens in distress. However beautifully dressed up and however heartrending were the distress cries of the NDA government the 'free world' knights did not come to India's rescue. So much so for brave patriotism of the Sangh Parivar's political face: the BJP!

The height of diplomatic sterility was exhibited by the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister in 1994, when he took the trouble to call me up personally and demanded to know the circumstance under which the PCIU team had picked up a non-diplomat of the Pakistan High Commission from under the prominent city flyover. I explained the circumstances that involved prolonged surveillance, identification of the Pakistani official and his Indian agent belonging to a wing of the defence services. The mighty Principal Secretary demanded video evidence of the event. The exchange of sensitive defence related document had taken place under the flyover that was a busy public thoroughfare. No intelligence sleuth could afford to place a clandestine camera at that carefully selected rendezvous. The PS to the PM was not happy with my 'undiplomatic' approach. I had to visit his office with the recovered documents, which pertained to intelligence leakage relating to India's suspected nuclear activities in Pokharan area and an inventory of missile system in the process of acquisition from Russia. He was convinced that the action taken was correct but demurred through cigarette smoke that I should have been more 'diplomatic'.

My perception of application of diplomacy—first, second and third track diplomacy— did not militate against the proverbial 'hyphenised' actions that kept nations away from war. Diplomacy is not only a tool of peace. The collapse of the USSR has proved beyond doubt that diplomacy can also be a great weapon of war. I continued to advocate for an aggressive and pro-active counter and forward intelligence thrust against Pakistan. My voice was rarely heard and mostly ignored. But I did not stop at the opaque window of diplomacy. My agenda of pursuing the policy of aggressive postures against Pakistan's policy of demolishing Indian unity continued unabated. I had virtually decided to overshoot the runway and fly over the forbidden territory. The rogue squirrel had the better of the saner one.

Did I want to emerge as a one-man army against Pakistan, as a later DIB tried to label me with that stamp? I do not think so. I perceived the task as an important national duty, which was being neglected by the politicians and the 'establishment.' However, I received adequate support only when V. G. Vaidya took over as the Director, Intelligence Bureau. This small statured person was a powerhouse of action. We did many things together. I would like to say more about that productive partnership in the subsequent narrations.

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Several volumes can be written only on forward intelligence thrust by Pakistan inside India. While I don't intend to resort to a lilaceous presentation of intelligence tradecraft, it is necessary to give a

brief tour to the unsuspecting Indians who often are trapped by the well-trained Pakistani operators. Pakistani forward intelligence operators operate from different locational positions:

- Diplomatic premises,
- Cover positions in media and commercial organisation,
- Short term shallow penetration itinerant agents, Pakistani as well as Indian nationals,
- Long term resident agents,
- Networking by the resident agents,
- Sleepers inside India based ethnic and religious organisations which are activated either by the operators at category one and four above and sometime by 'home based' handlers,
- Operators operating from third country based diplomatic missions and 'safe houses', etc.

Targeting is done with meticulous care. Main target areas are:

- Defence establishments and installations,
- Economic ministries,
- Defence related research and scientific organisations and production facilities,
- Movement, ORBAT, deployment and locational details of the Army, Air Force and Naval units,
- Naval stations in the west and east coasts,
- Weapons system testing grounds,
- Intelligence organisations and key positions in the civilian administration and security system,
- Media personalities,
- Members of the parliament and legislatures and officials of these august bodies,
- Key political personalities
- Intellectuals and,
- Society birds, etc.

This list is illustrative. Options are numerous and improvisation is the name of the game.

Pakistani associates in the Indian ethnic-religious insurgent and terrorist groups often carry out some of the major intelligence, sabotage and subversion operations. The scenario underwent vast changes when Pakistan started deputing its own intelligence recruits and trained mujahideens to carry out major sabotage and subversion operations, like attacks on the Red Fort and Parliament. These talents also help Pakistan out in inducting weapons and explosives through land and sea routes. It may be borne in mind that almost all '*mujahideen* tanjim' attacks in India are either sponsored or approved by the ISI and the military establishment. In that country even leaves cannot pulsate without command from the top or near top. The latest nuclear leakage charade should be considered as geopolitical ointment applied by the USA on the festering sores of Pakistan's endangered military dictator. There must be free air somewhere in Pakistan but there are no brave souls like Mujibur Rahman around to blow it in the direction of freedom and democracy.

The focal arrows of operations, therefore, emerge out of the production lines of the Inter Services Intelligence, PDMI, PAFI, PFO (Pakistan Foreign Office) and the hardest core of the 'Establishment' that normally consist of the top military, bureaucratic and political leadership. Pakistan, unlike India, adopts a unified as well as spectrumised approach depending on the task assigned by the 'Establishment'. It is a unique example of focal state approach rather than mere agency based

operational thrust. The battle that we are offered is both multi-fanged and unified. The Indian agencies, rather an agency has the monopoly of running intelligence and act as adjuncts to diplomatic operations inside Pakistan. The consumers are the best tasters to testify the quality of the curry manufactured by the prime and only foreign intelligence organisation of the country. I have no comment to offer.

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Though the Hindutwa protagonists have been crying wolf about Pakistan's proxy war basically after 1998, the neighbouring country's dalliance with the Indian insurgent and terrorist groups can be dated back to 1956.

The honeymoon started with the Naga rebels and still lingers on in the North East, where the operatives of our umbilical twin cast their nets from Bangladesh soil. While the 'unfinished agenda of partition' is being pursued in Kashmir, the proxy-war is being carried out in Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura. The Islamist mujahedins and Pan-Islamic fundamentalists are propped up in the rest of the country. The International Islamist modules have set up strong bases almost all over India. The Pakistani Establishment has turned India into a battleground, some of them like calling it a civilisational war, a war started in the 8th century AD and temporarily terminated with the British occupation. I do not have the scope to discuss this perceived concept of civilisational war between the *jahiliya* Hindus and the faithful Islamists. We must move on from the battlefield, which is being projected on the sub-continental screen for the last 52 years.

Pakistan's aggressive intelligence thrust is better exemplified by the active participation of its senior diplomats (not cover intelligence officials) in intelligence generation. Between 1989 and 1995 I had logged at least five members of Pakistan's Foreign Service successfully penetrating several strata of the Indian society. One of them, a hefty Frontier Pathan, had cultivated several members of the media and parliament. Some of the 'conquered' targets worked as conscious agents of Pakistan. One of them, my linguistic kin, was thoroughly inundated by booze and plastered by green bill. He is still around and adorns the columns of a Kolkata based national weekly. The susceptibility of the fourth estate to the intelligence community had tied our hands down. They are one of the too many holy Indian cows. Some of them, as described by a senior member of the fourth estate, 'taxi on hire.' Any paymaster can hire this particular brand. We were, therefore, forced to intervene in a very delicate manner. Messages shared by us were often received coolly and the disengagement process with the Pakistani handlers ensued promptly. I think in a civilised democratic society this is the best way of awakening the conscience and sense of patriotism amongst the volatile classes of people, the intellectuals and persons of art and letter. The process is slow but fail-safe.

I have been approached by politicians of various hues to comment on a particular politician from Uttar Pradesh and to supply materials with a view to crucifying him on the Pakistani Cross. My argument was very clear. The political breed in India cannot be crucified on any such Cross. They, like various amoebas, keep on developing resistance against all conceivable provisions of the Law and the Constitution. The celebrated politician, often described as the messiah of the minorities and the suppressed and the oppressed was in clandestine contact with the Mission based intelligence officials of a couple of Islamic countries. My bosses must have had the occasion to share such information with their consumers. But a politician in India cannot be hanged simply because he is funded by certain extraneous forces. Moreover, I did care for the security of my family. I was not afraid of the Punjab and Kashmir terrorists. But I feared the next-door killers bred in the backyard of

the criminalized politicians. The terrorists believe in some ideology, these killers believe in money alone, which is the surest licence to purchase the ballot boxes and end the breathing process of a conscientious civil servant.

While on the intelligence games played by the accredited diplomats I would like to display one or two illuminated slides of the glitterati and chatterati of Delhi. My knowledge on this exalted class of Delhi is shallow. But I am better equipped to unravel a few snippets which are based on 'truth and nothing but the truth'.

A few senior accredited diplomats of the Pakistan High Commission pursued a pleasant tradecraft for accessing live human tools, which were capable of penetrating any targeted parlours and beds of the novo rich. My surveillance had laboriously logged and video-graphed some of these pleasant freyas who normally painted Delhi's night joints, hotel rooms and a few exclusive watering holes with rainbow colours. Most of them belonged to awfully affluent homes and some of them were related to renowned media persons and key political figures. Stealing of joyous moments may not be an act of crime in their social dictionary, but allowing the momentary joy to be blackmailed by an itinerant diplomat is a crime. And to facilitate critical access to sensitive areas of national security under pressure of such blackmail is a heinous crime.

The sister of a reputed journalist, supposedly a close buddy of the Prime Minister of India (Rajiv Gandhi), had access to almost all the secrets that passed through the PMH. She had succumbed to the blackmailing tool of a NWFP origin Pakistani diplomat. The PCIU had documented several of their intimate meetings with appropriate light and sound. The Prime Minister received the initial reports about the likely penetration of the PMH through this 'reverse honey trap' with boyish pique. I was required to embarrass him by playing not too subtle a videotape to convince that he was sitting on a volcano and it could explode any moment. The Prime Minister acted promptly to rectify the leaking holes. National interest prevents me from detailing the actions taken by the Prime Minister.

The other important instance of use of 'reverse honey trap' by another Pakistani diplomat involved the daughter in law of a reputed arms peddler and defence contractor. A mother of two and the emotionally depraved lady was hooked by the diplomat in a five star hotel. The intimacy had led them from the lobby to the rooms and a guesthouse in prestigious Sundar Nagar locality, owned by a reputed Muslim family of Uttar Pradesh and patronised by the Pakistan High Commission. It is a crime to disturb persons engaged in the acts of stealing joy. But my nasty job had compelled me to record some of their intimate meetings on celluloid.

I pitied the otherwise wonderful lady, as I was aware of the rogue lifestyle of her husband. This particular lady was a genuine victim of her tormented emotions. We assessed the damage potential of this 'reverse honey trap' and came to a conclusion that the lady had passed on several pieces of sensitive defence related information. She had even organised two meetings of the Pakistan diplomat with a serving Major General of the Indian Army (now retired). The decision at the top level was to request Islamabad to quietly withdraw that senior diplomat and to sound a personal warning to the concerned lady. I was tasked with the later unpleasant duty, as I happened to know the family.

The initial reaction of the lady was adverse, though she served me tea in hand painted china and the softest cake from Oberoi Hotel. I did not have to act crudely and threaten her to witness a video rerun of her exploits. She got the message and broke down in tears. I promised her to consign the videotapes to IB's archive and to protect her secrets for the sake of her two lovely kids. She honoured my professional commitment by agreeing to snap her relationship with the diplomat and by accepting me as her 'rakhi' brother. I maintained that tender relationship of Hindu society and was given the honour to attend her daughter's marriage a couple of years ago. The tormented lady, who wanted to

feel happy by stealing pleasure, expired in 1999. Her son had personally dropped in at my modest place to invite me to her last rites. I appreciated her courage. She did not end up jumping from the top floor of a posh hotel and did not slip into perpetual sleep. She fought back against her erring husband and lived as long as life force was required to ensure happiness of her children.

Use of 'honey trap' and 'reverse honey trap' by intelligence officials and diplomats is not unique to Pakistan. A few other diplomatic Missions in Delhi had successfully exploited the time tested tradecraft tool, even against important defence and intelligence targets.

This luscious aspect of intelligence vocation is not my thrust area. But I would like to mention a successful use of 'honey trap' by PCIU against a very aggressive Mission based Pakistani ISI operative. This particular operative had penetrated various defence related targets. The traditional tradecraft applications by the PCIU had failed to nail the ISI operative, who in real life was a junior commissioned officer of Pakistan army.

His behavioural peculiarities were systematically studied for over a period and it was found that he was fond of certain lady from the walled city of Delhi. This beauty was recruited by the PCIU and was 'educated' to learn a few trade secrets. She knew her trade of taking partners to bed very well. A trap was laid at a pre-selected rendezvous and the ISI operative was caught fabulously on the celluloid. The materials were later used to India's advantage and the 'educated mole' had succeeded in penetrating several layers inside the high security Pakistan High Commission premises. That was a unique success ever achieved by the Intelligence Bureau.

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It's impossible to chronicle the entire spectrum of Indo-Pakistan intelligence war in the present volume. But I must mention another area of serious mismanagement by the Indian governmental and administrative authorities.

Influx of foreign national to India, especially from Bangladesh and Nepal has generated enough political steam, often very ugly steam in West Bengal and Assam. Our political leaders, including the latest BJP brand, have been eloquent on this sensitive issue. But they have done precious little to remove the anomalies. A few sincere efforts have been opposed by the 'secular' political forces, which have used the slogan of 'secularism' as 'apartheid of minorityism'.

My concerns are, however, related to the Pakistani nationals who visit India to meet relatives and for shallow penetration trading purposes. The major immigration point at Attari in Punjab was in shambles. Corruption prevailed at all conceivable levels. The PCIU had insisted on installation of computerised immigration clearance at Attari. After prolonged procrastination a system was installed by the NIC, a government owned IT organisation. Some efforts were made to link up the system with the Indian Mission in Islamabad and the Home Ministry in Delhi. It worked for a while but 'stalled' because of lack of trained work force and unwillingness of the 'police personnel' on deputation to operate the system. The NIC also wanted to pedal their own choice of computer and software, which was not acceptable to my experts and me.

Some efforts were made to streamline the data collection centre in Delhi and establishing connectivity with the Foreigner's Registration Officers in the states. We tried to streamline the information flow between the Centre and the States. But, in India, a system runs efficiently as long as the operator is willing to run it. It has gone into disuse.

A good number of Pakistani nationals visiting India through authorised routes manage to 'melt' down among the friendly population. For a considerable time they remain as 'sleepers' and they are

later activated to work as resident agents. Such ‘sleeper’ and resident agents generally target areas in Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, etc. Some of these ‘sleeper cells’ are used in sensitive areas of the country for organising ‘fundamentalist’ and Islamist modules.

In addition to the ‘melting’ Pakistani nationals visiting through approved routes some trained Pakistani agents and mujahedins are infiltrated through land border and third country routes. The latter trend gained prominence after 1992, when Pakistan’s proxy war targeted the heartland of India.

Sincere professional efforts of the PCIU to nab some of the trained Pakistani agents/mujahedins holed up in strategic points in India were frustrated by a few key politicians. I would like to mention three such glaring instances.

Around 1994 the PCIU had identified a Pakistan trained Islamist terrorist lodged at a safe address somewhere in the constituency of a caste-baron ‘secular leader’ of Uttar Pradesh. The ISI had assigned him the task of recruiting Indian youths having Deobandi and Wahabi convictions and sending them to Pakistan /Pakistan Occupied Kashmir for training. After a prolonged surveillance and assimilation of HumInt the Pakistani national and one of Pakistan trained Indian recruits were nabbed with the help of Delhi police. They were taken to local police station for initiating procedure to transfer to Delhi police custody. The same evening a phone call was received from an officer on special duty in the PMO asking me for a report on the incident. I referred him back to my boss, as I was aware of his own undeclared linkages with Pakistani nationals.

That very night a gang of criminals headed by a brother of the caste-baron ‘secular politician’ stormed the police station and freed the detained ISI operatives, one of them a proven Pakistan national. My protestations bounced back from the home ministry and the PMO. I was advised not to press the matter, as it was not in national interest.

The other incident involved training of a group of Sunni Wahabi Muslim youths of Bihar and West Bengal in a camp jointly run by the ISI and the Islamic Chhatra Shibir of Bangladesh, somewhere near Jaipur Hat in the district of Rajshahi. The PCIU HumInt efforts managed to collect a detailed list of the Islamist trainees and contacted the local administration authorities in Bihar and West Bengal. The ‘secular’ governments of both the states declined to intervene. A senior police officer of West Bengal had bluntly advised me not to press the matter as a senior Marxist leader from North Bengal was overwhelmingly interested in the welfare of the minorities. Patna too reacted rather clumsily. They sent out advance feelers to the suspect Islamist youths and helped them to trek back to Bangladesh before a police party was graciously allowed to accompany a PCIU team to conduct search in the villages around Araria, Joki Hat, Rauta and Kanki in the district of Purnia. I was given to understand that Patna had sent a communication to Delhi alleging harassment meted out to the minorities by a vengeful team of the Intelligence Bureau. Lalu Prasad Yadav, the tarnished chief minister called for my blood. It took me two months to clear my colleagues and myself from the cobweb of politics of ‘apartheid of minorityism’.

The third incident that I promised to share with the readers had taken place in the heart of Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, ruled by a caste-baron ‘secular leader’ Mulayam Singh Yadav. Intelligence generated by the PCIU and the ‘Operations Cell’ of the IB had detected some Pakistan trained foreign nationals operating from behind the safe walls of a reputed centre of Islamic studies. A raid was organised by the joint team of the Intelligence Bureau and Uttar Pradesh police. The incident had created tectonic reactions from the caste-baron politician and the PMO, which heavily depended on the support of the parliamentarians of the baron’s party for its survival. My IB colleague in Lucknow was shunted out from his post and was banished from his tenure with the organisation.

Several other intelligence and police personnel were hauled over fire for violating the 'sacred secular chastity belt' so religiously worn by some of our political leaders.

There are examples galore to prove the point that 'sterile secular' stances had grievously compromised national security. India, as a nation state, must rise above petty vote bank politics and should shun using the concept of 'secularism' as a tool of 'apartheid' to insulate and isolate the Muslim community.

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It's time I step aside and sail back into the current of events in 1988, which were twisted and turned by the storm of time rather apocalyptically. Overwhelmed by scandals, bad electoral performance and still guided by fortune hunting and inexperienced advisers Rajiv Gandhi had started 'melting' under pressure. The situation of drift had frustrated Rajiv Gandhi. The frustration steadily degenerated into frequent angry outbursts. It appeared the trained pilot had suddenly lost all touches with his inner guiding radar and control on the political and administrative machines. Like they said in the Gita, Rajiv's frustration and anger degenerated into loss of self-confidence, which was a sure symptom of the onset of a devastating whirlwind that was about to sweep away the third scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family.

Historiographers of current events have painted Rajiv Gandhi either in superlative eulogising colours or the blackest of the brush they could borrow. It is required to understand that the Congress cabal, which tried to perpetuate Nehru-Gandhi family dynasty, had imposed the charge of the vast and complicated nation on Rajiv. He was simply not the talent who could pilot India after a brief period of orientation. A country is a living organism. Probationers cannot run it. Rajiv was taught politics and administration in a few tutorial classes conducted by handpicked bureaucrats and politicians. He did not have enough time to learn the tricks of flying a grounded democracy in the rough and tough weather that India was placed after Indira's death. He just inherited the crown of thorn. He was the antithesis of Sanjay Gandhi, who was born with an uncanny sense of dirty politics. When saddled to power Rajiv was virtually surrounded by greedy and promiscuous politicians and a band of sycophants, who had more personal blades to hone up than serving their leader and the country. The Indian national Congress (Indira Congress) in fact, harmed the party's interest by burying the tenets of democracy.

Rattled to his bones Rajiv Gandhi was advised by some of the ostriches around him to summon back the old family loyal R. K. Dhawan from wilderness, where he was despatched by Rajiv Gandhi on the day he was sworn in as the Prime Minister. Funnily enough, I was summoned by his secretary and asked to meet the Prime Minister in the confines of his Race Course Road camp office. My face was not new to the beleaguered leader of the nation. He wanted to know if I was still in touch with Dhawan. My affirmative reply was followed by a few more questions about Dhawan's state of mind and his possible utility in the forthcoming parliamentary polls. I shared with the Prime Minister that Dhawan could still be useful for making a last minute bid to rally the Congressmen loyal to Indira Gandhi. Given a free hand he could still deliver the results.

I emerged out of the meeting with mixed feelings. I had lost my faith in Rajiv Gandhi's capability to run the road show. I had decided to help out the other national alternative-the Bharatiya Janata Party, the political front of the RSS, with which I had struck an emotional alliance from my troubled adolescent days.

But the crosscurrent of pity that I felt for the son of Indira Gandhi often tossed me down to the

valley of vacillation. Was I doing the right thing? Should the absurd Janata experiment of 1977 be given one more chance? Was V. P. Singh the correct choice of history? Would my friends in the Sangh Parivar be able to surmount the civilisational blockades they had erected around themselves and give a stable government to the country? Or should I continue to support Rajiv Gandhi? I was a torn man. However, events had become alive by themselves. It was beyond the control of any well wisher and operative to extricate the PM from the tentacles of events, which had started tightening a noose around him.

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In the meantime, my enlarged operational commitments in the PCIU had broadened the orbit of activities. I had started establishing the nucleus of PCIU cells in the field formations almost all over the country. I would like to revert to that a little later. My priority attention was focussed on the border tracts between Rajasthan, Gujarat with Pakistan. These prime infiltration routes were fabulously exploited by Pakistan to infiltrate trained and armed Sikh terrorists. The ISI and Field Intelligence Units of the Pak DMI located at Tejeke, Chhatteke, Nallianwala, Bahawalnagar, Bala Arian, Faqirabad, Harunabad and Fort Abbas on Punjab and Rajasthan borders had started playing havoc with our national security. These posts acted as forward launching pads for the Sikh terrorists, trained Islamist saboteurs and intelligence agents. Our physical defence was appallingly poor and intelligence presence was negligible. I made several forays to Jaipur and impressed upon the state police and intelligence machineries the need for strengthening border intelligence and policing. The Union Home Ministry also pitched in. I undertook prolonged visit to the remote border intelligence posts, which were under-resourced and poorly manned. These visits gave me vast opportunities to prime new intelligence targets, launch shallow penetration trans-border agents and to penetrate some of the Pakistani posts.

One such visit took me to the border belt of Hindu Mal Kot to Anupgarh, with stops at Sri Karanpur and Raisinghpur. On February 12, 1989, I was at Raisinghpur border intelligence post on a mission to meet a transborder agent from the ISI post at Harunabad. He had earlier reported on massing of about 40 Sikh terrorists armed to the teeth at Harunabad by an ISI handler known as 'Choudhry'. He arrived late in the night and was debriefed immediately and pushed back early in the morning.

As I was preparing to start onward journey to Anupgarh an important telephone call from Delhi checkmated my move. The antique First World War field telephone required cranking before connectivity could be achieved. Delhi was raised after gruelling effort of about 15 minutes and I was directed by my immediate boss to return to Delhi forthwith and assured that everything at my home front was okay. I was required on an urgent operational work. The order was emphatic and I turned the wheels towards Delhi, a good 12 hours journey through existing roads, dried riverbeds and sandy desert tracts.

I reported back to the Chief boss at about 22 hrs and was told to meet him in the morning for an urgent briefing. The morning briefing lasted for about five minutes. I was directed to contact and persuade Rajendra Kumar Dhawan to rejoin the personal staff of Rajiv Gandhi.

Why me? The answer was again emphatic. In February 1989, Dhawan lived like a lonely mendicant. He had shaven his hair off, taken to sincere worshipping and casual lonely stroll in the backyards of the Golf Links. Political activists shunned him; the business and industry tycoons avoided him like a plague and the serving bureaucrats sneered at him as a pariah. I was one of the

few stupid people who visited him regularly, defying squinted caution from the bosses and friends.

My late evening visit surprised Dhawan. I broke the news to him with trepidation. He was an injured person. Justice Thakkar had hanged the stigma of responsibility for the assassination of Indira Gandhi on his neck, at the instance of Rajiv's corporate cronies.

Dhawan's initial response was an emphatic no. I expected it. But I succeeded in convincing him that return to Rajiv Gandhi's office would give him an opportunity to get rid of the Thakkar sticker from his chest. He should agree to join Rajiv on condition that the PM agreed to exonerate him on the floor of the parliament and on files of the concerned ministries. Why should he die with the stigma of being a betrayer? Probably he did not require the money and the status, but he sure would like to clear his name! Dhawan finally yielded after I agreed to draft a note to the PM outlining the necessity of clearing Dhawan's name of the Thakkar stigma before he could be appointed as an official aide to the PM with the rank and privileges of an additional secretary to the government of India. I have no doubt that Dhawan had also consulted other experts and friends.

Rajiv Gandhi received Dhawan at his camp office and after a couple of days he was restored to the office of the PM, but with a reduced status. Dhawan was no more able to exercise the same power and influence as he did in the halcyon days of Indira Gandhi.

As I expected the hidden hunters armed with scissors and machetes started their operations soon after Dhawan took his shaky seat. Satish Sharma, M. L. Fotedar and Mani Shankar Iyer, etc, headed the cheer group. They did not approve of the 'stenographer's' reappearance on their pitch that had witnessed a cultural quantum jump. The corporate culture was craftily combined with the cultures of the big industrial houses and the core properties of the criminal world. By the time Dhawan returned to the PMO Rajiv had lost control both of the auto and manual piloting system of the state machinery. The only perverted noise that was prominently heard was '*gali gali mein shor hai, Rajiv Gandhi chor hai*'.

The likely outcome of November 1989 parliamentary polls were accurately predicted by the MARG, a marketing and research group crediting only 195 seats to Indira Congress. The Intelligence Bureau conclusions did not vastly differ from the MARG figures. But certain elements in the core formation of the IB were not yet ready to look into the mirror. Some of them, including the virtual brain trust of the Director IB, inflated the figures and predicted 273 seats to the kitty of Rajiv's party. Such figure fudging was not uncommon, especially when overexposure to the seat of power often blurred the objectivity of the operators and analysts. The ostriches around Rajiv, like Vasant Sathe, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Vishwajit Prithwiji Singh etc, ganged up with some media ostriches and tried vainly to keep up Rajiv's sagging moral.

I had made it abundantly clear to Dhawan soon after he rejoined the PMO that I would not be able to help him out formally in any manner in election matters. Why? He asked me. I owed a reply to my friend, which was extremely blunt. I had lost faith in Rajiv Gandhi's capability and I was disillusioned by his blind faith on a group of self-seeking friends. I had seen the raw hides below the skin of Rajiv loyalists like Satish Sharma during certain security and intelligence operations in Punjab. He was more interested in managing money than the affairs of his friend. I did not want to be sneered at by the so-called aristocrat and unprofessional 'advisors' of Rajiv. Dhawan was not happy to hear me. But I promised to share with him my personal estimate of the likely election results and other matters that were important to his own survival amongst the pack of wolves in the PMO/PMH. I hoped he understood me. I was not adept in doing a job on which I had no control. Neither had I liked any other General to fight my war.

I hadn't developed faith in V. P. Singh either. But I did not see any harm to help the BJP out as a

probable alternative. Dhawan did not agree with me. But we agreed to remain friends and help him out at personal level. I kept up my word and later helped Dhawan (not Rajiv) with an informal election study. The result was astonishingly shocking. Rajiv was not likely to pass the 190 mark. Dhawan too, like most other aides of Rajiv Gandhi, hoped against hope and expected that they could turn the tables on V. P. Singh's National Front and its Marxist and BJP allies.

The Intelligence Bureau was tasked to target the NF allies of V. P. Singh, especially Chandrashekhar, Ram Krishna Hegde, Coudhury Devi Lal and others. Rajiv Gandhi expected that these leaders could be exploited like his younger brother once exploited Jagjiwan Ram, Charan Singh and Rajnarain, etc. Some aides of Rajiv Gandhi too were in touch with Hegde and Viren Shah, both friends of Maneka Gandhi and her maternal family. But these leaders were unable to swim against the anti-Rajiv Gandhi torrent and thought it better to swim alongside V. P. Singh until such time they could play the role Charan Singh played to Morarji Desai.

The IB Director was a good friend of Rajiv Gandhi but like his Prime Minister, reliable assistants did not surround him. A number of senior and middle level IB officers were in discreet touch with the National Front leaders. Some of the '*thakur*' (warrior class) leaders of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan had virtually sided with V. P. Singh, another '*thakur*' by caste. A fanatic '*thakur*' lobbyist from Uttar Pradesh was in constant touch with Bhurelal and Vinod Pandey, two senior bureaucrats enjoying confidence of the rebel leader. He acted as a conduit to some of the members of the fourth estate who assiduously worked for V. P. Singh.

But the most important contact of the NF leaders, especially Arif Mohammad Khan, Mufti Mohammad and anti-Rajiv leaders like Vidya Charan Shukla in the IB was Mr. Saxena. He presided over the most sensitive desk in the IB that directly reported to the DIB and catered to the needs of the PMO. His Kashmir background had helped in establishing firm relationship with Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. He discreetly shared with them all strategic information from the virtual repository of top-level political intelligence treasure of the organisation. His endeavours were rewarded by the home minister of V. P. Singh, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed by awarding him the post of Director General of Police of Jammu and Kashmir.

There is no doubt, I continued, amidst my preoccupation with the PCIU and Punjab affairs, to remain in touch with my BJP and RSS friends. I was fully aware that even in my private capacity I should not dabble in politics. I had always lived on the edges. I have always succumbed to one of the fighting squirrels inside me. That's me. And I thought that it was my duty to the nation to help bringing about a regime change for the better. I had fullest regards for the son of Indira Gandhi, but I knew he was not yet ripe for the leadership of a complex country like India was. In me, I had discovered another Quixote, who thought he was capable of delivering some good results.

K.N.Gobindachariya, on most days accompanied and driven by Uma Bharati visited us. We shared food and exchanged information. We worked on a comprehensive list of constituencies where the BJP lagged behind Indira Congress and the NF candidates. Another broadsheet was worked out on the caste and class equations in the vital constituencies in the Hindi belt, Rajasthan and Gujarat and a few selected constituencies in the southern peninsula. We exchanged the visible and anticipated Indira Congress strategy all over the country, especially in its strongholds in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. I did so without consulting IB records and without having any access to Dhawan on such matters. My own resource poll was good enough.

S. Gurumurthy, Ved Prakash Goyal, Rajinder Sharma, Deodas Apte, and Piyush Goyal supplemented frequent visits by Gobindachariya and Uma. Piyush was accepted at our home as the fifth member, for whom a bed and a dinner plate were laid out almost daily. Piyush was not an active

member of the RSS and BJP way back in 1989. But his commitment was no less than of the most committed member of the Sangh Parivar. I still cherish the friendship of Piyush and his charming wife Seema, who is an oasis of love and affection.

I had virtually grown up with Gobindachariya, ideologically speaking. He seemed to me the most articulate and versatile of the whole lot. He was totally committed to the cause of buoying up the political front of the RSS to power. His optimism, sharp intellect and capability to work like a sledge dog were shadowed by not too invisible a pathos. A woman is better radar to detect the smoky traces of love in a person. Sunanda drew my attention to the fact that Gobind and Uma were in love. Our observations did not miss the tender looks in their eyes and smiles and their demeanour as a man and woman, which was distinct from their ideological and political relationship.

More than once Uma confided in my late wife about her intention to marry Gobind after taking clearance from the RSS top brass and after getting ceremonially relieved from her vow as a *sanyasin* (holy person who is supposed to maintain celibacy). We fervently hoped for that day to come soon and two sincere souls to unite in holy marital bond.

That was not to happen in near future. Gobindachariya was not permitted to marry-being a *pracharak*. He was assigned a mission by the RSS. He was supposed to work for the political ascendance of the BJP and Uma Bharati was cut out both for political and a special role: spreading virulent Hindutwa and advocating the cause of Rama temple in Ayodhya. My wife and I were immensely pained by the subsequent developments, when ideological and political demands prevailed upon the emotional demands of the fine couple. Gobind felt distressed, often in the thick of political developments. Uma, like most women, felt utterly lost. My wife and I were deputed twice by Gobind to counsel her. But her pining was deeper than our shallow words. We appreciated the state of desperation when her emotional banks were breached by an unfortunate incident. Well into 2004, I have developed a doubt that political compulsions may not allow Gobind and Uma to tie the holy knot.

A little before the November 1989 polls Gobindachariya and Gurumurthy insisted that I should meet Lal Krishna Advani, the BJP president. We met twice at the latter's Pandara Park residence, just across the road from our Bapa Nagar government housing colony. I was impressed by the white haired and moustached leader and the sharpness exhibited by him. He was too ahead of most other Sangh Parivar leaders I happened to meet, except Gobind and I deduced that he would one day lead a government solely dominated by the Hindutwa forces. His blueprint was not stridently 'non-secular'. But he gave me to understand that his views on secularism were an open state policy and not as a policy of social and political apartheid. It coincided with my views.

The results of 1989 election were an ample testimony to the success of the strategic input from people like Gobindachariya and the rest of the dedicated members of the Sangh Parivar. I did not discount my contribution. But I was not in a position to openly gloat over my humble contribution to the success of the political force with which I was closely connected from my early adolescent days. Some key members of the Sangh Parivar, who did not suffer from acute amnesia, recognised that I had put my service and family security on the line out of my commitment to, what I believed at that point of time, a genuine national cause.

No individual is unidimensional. Rajiv Gandhi, however inadequate he was for running a country like India, did not lack in strategic imagination. He was a more wronged person than he had wronged the country. He definitely goofed in Kashmir by following the beaten Nehru-Gandhi family tradition of putting all the eggs in one basket. The variations they often tried had failed to convince the people of the beleaguered state about Delhi's honest intentions. By the time Rajiv inherited the Nehru-Gandhi

family throne and had put his eggs again in the Abdullah family basket the geostrategic situation in the subcontinent and neighbourhood had gone past the scope of petty manoeuvring by Delhi.

A generation of bureaucrats, including intelligence operators, had also grown up alongside the single basket symbiosis of the Nehru-Gandhi-Abdullah family. Most of them were still around to block all forward thinking and innovative experiments in Kashmir. By that time the Pakistani Establishment had turned its attention from Afghanistan to Punjab and Kashmir. The proxy war had taken a virulent form.

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Rajiv was not allowed to go for innovation in Kashmir. However, he exhibited streaks of fresh imagination in Punjab. Busy though I was with the PCIU and Pakistan affairs my services were utilised in Punjab also.

An exercise was carried out with my full participation to examine the likely impact of persuading some of the terrorism-tainted leaders of the state contesting the parliamentary polls. I carried out the sounding mission with the factious AISSF, some persons close to S.S. Mann, leaders of the Dam Dami Taksal, Shiromani Akali Dal (J), Jagdev Singh Talwandi and Jasbir Singh Rode. The purpose behind this exercise was to cut down the mainstream SAD forces to size and to expose the militant sponsored politicians to the mainstream democratic process. Rajiv had tried this strategy in Assam too and had marginally succeeded in containing the AASU activities. Punjab was entirely a different ball game. Pakistan was still breathing down Indian neck and the Second Panthic Committee headed by Dr. Sohan Singh had adopted a strident stance. Violence increased rapidly. In fact Pakistan and the ISI dictated the turns of events in the Indian Punjab.

The emergent picture was rather confusing. Problematic ego bags like Mann, Baba Joginder Singh (father of Bhindranwale) and Jasbir Singh were drunk with the impression that Delhi was ready to kneel before them with sackcloth and ash. It was difficult to communicate with Mann as he was incarcerated in a Bihar jail. Moreover, several intermediaries who surrounded him were more concerned with Delhi's moneybags than return of peace to the state. Simranjeet Singh Mann, a member of the Indian Police Service, to which I belonged, was no doubt a hurt person. But he suffered from a compulsive paranoia that forced him to believe that resistance per se, in any form, was the sure catapult to be launched to martyrdom. He simply did not know when to change over to constructive dialogue from apparently irreconcilable stance of resistance. This tragic hero was equally ignorant in the art of waging war and keeping the peace window open. He behaved as if he was the Phizo of Punjab.

Rajiv Gandhi was keen to see the militant factions taking part in the election process. A number of Punjab leaders had interceded on behalf of Mann. I was concerned with the initiatives of Dam Dami Taksal, the group headed by Jasbir Singh Rode and a section of the militants owing allegiance to the First Panthic Committee and discreet support from Atinderpal Singh's Khalistan Liberation Organisation and his associates in the Second Panthic Committee. Mann had made it clear to a couple of Dam Dami Taksal sponsored visitors to his detention cell that he was ready to play along the election game.

The conventional Akali parties aside the other major players in the Punjab elections were the Indira Congress, Janata Dal, BJP and Mann Akali Dal. But the major factions of the Second Panthic Committee and major militant groups were reluctant to participate in the election process. Feedbacks received from Pakistan indicated that the ISI was keen to sabotage the election process. Democratic

elections often have the capability of levelling up the rough political edges and readjusting the tectonic slips. Its preparations for a decisive intervention in Kashmir along the fault lines created by Delhi were complete. The ISI was keen to discredit the democratically elected government of Benazir Bhutto and scuttle the peace process initiated by the Indian Prime Minister. Zia had gone but the ghost of military establishment still hovered over the head of Zulfikar's daughter, who was not ready to walk all the way with the Establishment forces.

Under the circumstances Rajiv Gandhi's decision to encourage a section of the Punjab militants to take part in the democratic process was a rare instance of his long-term strategic understanding of the problems of the people of Punjab. Buta Singh and other Punjab experts with entrenched interest in the fouled up political ambience of the border state opposed him. But Rajiv enjoyed an advantage in Punjab that he missed out in Kashmir. The new governor was not biased by prejudices as his predecessor from Calcutta was. The Director General of Police, K.P.S.Gill, contrary to the general perception believed in the intrinsic strength of the democratic process. Moreover, the single basket syndrome that Rajiv had inherited from his mother did not tie down his hands in Punjab. The key bureaucrats, including the intelligence technocrats, who feigned to specialise and monopolise all conceivable knowledge on Kashmir were not there to inject prejudice into Rajiv's mind. He had the entire field open to him to play the game according to his rules.

At one stage I was called upon to clinch a deal between Delhi and a section of the Sikh militants. Jasbir Singh Rode assisted me in the prolonged consultations. Others to help were the militant appointed high priests, some leaders of the Dam Dami Taksal, Rajdev Singh Barnala (later elected to the Lok Sabha) and Harjinder Singh (Ramdas), the energetic and selfless young man, who acted as a link between several militant leaders and me. An agreed amount, resourced by Rajiv Gandhi, was delivered in cash to meet the election cost of the candidates sponsored by the assorted militant and pro-militant groups. The heavy amount was carried in two instalments to a designated hideout in Punjab and handed over to the linkmen who negotiated with the Prime Minister.

I must add a few words on the depth and extent of love Rajiv Gandhi had for Buta Singh. I was resourced by Rajiv Gandhi to transfer funds to the BJP candidate Kailash Meghwal to ensure defeat of the Sikh stalwart, who had shifted to a safer seat in Rajasthan from his dear home turf-Punjab. Meghwal was more than surprised to be financed from an unknown and unexpected quarter. This tiny David had finally floored the Sikh Goliath. Buta Singh did not know what had really spurred up his unknown adversary with sudden flush of fund. This one realpolitik action by Rajiv Gandhi had struck a fine chord in my heart.

The election results went on the expected lines. Indira Congress bagged two seats against six by Mann conglomerate, Janata Dal one, BSP one, and independents three. I would not like to go into the depth of the political shenanigans that followed the parliamentary polls. But I was happy to see a few friendly Sikh faces in the Parliament. One of them was Atinderpal Singh. I would like to talk about this '*to be or not to be*' man and a reluctant revolutionary a little later.

The first hesitant step to return to the democratic mainstream was possible because of Rajiv Gandhi's action of strategic political retreat. His party lost the Parliamentary polls but surely he had left a mark of victory on the Punjab.

TWENTY-TWO

THE BRITTLE MESSIAH

A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery.
James Joyce.

Rajiv Gandhi had flown past his five-year tenure like a stunt pilot. His political life received a serious, but not unexpected jolt in the 9th Lok Sabha elections. Even though Indira Congress managed to score 195 seats Rajiv was not in position to stake his claim as the left front, hitherto loyal to the Nehru-Gandhi family, refused to support a Congress government headed by Rajiv Gandhi. With 137 seats in its kitty the Janta Dal was poised to form the government with outside support from the BJP (86) and the left front. The skulduggery that went in outwitting both Chandrashekhar and Devi Lal and installing V. P. Singh as the Prime Minister was by itself a hair-raising cloak and dagger story. The RSS and BJP lobby had pitched in for amorphous V.P.Singh instead of more earthy persons like Chandrashekhar and Devi Lal. The beginning itself had exhibited that there were too many Brutus around V. P. Singh and he was not a match for the scheming power barons, who masqueraded as servants of the people.

V. P. Singh had never inspired me. He was a myopic avenger, not a visionary. He was driven by supposed honesty, which was not matched by his political skill. His networking was based on very fragile connectivity. A person of poor outward connectivity can be a better mendicant, not a Prime Minister of a complicated country. I never gave him a chance of survival for more than two years.

Nevertheless, I was happy with the performance of the BJP. With a marginal stirring of Hindutwa sentiment and appropriate exploitation of Rajiv Gandhi's anti-incumbency factor it made a big dent. They used the seem-alike of JP to their advantage. The success spurred the RSS and BJP think tank to plan out a more perilous course of action.

Rajiv Gandhi's defeat signalled the inevitability of top-level changes in the Intelligence Bureau. M. K. Narayanan, a recognised intelligence professional, had become identified himself with the Rajiv coterie. In the absence of any act of the parliament and the law of the land to regulate the organisation's activities the top intelligence man is supposed to be personally loyal to the Prime Minister and home minister. He owed his existence to them and not to any statutory institution. It's but natural that the top intelligence echelons tend to bend when they are required to bow.

The succession choice should have fallen on V.G.Vaidya, a competent professional. With 31 years service behind him Vaidya was not considered apparently on ground of his comparative junior status and apprehension in a section of the Janata Dal that the Maharashtrian officer had hidden connections with the RSS. The *thakur* and *kayasth* lobby inside and outside the agency mostly touted the trumped up whispering charges. They wanted a trusted Uttar Pradesh hand and the choice finally fell on Rajendra Prasad Joshi. A former IB hand, Joshi was sent out of the IB as his course mate M. K. Narayanan was predestined to head the IB about 20 years ago. Joshi had earned admiration for his accessibility, ability to share responsibility with his juniors and maintaining low profile. Another qualification of Joshi was that he was related to Vinod Pandey, a confidant of V. P. Singh, who was slated to take over as the Cabinet Secretary under the new dispensation.

Another Joshi, Murli Manohar Joshi, an ambitious RSS/BJP leader from the heart of the cow belt, advocated Joshi's case. The relationship between Rajendra Prasad and Murli Manohar transcended their common clan bondage. Murli Manohar was a friend of the veteran intelligence bureau officer. The BJP leader was on the verge of assuming the reins of the party after L. K. Advani's term was over. The wily Uttar Pradesh Brahmin considered himself more competent than the Sindhi refugee and aspired for the top slot once the Sangh Parivar succeeded in increasing its kitty from 86 to 200. Murli Manohar wanted his own man to lead the IB, an organisation that could virtually open up the treasure trove of intelligence to him. Mastery over the virtual eyes and ears of the nation, he hoped, would make his position invincible. Rajendra Prasad, in his own turn, exploited the relationship to promote the interest of his Prime Minister. The RSS/BJP were not aware that in his eagerness to exploit the IB Murli Manohar was sharing consciously and subconsciously strategic information about the Hindutwa organisation's forthcoming earthshaking policies.

I enjoyed extremely good relationship with the Joshi family. Tara Joshi, his wife, is regarded as an elder sister in our family. Their presence at 9 Tughlaq Road brought in a whiff of informality.

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Having done what I considered, rightly or wrongly, my duty to assist the Sangh Parivar to come to the centre stage of Indian politics, I settled down on my old love, the PCIU and Punjab operations.

At one point of time I was approached by one of the BJP leaders to accept a position in the PMO more as a reward for my contribution in promoting the electoral success of the party. I declined the offer after two meetings with Bhurelal. His idea of the job that waited me involved digging out skeletons of corruption in the cupboards of the former Indira Congress leaders, including Rajiv Gandhi. I declined the offer. I never could bring myself to accept the position of a hatchet man. Moreover the Prime Minister and Bhurelal had at their disposal more professional gravediggers like the Central Bureau of Investigation, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and numerous other enforcement organisations. I was never an expert gravedigger.

I might have had differences with Rajiv's style of functioning, I might have been disillusioned by the black cloud of scandals surrounding him, but I could not cope with the idea of dogging him to the edges of a graveyard. I could not do that to the son of Indira Gandhi. I could have not brought myself down to the political morgue to dissect skeletons and corpses. I declined the offer, and I think, in the process I had earned the displeasure of a coterie around the PM.

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Before I walk past that stretch of the canvas I should make a brief comment on my passing dalliance with the affairs of Kashmir.

Kashmir, as most Indians are aware, has been treated as a single basket case from the days Nehru had fallen in love with the Switzerland of the East during his honeymoon with Kamala Nehru. The history of post independence Kashmir is briefly the history of waxing and waning of relationship between the Nehru-Gandhi and Sheikh Abdullah families. The Pakistani Establishment had of course kept the heat on and fought two wars to grab the territory through use of force.

The facilitators in the love affair between the two families included certain peripheral Kashmiri Muslims and core Pundits and a few intelligence bureaucrats, who deemed to have acquired 'expertise' on the delicate nuances of the exclusive love affair. The two families did not make any

serious effort to pursue an open door policy and involve the people of Kashmir in reaching a logical conclusion to the gangrenous sore. Indian democracy did never give a sincere try to the goodwill of the people of Kashmir. While Pakistan believed in the efficacy of war as an instrument to solve the 'unfinished agenda of partition', Delhi believed in a mystique mixture of diplomacy, limited democratic experimentation and defensive military manoeuvres. Such indeterminate manoeuvres can manage to hang between war and peace for a while, but not for all time to come. International relations and compulsions of geopolitics do not permit such indefinite hanging of an entire people at the hangmen's gallows. However, both Delhi and Srinagar failed to realise this simple truth of international geopolitics. War and peace can be deferred but not kept hanging, especially when the enemy gains strength by leaps and bounds. A hanging issue often develops incurable gangrene.

By 1988-89 Indo-Pakistan tango on Kashmir reached another dead end when Benazir Bhutto reiterated the need for a plebiscite and Rajiv Gandhi announced the impracticability of such a demand. The two young leaders, both children of midnight, were inhibited by history and failed to turn the guns away. The Vale of Kashmir was on fire again since September 1989, when the militants killed J.L. Taploo, a BJP leader. It was followed by the assassination of N. K. Ganjoo, the judge who had sentenced the JKLF activist Maqbool Bhatt to death.

The JKLF militants greeted the inauguration of the Janata Dal government by the dramatic kidnapping of Dr. Rubaiya Sayeed, daughter of V. P. Singh's home minister. Delhi caved in by forcing the state government to sign an agreement with the militants. Dr. Rubaiya was released but the action of V. P. Singh government had India bonded to unprecedented scale of terrorist activities for years to come. The JKLF action was a pressure tactic, a "bluff that worked" (The Dawn-Pakistan).

The story thereafter took bizarre turn when Jagmohan, once a Gandhi family acolyte, was brought back to Srinagar as governor.

Besides other sensational actions the Pakistan backed militants in planned manner targeted the officials of the Intelligence Bureau and killed a couple of them compelling the IB to evacuate most of its staff from the state. Some staff was retained at Srinagar. But intelligence production had simply dried up.

An intelligence operator like me was considered too upstart a spoilsport, rather a gadfly on the blue noses of the blue-blooded people, who dealt with Kashmir. At that critical stage I was called upon to assist my colleagues to raise a few human assets in the valley. Our endeavours helped the IB to regain some 'toehold' in the valley. I deftly used the services of a Delhi based Muslim lady to recruit a couple of Kashmiri Muslim assets. These assets were engaged in fruit and carpet trading and lived around Muslim ghettos in Lajpat Nagar and Okhla. From that modest beginning, I believe, my colleagues had later built up a reinvigorated intelligence network. Operational exigencies prevent me from elaborating the topic.

However, as part of the undeclared 'pro-active' policy of the Intelligence Bureau I was given a free hand to penetrate a few 'mujaheedin camps' run by the ISI in Pakistan and PoK. The assets recruited with the assistance of the agent mentioned above had succeeded in penetrating the mujaheedin camps at Murgikhana (Muzaffarabad), Chelapul, Main Road (Muzaffarabad), Chhaprian (PoK) and Lal Haveli, Fateh Jung (Rawalpindi). The services rendered by these human assets were satisfactory. Those were the happy days when the politicians talked little of 'pro-active' thrust and approved more of daring trans-border action inside Pakistan, especially during the tenure of the lion hearted Director of Intelligence Bureau, V.G.Vaidya.

I have briefly mentioned this aspect to highlight India's deplorably meagre reaction to Pakistan's proxy war in Kashmir and elsewhere. Governments in Delhi was forced to allow Pakistan backed

militants to impose 'mass control' measures in Kashmir by imposing its 'military' superiority through undiluted terrorist actions. India's reactions revolved around:

- Increased paramilitary presence in the affected areas,
- Virtual police response to the complicated socio-economic and political problems,
- Increased dependence on the Armed Forces thus blurring out vital differences between civic and military responses, and
- Diplomatic initiatives that took a somewhat positive turn only after September 11, 2001 and when US involvement in Afghanistan war and anti-terror actions inside Pakistan received low priority of Washington.
- Protracted diplomatic squabble and India's defensive posture has given some kind of legitimacy to the western perception that Kashmir is a 'dispute' between India and Pakistan. Defence oriented security responses sans credible political action and development programme have added to the erosion of Indian 'mass control' mechanism.

Way back in 1988-89 Delhi's failure to implement the 'mass control' measure through positive actions and better economic and political package had alienated the general people. The so-called Hindu majority areas of Jammu were undergoing vast demographic changes. The Hindus were being systematically attacked with a view to communalise the issue and to revalidate the old Dixon concept of selective plebiscite. This nasty game of Pakistan was noted by the experts a little late in the day.

Delhi had not undertaken significant 'pro-active' actions though ministers in the BJP led National Democratic Alliance government had spoken a lot about it. They had cried hoarse but failed to hit the enemy where it hurt him most. The post 9/11 developments and increased US interest in the region has brought about some improvement. It is hoped that the 'peace interregnum' initiated by the NDA government and supported by the USA would bring about temporary thaw in fighting, until such time more militant fundamentalist forces push out Washington's friend, General Musharraf.

However, as a matter of strategic and tactical policy it is in the realm of possibility and permissible by the standards set up by the 'Free World' countries like the USA and Israel to launch covert and overt strikes against the training camps of the 'mujahedins' through a combination of tradecraft and commando application. Such lightening missions can be undertaken by 'designated and guided agents', trained suicide squads, deep penetration commando units, including para-commando units and well-researched and calibrated aerial strikes.

For reasons not well understood by the informed strategists and tactical applicators Delhi has always preferred to adopt passive and defensive stances. Pakistani establishment is a geopolitical bully. The best response to blunt such a bully is to take the war inside his home. India has allowed itself to be blackmailed by Pakistan even before it went nuclear. The sabre rattling of 'coercive diplomacy', which is nothing but sterile military poser, cannot convince the Islamist Pakistani Establishment that India can take the border skirmishes inside their homes and hit at the very roots of the jaundiced Islamist groups.

History cannot be made and unmade by protracted inaction and defensive action. Calibrated action to exploit the fault lines of the enemy often reduces the risk of open warfare. Pakistan has proved this point by successfully waging prolonged low cost proxy war against India. India's helpless dependence on the US for taming Pakistan is pregnant with the possibilities of third country intervention in the complicated Kashmir issue. The present day BJP leadership appears to be amnesia afflicted on this front.

I don't think it's possible for me to dwell on the efficacy of intelligence and political handling of

the affairs in Kashmir, where my services were borrowed under special circumstances. I did whatever I could do to offer a toehold to the Intelligence Bureau after the sudden collapse. I was not cut out for the job of miming the 'single basket' drama that was being pursued by the new regime too. India failed to adopt new strategic and tactical approaches in that vital area of national security. But, as a knowledgeable citizen I was concerned with the pathetic turn of events, which resulted from mindless bungling by Indira and Rajiv government and fresh proxy-war thrust by Pakistan. The nation had willy-nilly entered into another quagmire of its own creation.

In fact, the V. P. Singh government was so much swayed away by the bluff of kidnapping of the home minister's daughter that they refused to change their looking glasses and have a fresh reading of the situation in the troubled state. The new government too was sucked into the surging fire of Kashmir fault line. Pakistan called the shot and India simply echoed the sound and fury by police/military response. Even a political giant like George Fernandez did not get ample opportunity to shift the eggs to newer baskets. He was hemmed by the same set of administrative, security and intelligence bureaucrats, who were considered 'experts' on the affairs of the 'honeymoon state of the Nehru-Gandhi family'. The moment of crisis required some innovation and George was the man who could lay new bricks to bridge the minds.

I had no illusion about the gravity of the Indian fault lines, some inherited and some created by the grown up children called politicians and their punching bags, the bureaucrats. I had witnessed the fissures in Naksalbari, in the North East and now I was swimming aimlessly in the muddled up bloody poodle of Punjab. I was an ill equipped Don Quixote de la Mancha in the PCIU, which was supposed to fight the mighty Pakistani Establishment's diabolical thrusts with a few skeletal horses and a couple of broken lances.

TWENTY-THREE

PUNJAB REVISITED

Action and faith enslave thought, both of them in order not to be troubled or inconvenienced by reflection, criticism and doubt.

Henri Frederic Amiel.

Before I turn to my favourite rendezvous with Pakistan I think I should go back to my passionate love for the Punjab fault lines. Before being humbled in the parliamentary polls Rajiv Gandhi had initiated certain positive actions, which were aimed at weakening the terrorist movement. Pakistan's intentions in Punjab had become more transparent by mid 1989. The Pakistani Establishment was convinced that the Jat Sikh gentry were incapable of putting up a united front against India. Their Hindu roots were much deeper than the egalitarian preaching of the Gurus and artificial efforts by certain leaders to project Sikhism as altogether a new faith. Its roots were firmly embedded in the *saptasindhu* region, the foremost playground of Indian civilisation.

However, Delhi had created enough problems for itself by crafting a Bhindranwale and destroying the Vatican of the Sikhs. It lost an illustrious Prime Minister in the process. The communal divide had taken threatening proportions in the traditionally unified Punjabi society. But the expected communal explosion did not take place, despite Pakistani prodding. The vast majority of the Sikh masses were not ready to walk along the fundamentalist path following the era of fundamentalism ushered in by Iran revolution, Zia-ul-Haq and Afghan jihad.

A disillusioned Islamabad had no intension to help the Sikhs beyond a point. They maintained tactical supply of Afghanistan surplus weapons and explosives and imparted rudimentary training to the lumpen terrorist cadre that believed more in loot and rape than advancing the cause of the '*quam*' (nation). Islamabad simply wanted the chaos to continue at heightened scale with a view to diverting Indian attention from Kashmir, where it had decided to play the new game of 'inflicting thousand cuts' on India by launching a reinforced proxy war.

Rajiv Gandhi was convinced that the movement in Punjab could be fragmented with deft manipulation of some of the key personalities. He had discussed this point with me twice. This policy sounded contradictory to the policy (not necessarily Delhi's policy) of both conventional and unconventional application of force to contain the terror machine. The application of planned conventional force by police and paramilitary forces under the leadership of K.P.S.Gill had succeeded in localising the movement to narrower geographical features.

The application of unconventional force by the police/paramilitary formations and some messianic intelligence operatives of the IB had succeeded in sending shivers of panic amongst the civilian population. They reacted in a frenetic manner with violence. The state forces responded with equal ferocity in questionable acts of plunder, extortion, inhuman torture and murder of innocent people. At points of time it had become difficult to differentiate between state action and terrorist action. These were not violent response to violent acts by the terrorists. These were organised acts of state repression that alienated the people and eroded their faith in the rule of law, as enshrined in the constitution.

It's not my intention to count every incident of excesses committed by the state machineries, including the central intelligence machineries. The nation should have gone into these misdeeds, which allowed a section of the citizens to be tortured and killed by state machineries, in a planned manner. Inaction by the conscience keepers of the nation had allowed a few dozen officers to walk away with fat material booty and prestigious honours. It was a shameful chapter. All that I can say that the people of Punjab and the Indians at large deserved a human rights accounting after peace was restored. Is it too late to reopen the grave wounds, which finally aggravate the hidden fault lines?

In any case, my understanding of the task assigned to me by the PMO was very clear. It involved cleverly planned intelligence operations to drive wedges between the feuding terrorist leaders and groups.

One of the prime targets was Harwinder Singh Sandhu, General Secretary of the AISSF (Manjit). He was expected to split the Sikh Students Federation and rally around him some of the terrorist outfits. Sandhu was released along with other Jodhpur detainees after V. P. Singh came to power. Some clumsy direct interference by a self-righteous political figure had compromised the delicately planned operation. Sandhu was assassinated on January 24, 1990, by terrorist outfits owing allegiance to the Second Panthic Committee. My inability to establish adequate rapport with some of the over zealous political operators of V. P. Singh often stood in the way of successfully concluding some of the operations. V. P. Singh as well as some of his emissaries thought that good intentions were enough to quell the fire in Punjab. Some of them behaved naively if not stupidly.

But my next target Gurbachan Singh Manochahal, self-styled chief of the Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan (BTFFK) and a member of First Panthic Committee had in the meantime returned from Pakistan with a cache of weapons and bagsful of disillusionment. My earlier contact with him before the release of Jasbir Singh Rode was fortified by intervention of a rice mill owner of village Shero. A strange character named Vishram Singh worked as a go between.

Vishram Singh was a tribal from Chhotanagpur. He was converted to Sikhism by a Patna Sahib (Bihar) based Sikh missionary and was deputed to Dam Dami Taksal for religious training. After completion of training he had worked in several rural Gurdwaras in Amritsar district and had left for Patna after Operation Blue Star. My colleagues in Patna helped me in recruiting him and relocating him at Dam Dami Taksal and finally securing a job for him at Sirhali Kalan Gurdwara. Vishram was not the only one of his kind. A couple of such former pupils of the Taksal were recruited from Nanded Sahib (Maharashtra) and Paonta Sahib (Himachal Pradesh) and relocated in Punjab to work as eyes and ears of the Intelligence Bureau.

Manochahal was disillusioned with Pakistan as he discovered to his horror that his ISI handlers were not keen on the issue of helping the Sikhs to secure an independent homeland: Khalistan. They were keen only on keeping the Punjab cauldron boiling. Punjab was not an integrated part of Pakistan's proxy war; it was a diversionary tactics that exploited India's self-created fault line. Punjab happened because India had faltered and Islamabad simply took advantage of the situation.

Manochahal was further shocked to see that the ISI handlers reposed greater trust in Wassan Singh Jaffarwal, Dr. Sohan Singh and Babbar Khalsa leaders like Wadhwa Singh and Mehal Singh. He was in for another shock when his lieutenant Sukhwinder Singh Sangha broke away under instigation from the Second Panthic Committee and an ISI handler.

My meetings with Manochahal and confabulations with Jasbir Singh Rode had helped in forming a new axis comprising BTFFK (M), KCF (Gurjant Singh Rajasthani) and the AISSF (Manjit). In fact, a tip off from Manochahal had led to an engagement between Sangha and police near village Bhuller, in Amritsar district.

Manochahal played his role appreciably and brought about a clear line of alignment in the underground movement. Forces opposed to him comprised SSF (Bittoo), KCF (Panjwar), KCF (Jaffarwal), BTFK (Rachpal), KLF (Budhsingwala) and Babbar Khalsa.

Another front on which I worked was the Babbar Khalsa. The Babbar Khalsa movement was evolved out of Sikh quest for *Khalis* (purist) aspects of the Khalsa faith propounded by the Gurus and finally encoded by the tenth Guru Gobind Singh. It drew inspiration from another purist organisation – Akhand Kirtani Jatha headed by Bhai Fouja Singh. Let's not dabble in the religious and ritualistic specialities of the Babbars. On many counts they did not conform to the rites and rituals prescribed by the SGPC and the Dam Dami Taksal. They were ready to walk along with other terrorist groups but preferred an independent furrow. The Babbars were one of the earliest militant groups to establish linkages with the Inter Services Intelligence and the Sikh Diaspora that strived for an independent Sikh homeland as a logical conclusion of the manoeuvres a section of the Sikh elite made on the eve of the transfer of power negotiations and the Punjabi Suba movement. The Babbars had acquired expertise in using sophisticated improvised explosive devices.

The Babbars had maintained their distinct identity from the First Panthic Committee and an uneasy truce with Dam Dami Taksal and Jasbir Singh Rode. After Operation Black Thunder and appointment of a new *jathedar* of the *Akal Takht* by the SGPC, Jasbir Singh Rode had announced that he and other high priests appointed by the militants were the real *jathedars*. This development had led to a split in the Panthic Committee. After several stormy discussions in August and September 1988, the formation of Second Panthic Committee was announced on November 4, 1988. Wadhwa Singh and Mehal Singh represented the Babbar Khalsa in the committee. The Babbars were accommodated at the instance of the ISI.

The initiation of peace talks by the government of India in late 1990 had stirred up mixed reactions among the militant groups. Pakistan did not want the terrorist groups to mend fences with the government of India at that critical point. Soon after conducting the Zarb-I-Momin (the Believer's Blow) exercise in December 1989 the Pakistan army had concluded that it was adequately poised to fight a conventional war with India. There were rumours of possibility of another round of Indo-Pak war in early 1990. For a change V. P. Singh too talked in terms of war, which was echoed by General Aslam Beg. The Pakistan Army in consonance with the President had started calling the shots bypassing Benazir Bhutto, who was finally deposed in August 1990. The ISI had played a decisive role in these developments.

Pakistan hadn't failed to notice the fragile coalition in Delhi tottering under irreconcilable pulls and pressures. Indira Congress had established bridgeheads with Devi Lal and Chandrashekhar and the BJP had embarked on a dangerous game of whipping up Hindu sentiment by launching L. K. Advani's Somnath to Ayodhya rathayatra (chariot safari). V. P. Singh had responded to the looming perils by letting loose the genie of caste hatred. History is yet to assess which of the two blunderers—Advani's rathayatra and V. P. Singh's Mandal Commission action—had inflicted the maximum injury on Indian society.

The Pakistani strategic planners were not blind to these changes in Delhi and gleefully pumped in men and materials in Kashmir and egged on the eggheads like Dr. Sohan Singh to adopt sterner postures.

The time frame chosen to woo a section of the Babbars was, therefore, not propitious. I sought out the services of a Sikh journalist to approach two important leaders of the Babbar Khalsa. A bridgehead was established after a sizeable goodwill amount was passed on to a cut out. Support from an unexpected quarter facilitated the operation, when Atinderpal Singh, a journalist turned

terrorist, then a Member of Parliament, pitched in to soften a section of the Babbar Khalsa. Adequate help was received from a Patiala based lady member of the parliament.

The desired result was achieved when Dr. Sohan Singh expelled Wadhwa Singh and Mehal Singh from the Second Panthic Committee and inducted Daljit Singh Bittoo (son of a renowned agricultural scientist) and Shahbaz Singh. A few Punjab observers and 'experts' have described this as ideological incompatibility between the Second Panthic Committee and the Babbar Khalsa. They also pointed out Pakistani displeasure with the Babbars.

These assertions were far from the truth. Babbars never lost the confidence of the ISI and Pakistan. The fissure came through because of the initiative taken by Rajiv Gandhi and adequate helps that I received from various sources, including the family of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

The Babbar Khalsa had in the meantime floated its political fronts like the Shiromani Babbar Akali Dal, and Babbar Akali Istri Dal. It declined to wind up the London based 'Khalistan Government in Exile'.

My tasks were limited to bringing about fissure in the Second Panthic Committee and prepare the ground for talks with the government of India. I had reasons to believe that the limited brief was implemented gracefully but with a great personal loss. My Sikh journalist friend was assassinated by a hit squad of the KCF on suspicion that he had helped the government of India in bringing about a fissure between the Second Panthic Committee and the Babbar Khalsa.

I was later informed by a very reliable source in the IB that an organisational faction opposed to me (personally and professionally) had leaked out the identity of the journalist friend. I still consider it as the most despicable event. My grief was compounded by the refusal of the IB to concede a 'compensation package' to the 'friend's' family. There is no provision of golden and silver handshakes in the intelligence fraternity.

Atinderpal Singh had played a significant role in pushing the militant movement in the direction of a negotiated settlement. At heart a poet and journalist the spark of 'militancy' had hit this lower middle class journalist after Delhi's unimaginative handling of the Sikh affairs between 1982 and 1984. The ideas of revolution are mostly expressed through cataclysmic explosion. The 'contrived revolution' in Punjab was no exception. It brought in its wake plenty of blood and body bags, for which the terrorists and the state machinery were equally responsible. Atinderpal too had contributed a large number of body bags. But I did not find him to be a mindless killer. In a war situation losers are treated as criminals and the winners get away with trophies. I did not fail to notice that Atinderpal abhorred the criminal tag around his neck, and he sincerely aspired to replace it by a respectable tag of a man of peace.

I happened to meet Atinderpal way back in 1987 when I had escorted the militant group from Bhatinda to Delhi for talks with the Prime Minister. I liked the slightly built person who favoured using terse and pungent sentences. I had the resilience to accommodate staccato outbursts of the angry youths, who believed, rightly or wrongly, that destiny beckoned them with the vision of an independent homeland.

I happened to meet him again somewhere near Kartarpur before the Second Panthic Committee was formed and he floated his own militant outfit, Khalistan Liberation Organisation.

Atinderpal and his young wife lived in a North Avenue apartment, which spoke loudly of their deplorable pecuniary condition. I was directed by my command structure to use money to win over the needy person. To my surprise I discovered that Atinder was needy indeed, but not greedy. On one occasion he spurned the offer of a fat packet carried by me on the plea that he should acquire at least two cars to facilitate his movements as a peace intermediary between the government of India and

S.S.Mann and a section of Panthic Committee. My efforts to soften his graceful wife also failed miserably. The only favour she accepted from me was to grace our home by attending a private dinner.

Atinderpal's role in peace making did not make much progress. Several inflated ego bags like the factious Sikh Student Federations, Panthic Committees, gun wielding terrorists and the super ego bag S.S. Mann waxed and waned in their interlocution with the government representatives.

Moreover, the political leaders in Delhi had other priorities to attend. The maverick and old political juveniles had again taken out the knives and started inflicting thousand wounds on the soul of the nation. India was again being pushed into the nutcracker of ambition of the greedy political thugs. Peace in Punjab and Kashmir was not the priority agenda of Delhi and Islamabad.

While in Delhi Rajiv Gandhi, Chandrashekhar, Devi Lal and L. K. Advani ran out of patience, in Islamabad the Pakistani President and the COAS felt that Benazir Bhutto had exceeded the mandate of the people and brief of the Establishment. Mr. Nawaz Sharif, a protégé of General Zia, was smuggled into office by the Establishment on November 10, 1990. He was a creation of Hamid Gul, a former Director General of the ISI.

The drama in Delhi had unfolded in similar fashion minus the Army Brass, Boots and Boozes and the helpless shrugging by the constitutionally emasculated President. Chandrashekhar visited Rajiv Gandhi on November 6 and the Rashtrapati Bhawan on November 9 and was smuggled into power with Indira Congress's support. Another shameful page was added to the history of Indian democracy.

But a cardinal difference marked the two changeovers: Nawaj Sharif was brought in as a shield to the Establishment and Chandrashekhar was granted his dream by Rajiv Gandhi as he wanted to use the old Young Turk as the proverbial bean stalk to climb back to the seat of power. His mother too had used the Young Turk occasionally. Did not she? It was a repeat game played earlier by Sanjay with Charan Singh as the key operator.

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The idea of using Chandrashekhar and Devi Lal to topple V. P. Singh was mooted by Rajiv Gandhi's coterie. Dhawan, who was called back from the doghouse in February 1989, had complimented the efforts of Rajiv Gandhi as he enjoyed close relationship with the *padatik* (foot soldier) from Balia from the days of Tarakeshwari Sinha (former minister) and Indira Gandhi. I had a close ringside view of the machinations that were carried out both in the Sangh Parivar conclaves and the backroom offices of Rajiv Gandhi.

The *padatik* of Indian politics, Chandrashekhar, was tampered in the faked fire of socialism and vainly shaped on the anvil of Jayprakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia, the gurus of Indian socialist movement. The molecules of mundane politics in him did not undergo significant change even after his passage through the socialist mill. He nursed a few unique ambitions: grabbing the Prime Ministerial seat at least for one Arabian Night, unaccounted wealth and hollow high sounding moral postures. He was not as simple a charlatan as Charan Singh and Raj Narain were.

For Devi Lal, the injured Jat patriarch, Rajiv Gandhi again used the services of his aides, Dhawan-Bhajan Lal duo.

Rajiv Gandhi and his backroom team had initiated the operation way back in June 1990. A peep into Rajiv Gandhi's mind was discernible from an interview prophetically carried in Calcutta's *Sunday* magazine in august 1990, in which Rajiv proved that he excelled at least in one aspect of politicking: double speak.

The slight of hand that brought V. P. Singh to power was doomed to disappear, as the great Indian vanishing trick. Chandrashekhar had never accepted the magic performed by the corpulent corporate manager, Arun Nehru, in installing V. P. Singh on the prime ministerial throne.

V. P. Singh allowed himself to be engulfed in a self-created fire by implementing the Mandal Commission recommendations that was shoved off by Indira Gandhi under piles of dust. The thakur from caste heartland of Uttar Pradesh acted out of his nervousness over the challenges he faced from Chandrashekhar and Devi Lal and the Hindutwa activities of his another chamber partner, the BJP. He used the caste card by empowering the 'backward castes' (less privileged) in matters of reservation in education and services etc. His calculations went haywire as the student community in Delhi and elsewhere were instigated to indulge in sustained violence against the 'Mandal formula'.

The Mandal formula to offer 27% reservations to the backward castes was taken out from the cold storage with two definite objectives. V.P. Singh wanted to secure his vote bank among the backward castes and by throwing the Mandal gauntlet on the face of the Jat patriarch and he wanted to 'kill' Devi Lal marching supporter's on to Delhi.

The political, bureaucratic and intelligence machineries of V. P. Singh had failed to fathom the depth of hatred Devi Lal had developed for the Prime Minister and the secret linkages he had established with Rajiv Gandhi. Two important Haryana Jat leaders, Shamsheer Singh Surjewala and Birendra Singh had met me in Delhi barely four days before Devi Lal goons descended on Delhi. The chilling information that they shared with me indicated that Devi Lal's reply to V. P. Singh's Mandal card would be nothing short of blood letting on the streets of Delhi. Indira Congress, headed by Rajiv Gandhi, exploited Devi Lal as deftly as his brother had manipulated the other Jat, Charan Singh.

I had shared the vital inputs with the IB, though I was not supposed to dabble in 'internal political intelligence'. Obviously R. P. Joshi was taken by surprise on the fateful day when I called him up at 5 a. m. to inform that thousands of Devi Lal supporters, completely drunk and armed with assorted weapons, had started entering Delhi in motorised convoys. The police forces of Haryana and Delhi did very little to stop the drunken goons outside the city limits. Indira Congress workers served them with food and 'drinks' at temporary roadside stalls set up along the route. On their triumphant march to Delhi the drunken goons molested several female morning walkers/joggers and chased away the protesting citizens.

My comment about R. P. Joshi's inability to cater precise intelligence on the diabolical intentions of Rajiv Gandhi, Devi Lal and Chandrashekhar should not be construed as an aspersion on his professional capability. By the time V. P. Singh was bogged down in his Mandal quicksand, he was almost deserted by the spearhead and the cutting edge level administrative machineries. The police and intelligence had withdrawn their support from the 'crusader against the corrupt regime of Rajiv Gandhi'. The upper caste Hindus dominated the administrative machineries and most of them were religiously committed to the caste concept enunciated in Rig Veda (*Purusha Sukta*) and by Lord Krishna in the Gita: '*Chaturvarnang maya Shrishtang Gunaih Krmah Vibhagash*' (I have created the four castes according to their aptitude and work). The Gita is the Bible and the Quran of the Hindus. The Sha'ria of the Hindus, the Manusmriti's preaching that Brahma (Supreme Being) had created Brahmins, Warrior classes from the upper parts of his body and the Vaishyas (traders) and the Sudras (servant class) from inferior lower parts of His body had been ingrained in Hindu psyche. From the mythological and historical times the upper caste Hindus has treated the lower castes as gutter creatures.

They were resentful of the reservations provided to the suppressed and oppressed classes of the society. V.P. Singh's noble but blunderingly ill-timed action to extend the reservation benefits to the

intermediate castes had infuriated the upper caste Hindus. Their contrived superior social citadel was irrevocably shaken by the move. They were ready to opt for any change. They had two clear options: to give another chance to Rajiv Gandhi or opt for the BJP that had just arrived at the national scene. These officers simply stopped cooperating with the government of V. P. Singh. Wives of some senior bureaucrats openly participated in BJP and *Ramjanambhoomi* campaign. They were still distrustful of Rajiv Gandhi.

R. P. Joshi was plagued by a serious intra-organisation problem. A fine person and a consummate social creature Joshi did not take the vital decision to remove the key old loyalists from vital analysis and operations desks. They were still beholden to their former leader and they treated Joshi as a temporary interlude. They expected Narayanan to be reinducted as soon as V.P.Singh was toppled. Most of the old loyal officers supplied vital intelligence to him, who in turn worked as the unofficial DIB to Rajiv Gandhi, in addition to his duties as the chairperson of the Joint Intelligence Committee.

I had tried to wizen him up about the intra-organisational intrigues. But he was too nice a person to ruffle the feathers of even a hawk swooping down on him. His trusting nature undid some of his sterling qualities. And after the Mandal fiasco the loyalists of the former Director were convinced that he was destined to return to the North Block room following the trails of his 'friend' Rajiv Gandhi.

The mammoth *kissan* (cultivator) rally of Devi Lal ended up in wanton violence and police firing. The fleeing drunken goons swarmed some of the residential quarters near the India gate, including mine. They threw stones at our windows and destroyed the green lawns and flowerbeds. This was a planned retaliation by Devi Lal, Om Prakash Chauthala and the backroom Generals of Rajiv Gandhi. The real war of dumping V. P. Singh had started.

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V.P. Singh was badly trapped in his Mandal web, the far-reaching social engineering step he had taken out of political panic. He had miserably failed to take into consideration that his 'concern' for the intermediate Hindu castes would drive in irreparable wedge in a society that was already badly divided on caste lines. The Hindu society suffered and still suffers from the worst type of apartheid type segregation. V.P.Singh appeased the minority and intermediate caste Hindu vote banks rather mindlessly. He was simply not the messiah India had been waiting for since the dawn of independence.

The anti-Mandal agitation was far from a spontaneous response against reservation for the backward castes. It was inspired, guided and funded by the Indira Congress and was handled by the Indira Congress trouble-shooters. The large amount of money that was spent on the agitation came from the dark chambers of the Indira Congress party.

My pipelines in the Indira Congress provided me with exact details about the funding of the 'student agitation' by Rajiv Gandhi's aides. In Delhi alone an approximate amount of Rs. 2 million was spent. Payments were made to some student leaders, university teachers and district level Congress office bearers. The lives lost in the agitation were not sacrificed for the genuine cause of the upper caste Hindu community. These lives were lost because Indira Congress wanted to make it sure that V. P. Singh did not remain in power a single day more than it was necessary. It was as cruel an experiment as were the experiments committed by Rajiv's younger brother Sanjay. The student agitation was another form of Turkman Gate massacre performed by Sanjay Gandhi during the emergency regime. The priests who chanted the mantras on this occasion were almost the same. The

Indira Congress leaders had deftly exploited the rump Sanjay brigade.

It is to my intimate knowledge that one of the students who committed self-immolation in Delhi was actually murdered by the Indira Congress goons. The student from a poor family background was administered heavy amount of intoxicant and was asked to put on at least three layers of trousers and was assured that the fire on his apparel would be promptly put out. The poor fellow, high on intoxicant, had fallen for the lure of some easy money doled out by the agents of the 'High Command'. As it transpired later, the fire on his apparel was not put out; rather he was doused with kerosene and allowed to suffer over 80% burn injury. The Indira Congress conspirators, in fact, had murdered the first caste agitation 'martyr'.

However, I could not gather any solid evidence of the Sangh Parivar members taking part in the contrived student agitation. At one point of time the caste hatred had blurred the party affiliation.

Nevertheless, I had shared my 'intelligence input' with the IB on this nefarious operation of Indira Congress, though I continued to enjoy the friendship of R.K. Dhawan. I did not approve of the way Rajiv Gandhi's mischievous manipulators played with the sentiments of the people, simply out of spite for a man who had implicated Rajiv and his friends in a couple of scandals.

But the assumed 'self righteous' government of V. P. Singh had by that time lost its bearings. The IB had failed to react and inspire its consumer to look beyond the body bags and the bruises that were inflicted on the rump political edifice of V. P. Singh. The law and order machinery simply reacted to the fiery developments and the political structure of the badly divided Janata Dal creaked like a sinking boat. An utter failure on many fronts Rajiv Gandhi had succeeded in exploiting the Mandal fiasco and rocking the boat of V. P. Singh beyond redemption.

The Sangh Parivar and its umbilical organisations, the BJP and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, aggravated the situation for V. P. Singh. They were not content with the 86 seats that they harvested by way of cashing on negative vote against Rajiv Gandhi. They had propped up V.P. Singh on the hope that the state machinery would look the other way when they pushed the Hindu agenda as a sure weapon to score a near majority in the next parliamentary election. This was a renovated version of the strategy adopted by the Sangh Parivar during the Jayaprakash movement. The Parivar was keen to dismount from VP piggyback and charge with its own stallion.

In fact, L. K. Advani had spelt out some of the modalities of BJP's conditional support to the National Front government. These involved vital issues like Article 370 (with reference to Kashmir), Uniform Civil Code, Human Rights Commission, and construction of Rama temple at Ayodhya. The RSS and Parivar members were acutely aware of the fragile nature of the NF government and they did not waste time to put their own agenda in motion.

The ostensible hitch started with V. P. Singh's alleged Muslim appeasement. The high point of this allegation was a non-essential political action by which Singh had thrown open all protected mosques under the supervision of the Archaeological Survey of India for prayers during the Ramadan period. The short sighted and visionless visionary did not comprehend the cascading effect this innocuous concession might lead to. This was followed by a huge grant for the repairs of the Jama Masjid and public declaration that the birthday of the Prophet (pbuh) Mohammad would be observed as a public holiday. The Sangh Parivar responded to the hollow minority appeasement actions by demanding state holidays on Hindu festivals like Ram Navami.

Both V. P. Singh and Rajiv Gandhi had failed to take cognisance of the consolidation of the Hindu outfits by the Sangh Parivar. It had started soon after Congress had invoked the Hindu card through Dharendra Brahmachari and political loyalists like Dr. Karan Singh in 1979-80 elections and gained active RSS support. Even before the 1984 Operation Blue Star the Vishwa Hindu Parishad had

started the Shila Pujan (worshipping the holy stones) and initiated the holy *yatras* (marches). Launching of the *Ramjanambhoomi* Mukti Yojana (liberation of the birth place of Lord Rama) had, in fact, set rolling the Hindu juggernaut. It was evidenced in the centenary celebrations of K. B. Hegdewar (1988-89) and a very significant meeting of the Sangh Parivar in Gujarat (Ahmedabad) on March 24, 1989. The stratagem for launching a determined bid to secure power in Delhi and in key states was given final shape in that meeting. The choice of Gujarat was symbolic. L. K. Advani had established his political base in Gujarat and the Somnath temple (destroyed several times by Muslim invaders) was considered as the symbol of '*Hindu maryada*.' No wonder that after over a decade Gujarat was again selected as the laboratory of communal politics by some of the Sangh Parivar leaders.

Lal Krishna Advani's *rath yatra* (chariot march), on a Toyota *rath* from Somnath in Gujarat to Ayodhya pushed up the Hindu wave to an unprecedented crescendo. It whipped up anti-Muslim sentiment and blunted to a large extent the Mandal card of V. P. Singh. Advani was arrested at the fag end of his journey in Bihar and Mulayam Singh Yadav, the 'secular' chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, thwarted attempts of the *kar sevaks* (volunteers) from storming the disputed Babri mosque, in the process killing 50 odd followers of the Sangh Parivar.

There was no reason for the IB not to have access to the inner thinking process and operational strategy of the Sangh Parivar. The Hindu outfit was sufficiently infiltrated by the IB. Bombay based industrialists close to Rajiv Gandhi had successfully cultivated a couple of RSS/BJP leaders like Dinanath Mishra (a journalist), T.V. R. Shenoy (a journalist and pro-RSS trouble-shooter), another senior journalist attached to the tycoon-owned newspaper (now a MP) and one of the resident operators at Keshav Kunj, hub of the RSS. I am unable to disclose the last name due to certain constraints. But he enjoyed a top position. One of the industrialists was personally very close to a parochial chauvinist leader of Maharashtra. The Delhi bureau of the industrialist was in constant touch with Rajiv Gandhi and supplied him with vital 'intelligence' on the Sangh Parivar. On one occasion an operator of the industrialist was offered free access for a couple of hours to the 'guarded' documents of the BJP in its national office. An electronic hand held copier was used for taking out copies of vital BJP meeting proceedings and internal communications. These valuable unconventional intelligence inputs were shared with Rajiv Gandhi.

I want to be emphatic that the mole in the RSS who had given access to the Bombay industrialist was from the state of Maharashtra and not identical with any of my personal friends in the Sangh Parivar.

R. P. Joshi was personally in touch with Murli Manohar Joshi, who was about to replace Advani as the President of the BJP. There was no lack of intelligence. The country lacked a cohesive government that could chalk out a comprehensive plan. It was not supported by credible administrative machinery. Most of the top bureaucrats had deserted VP and had started aligning either with the BJP or with the Congress.

Moreover, the Hindu upsurge between 1980 and 1990 had become inevitable, almost a historical necessity. Indira Congress had replaced the Indian National Congress and Rajiv Congress was in no position to hold the country together. The growing influence of the regional satraps and caste polarisation of the polity was further confounded by communal stratification. This was the historic moment for the Hindutwa elements to make determined bid to emerge as the national alternative to Indira Congress. In the absence of any stronger political force it was difficult to halt the process of the Hindu resurgence.

Hindu sentiment was fortified by a few other factors. The '*uprising*' in Punjab, atrocities on the

Hindus in Kashmir, fast accretion of Muslim population in Assam, West Bengal, Bihar and ascendance of the Islamist fundamentalists in Afghanistan and Pakistan had bolstered up Hindu resolve to build new political and social bridges that could ensure safety of the majority community.

It may also be mentioned that the consecutive Congress governments and the government of V.P. Singh had embraced the policy of 'minority appeasement' as gospel truth. The Indian National Congress was responsible for creating *apartheid segregation* between the Hindus and the Muslims, in as much as the Muslim League and other Muslim organisations were. Most of the eminent Muslims had very little to do with the independence movement. They had dubbed the Congress movement as a Hindu movement. The extreme Hindu strain had opposed this attitude of the Muslims. Even the moderate Hindus never cherished this kind of Hindu-Muslim *apartheid segregation* in the name of protecting the minorities and securing vote banks. They were, and still are, of the opinion that the so-called secular political parties appeased the Muslims unmindful of the strategic and tactical moves taken by a large section of the Indian Muslims in collaboration with the resurgent international Islamist elements. These elements were, even now they are, engaged in radicalising the Muslim community and link them up with the jihadist forces.

A Hindu backlash was on the card and the Sangh Parivar simply took advantage of the tottering political edifices of the Congress and other so-called secular parties to revive that strand of Indianness, which believed in Hindu supremacy. In a vastly Hindu majority country this was not an unnatural political dream. No one should forget that ideas of Bande Mataram movement, Tilak's and Lajpat Rai's contribution, the Arya Samaj, Hindu Mahasabha movement and the RSS activism had aimed at promoting and protecting the Hindu identity of *Bharatvarsha*. These ideas could not be smothered to extinction by the apartheid policy of secularism and ism-less communist protagonists. The post-independence rulers had failed to assuage the feelings of the Hindus that in an independent country their interests would not be sacrificed in the name of promoting minorityism. The collapse of the Congress and failure of V.P. Singh to ensure that a fine balance would be struck between the Hindu and Muslim aspirations had inevitably given rise to the 'neo Hindu-resurgence.'

This was my understanding of the current of history of the subcontinent. I had never ceased to share these views with the leaders of my agency and even with my political friends across the spectrum. I could have been incorrect.

I had discussed the entire gamut of the Hindutwa strategy with my Sangh Parivar friends. I was left with no doubt that the coming decade would be dominated by the Hindutwa forces and India would have to make a long haul over the fire of internal disturbances, caste and communal polarisations and regional conflict. The *kalachakra* (wheel of time) had taken an inevitable turn and I expected India to brace for new socio-political experimentations in an ambience of more power sharing between the Centre and the States and a prolonged phase of 'coalition governments.'

I did not snap my relationship with my friends in the Sangh Parivar and the BJP. I could not. Minus the elements of rabid anti-Islamism I believed in the essence of unity of the Hindu society and the need for a Hindu resurgence. Hinduism is not the only building block of Indian nationalism, but on it rests the foundation of the nation

My RSS friends, however, told me that the 'free world' powers would like the idea of Hindu resurgence in a geopolitical area dominated by fundamentalist Islam—from North Africa, to Central Asia, to South Asia and a major part of South East Asia. What was the harm if Hindus flaunted their religion when the Zionist, Christian and Muslim world never tired in flaunting their religious flags? Was it a crime to say 'I'm a Hindu?' Historically it was a correct logic, I knew. But, was it not a faulted logic? Were we going to experiment the civilisational war on Indian soil again? Was the

1946-47 one not enough? Answers for and against this argument would be, I knew, as eternal as history is.

I did, in my small way, whatever I could do to help my friends. I had lost faith in V.P. Singh's political skill and Rajiv Gandhi's capability of steering the nation out of the rotting morass. Rajiv had reached the tether's end and all the god's soldiers could not put him back to power. His 'reign of error' was the main cause of his political downfall. He had failed to appreciate, amongst other failures, the imperative of the emergence of a fresh Hindu wave. Indira Gandhi's death had churned out new political forces and equations, and that was the time to delicately measure up the Hindu Fahrenheit, by all concerned political and social forces. Rajiv Gandhi and the IB had failed to measure the rising heat. The subsequent explosion was a historical culmination of tectonic clashes between the Hindu (branded) and so-called champions of secularism.

TWENTY-FOUR

FLEETING RETURN TO THE PRE-HISTORIC STATE (PRAG-JYOTISH-PURA)

Racism is man's gravest threat to man—the maximum of hatred for a minimum of reason.
Abraham Joshua Heschel.

I have had strong filial and emotional connectivity with Assam, called Assom by the people of the Brhmaputra valley, pronounced Ahom, and Prag-Jyotish-Pura (Prehistoric place) by the Aryan historiographers. It was Prag (pre)-Jyotish (calendar) because the tract was considered existing as a civilised unit even before the Aryan calendar was implemented in Aryavarta. However, I had never served in Assam. The opportunity came rather abruptly.

In the midst of political uncertainty in Delhi my services were withdrawn from Punjab and Pakistan operations and I was asked to assist the Assam Operations, handled by a veteran North East expert, O. N. Srivastava. He was married to an elegant Angami Naga lady, daughter of H. Zopianga, former chief secretary of Nagaland. With his record of long stints in the North East and his association with the Assam affairs since 1980 Srivastava was, by any imagination, the most competent person to handle the delicate and dangerous operations in Assam.

The woes of Assam, accumulated over a period of about 75 years, partly by the British administration, Muslim League and mostly by the Indian National Congress and Indira Congress had burst the banks of patience of the people. Assam, well in the midst of 1988-89, faced uncertain prospects of being overrun by hordes of illegally settled foreign nationals. Assam was again threatened with the bleak prospect of its ethnic geography being redrawn. Assam, in fact, is a portrait of national mismanagement of the affairs of a delicate state that was surrounded by ethnic insurgency. This vital bridge to the North East was still being eyed by Pakistan as a part of its original scheme of territorial claims, based on ethno-religious dominance.

I don't think I should use the scalpel of history to unravel the sedimented layers of mistakes committed by the national leaders in Assam and elsewhere in the North East. It should be sufficient to say that senior Congress leaders like Nehru and Patel had almost agreed to cede Assam and Eastern Bengal to Pakistan as demanded by M. A. Jinnah. Nationalist leaders like Gopinath Bordoloi and Mahatma Gandhi had saved Assam and the rest of the North East for India. There are ample scopes for a dispassionate analysis of the historic imbalances that Assam suffered from for over seven decades and the dubious roles played by the Indian National Congress, Indira Congress and the fanatic Muslim political and religious organisations. The gaping fault line created in Assam was not overlooked by Pakistan and its successor regimes in Bangladesh. *Assam for Muslims* was and continues to be a potent programme of the communalist Muslim organisations in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

I did not like the idea of being drafted to Assam. I have had enough of the North East and I had no illusion about the ticking volcano on which Assam was placed by wrong policies pursued by the Congress leaders in Delhi and Shillong/Guwahati. Moreover, I did not want my family relationship with some of the leaders of the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)

as potent reasons for exposing me to a situation that could compromise my personal position.

I had another genuine objection. The vital Assam operations of the IB, starting from the AASU agitation, Assam Accord and the latest operations against the ULFA hinged on Hiteshwar Saikia (pronounced Hai-kia), a veteran Indira Congress leader and a former (future too) chief minister.

Hiteshwar and I were not strangers. Accompanied by my wife's maternal uncle, secretary public works department of Assam, Hiteshwar had landed at my Delhi residence soon after the Election Commission declared the election schedule for Assam in January 1980. His grapevine had enriched his knowledge about my supposed proximity to Indira Gandhi and her all-important aide R. K. Dhawan.

I am not qualified to comment on the correctness of the decisions of Indira Gandhi and the Election Commission to hold elections in the strife torn state. The convenient slogan that in a democracy election is a great leveller appeared to be empty when the communal massacre at Nellie, in which more than a thousand Muslims, mostly women and children, were killed by the rampaging mob of Assamese Hindus, Nepalis and Lalung tribals. Elsewhere there were hellish fight between the Bodos and the Assamese. Finally little more than 30% voters turned out to restore the democratic process and to initiate another chapter of bloody strife in the state.

Harendra Nath Talukdar, president of the Assam unit of Indira Congress, had challenged Hiteshwar. Harendra Nath had succeeded in establishing a bridgehead to quarters nearer to Sanjay Gandhi. Hiteshwar worked through triple network headed by R. K. Dhawan, Dharendra Brahmachari and M. L. Fotedar.

I had taken him to R.K. Dhawan out of exasperation and pity for my wife's uncle. Hiteshwar had declared that he would camp at my home until I helped him out. At that point of time Indira Gandhi often allowed me to approach her informally. One evening I ventured to tag Hiteshwar under my arms and approached the Prime Minister. She listened patiently and referred him to Sanjay and Dhawan.

A slick operator as he was, Hiteshwar had succeeded in influencing O. N. Srivastava, IB's operational spearhead in Assam. His case was strongly recommended by the Director IB too. In fact, Hiteshwar and the IB had influenced Indira Gandhi to give electoral nomination to over 30 Muslim candidates. This decision caused serious concern to the AASU and the Hindu Ahomias in general. The upper Assam Muttock Hindus disliked the pattern of ticket distribution.

A soft speaking Ahom and a person of good administrative ability Hiteshwar managed to grab the top seat in Guwahati and prepared for a long ditch battle against the ASSU, AAGSP, Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and hitherto dormant United Liberation Front of Assam.

I must admit that Hiteshwar, after being sworn in, visited my house and offered a *tusser* silk sari to my wife and a currency note filled briefcase to me. We kept the sari and returned the briefcase. My wife's uncle had received a boost in his service. Hiteshwar and I maintained cordial relationship until the scion of Assam politics expired.

I had done what I had to do to help Hiteshwar. But I had no illusion that he was the person responsible for aiding and abetting Indira Congress leaders like Santosh Mohan Dev to incite the Muslims, North Cachar tribals and the Bodos to organise dirty games against the ASSU and the AGP. Hiteshwar's hands were clearly discernible behind the formation of the ULFA in 1979. Hiteshwar's Ahom ethnicity had helped him in establishing equation with Ahom Muttock (Thai-Ahom origin) leaders like Arobindo Rajkhowa, Golap Baura (Anup Chetia), Prodip Gogoi, and Paresh Baruah. Some chilling details of Hiteshwar's linkages with the breakaway AASU leaders, who cobbled up the ULFA, were narrated to me by Samiran way back in 1981, during one of his clandestine visits to Delhi. At that point of time I had treated his story as another application of dirty tricks by the inner

coterie of Indira Gandhi.

I met Samiran again after Indira Gandhi foisted Anwara Taimur as the chief minister of Assam. The non-Muslim Congress leaders were equally unhappy with her and her pet minister A. F. Golam Osmani for their pro-Muslim policies. Both these leaders encouraged large scale Bangladeshi Muslim migration to Assam. That was the salient point of time when Indira Congress leaders like Hiteshwar Saikia and Lalit Doley extended tacit support to the ULFA faction of the AASU/AAGSP. They blindly tried to use the Ahom Nationalism card against the Muslims. Hiteshwar did not do anything new. The insurgent groups in neighbouring Nagaland and Manipur enjoyed some patronage from the so-called democratic and mainstream political parties. The Congress party has the distinguished history of supporting divisive forces in the North East to its political advantage.

My personal awareness of the complicated interrelationship between the ULFA and AASU/AGP on the one hand and the cream of the Indira Congress leaders on the other gave a creeping feeling. The feeling arose not out of aversion for Hiteshwar. He was one of the illustrious flag posts of Indian nationalism in the North East. The allegation that he had patronised the early ULFA ideologues and extreme separatists was not unique in Indian politics. He followed the footsteps of his illustrious political colleagues, who, almost around the same time, had crafted out another Frankenstein in Punjab.

I got the creeping feeling because I was aware of the jealous-cat character of my senior colleague, O.N. Srivastava. He would have not taken kindly my off the shelf relationship with Hiteshwar. IB handled the North East tribal affairs through a single window system. And Srivastava was the keeper of that window.

Only IB insiders know that the window owners often guarded their space with more ferocity than a trench-embedded soldier. One window talking to the other was deemed as a violation of the principle of restrictive security. They often talked through memos.

I was dead sure that Srivastava would not have tolerated another expert North East operative intruding into his territory. I did not resent his handling of the affairs in Assam, Tripura, Manipur and rest of the wild North East. He swam alongside the politicians to reach accord with the Bodos, TNVF, AASU/AAGSP and laboured shoulder to shoulder with them to widen the fault lines in the forgotten 'outland' of India. A bleeding India is the witness of the degree of success and failure of these accords, which are more of paperwork than real repair work of the fault lines.

Here again I leave the field open to intellectual entrepreneurs to chronicle the contribution of the Indian ruling classes and bureaucrats in playing with the sub-nationalist aspirations of the North Eastern tribals to seek out a new political geography for them. In particular I would expect them to unearth the dirty tricks played by Buta Singh, Rajiv's home minister in inciting the Assam tribals to float a demand for 'Udayachal'. Senior officers of the Intelligence Bureau collaborated with Rajiv Gandhi's troubleshooters in crafting out new Frankensteins in the North East. I wonder as to why the 'Frankenstein' of the Punjab has been dissected so much by the intellectuals as against very little attention they paid to the Frankensteins of the North East!

I was not keen to walk into the minefield.

In any case my reservations against an undefined shift to Assam theatre were overruled. I did not like to hurt R. P. Joshi either.

I landed on the Assam scene with plenty of reservation and trepidation as the ruling National Front government dithered helplessly to push its coalition partner, the AGP, for taking decisive action against the ULFA. The drift and alleged collaboration had allowed the ULFA to strengthen grassroots bases in upper and lower Brahmaputra valley and to establish contact with the Kachin rebels of

Burma for training and weapons. The ULFA had infiltrated the veins, arteries and capillaries of Assam's administration. At the fag end of his disastrous regime V. P. Singh agreed to impose President's rule in the troubled state. The governor of the state was far removed from the ground realities. His late night drinking binge clouded up his mornings and day times. He had very little clue about the situation around him. A superannuated former IB officer was taken out from the cold to advise the governor. This former seasoned North East hand was out of tune with the ground realities as the state administration had become incapable of either generating intelligence or policing effectively.

My classification as a dare devil field operator pushed me into the thick of the problem that called for a well planned military action against the ULFA hideouts and its hideous activities. Two human assets were made available to me by O. N. Srivastava and I was left to the daunting task of locating fresh human assets from crucial ULFA infested areas like Nalbari, Haulighat, Chaparmukh, Nowgong, Jakhlabantha, Hathi Khuli, Tengapania and Barbara. A few Muslim, Nepali and Bengali friends assisted me out of their genuine desire to restore normalcy in the state. I must salute a Bengali professor of Nowgong College, Muslim friends from Kathiatoli (near Nowgong) and Amingaon (north of Brahmaputra) and a few Nepali friends from Dhing (south of Brahmaputra) and Bihuguri (north of Brahmaputra).

Srivastava had worked out his blueprint and I assisted him in briefing the Army command in Calcutta and Shillong. The Army Command was reasonably concerned over the exact location of the ULFA camps, routes leading through forested and riverine tracts and expert guides to lead the columns. These details were discussed over maps provided by the HumInt assets and transplanted on the grid maps. At that point of time we did not think of resorting to the Punjab experimentation with aerial imaging, as most of the camps were located inside deep forests and swampy riverfronts. We did not have access to thermal imaging technique that could fortify the HumInt inputs.

The nitty gritty of Operation Bajrang was worked out in collaboration with Hiteshwar Saikia and certain key human assets provided by him. The wily Ahom leader had developed key human assets, mostly drawn from the Nepali, Bengali and Muslim communities. He knew the terrain better than he knew his grassy lawn. These assets were contacted in Calcutta and in certain rural locations in Meghalaya.

A particular rendezvous point beyond Khanapara, deep into the foothills between Assam and Meghalaya, a little before the launching of Operation Bajrang had almost jeopardised my life. We drove in a hired jeep and went past a few tribal hamlets before reaching the dried up bed of a stream. We waited for the human asset to turn up at the rendezvous exactly at 8.15 p.m. At about 8 p.m. two shots rang out from the wooded hill forcing us to take cover behind massive boulders. The area did not have any ULFA hideout and Assam police hardly ventured out beyond the city limits.

My Nepali guide whispered that the illegal miners who poached into the forested area and extracted some yellow rock that contained radioactive uranium might have fired the shots. The crudely processed mineral was marketed to entrepreneurs based in Calcutta and Kathmandu. A part of the product went down to Bangladesh and probably to Pakistan. I watched the situation for a while fired back from my pistol. That was enough to propel the heels of the illegal miners, who mostly carried single barrel guns. The human asset meeting was aborted and we decided to spend the night in a Nepali village.

I need not go into the details of the military operations. Operation Bajrang offered us a mixed bag. The infected layers of the Assam administration had leaked out information about the impending Army operations. Most of the camps were abandoned by the ULFA, some in the nick of the moment, leaving

behind huge cash (over Rupees 50 million) and gold bars. Certain recovered materials indicated that the ULFA leaders and cadres either believed in family planning or took abundant precaution against AIDS. They enjoyed sex!

The ULFA leaders and most of the armed cadre used country boats to negotiate the riverine area. The top leadership sneaked into Bangladesh and the majority of the cadre took refuge in the forested tracts of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. Most of them melted into the rural areas.

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Operation Bajrang coincided with the collapse of the National Front government headed by Vishwanath Pratap Singh. The honest and well-intentioned person was fired by vague ideals and was not steered into the furnace of real politics. He was not a better pilot than Rajiv was.

The old con artists of Indian politics Chandrashekhar and Devi Lal had already ganged up with Rajiv Gandhi, who was more eager to write the political epitaph for V.P. Singh than bouncing back to power. Rajiv was aware that the chances for securing parliamentary majority immediately after V.P. Singh's removal were dim. The con artists were cultivated to provide an interlude and an embarrassed President, who was not left with any other alternative, swore in Chandrashekhar as the Prime Minister. There was no second contender for the crown that was booby trapped with Mandal, *Ramjanambhoomi* and myriads of internal security and deteriorating economic problems. On top of everything Rajiv's carpet spreaders were ready to remove the ornate piece of support at any point of time. Chandrashekhar knew that he was ensconced on an uncomfortable throne, but he had dreamt of this throne all his active political life. Rajiv Gandhi, like Harun-al-Rashid had sanctioned the *padatik* a brief dream.

Curiously enough, around the same time the Pakistani Establishment had succeeded in installing Nawaz Sharif as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. But strategic observers and analysts could not agree on a probable scenario that could bring in a thaw in Indo-pak relationship. And Chandrashekhar was shackled by the unique legacy of 11 incumbents in the ministry of external affairs falling under the domino action since Rajiv Gandhi had taken over in 1985. It was beyond the legendary *padatik* to put the Indo-Pak relations on an even keel.

My tryst with Assam operations came to an abrupt end soon after the new government took over in Delhi. I received telephonic instructions to return to Delhi. On arrival I was told that the minister of state for home affairs Subodh Kant Sahay wanted to see me.

I have had no occasion to meet Subodh Kant, a politician from Daltonganj in Bihar. The Jayaprakash Narayan movement against Indira Gandhi regime had popped him up in Bihar politics and the V.P Singh movement against Rajiv Gandhi had brought him to the parliament. A person with known socialist leaning he was somewhat attached to Chandrashekhar.

I found Subodh Kant virtually surrounded by a contingent of six officers hailing from Bihar, some belonging to the IAS and other to the IPS and assorted services. He had allocated specific tasks to his aides in the home ministry. One looked after the Ramjanambhoomi/ Babri Mosque dispute and the others assisted him in developmental activities in his constituency, transfer and posting of officers and liaison with the central police forces. I was supposed to be the seventh addition to his personal office.

Subodh was forthright in his approach. He was, he said, sincere to solve the Punjab problem and problem in Assam and wanted to avail of my services to facilitate his mission. The proposal surprised me. The Intelligence Bureau is an appended department of the Union Home Ministry. I was

readily available for his Punjab and Assam operations, in case he so keenly desired to avail of my services. But he insisted on my joining his personal staff. I asked for a day to toss over the idea in my mind.

R.P. Joshi was under order of transfer to the Joint Intelligence Committee and he was to be replaced by M. K. Narayanan. Joshi was a harmless person and he had not donned on any political pyjama like Narayanan was identified with Rajiv Gandhi. Joshi's advice to me was to get out of the IB for a while during the fluid political changes.

I was kicked around for two days. The Union Home Secretary and his Additional Secretary were opposed to the idea of adding the seventh aide to the minister. Finally I was asked to join Home Ministry on deputation as a Joint Secretary. I opposed the idea. The Chandrashekhar government was an overnight guest, which occupied the North and South Block rooms by courtesy of Rajiv Gandhi. The next government could terminate my deputation and send me either to the refuse bin of OOCOW, Officer On Compulsory Waiting or back to my state cadre that I had left, almost haunted by the CPM way back in 1967-68.

At my insistence a compromise formula was worked out by the Cabinet Secretary, which allowed me to remain on the strength of the IB and work in the office of MoS Home. I was entitled to draw my pay and allowances from the Intelligence Bureau. My colleagues and well wishers were amused by the queer arrangement and my adamant attitude of sticking to the IB. I did so intentionally to prove that I was not running away from the IB out of fear. I wanted to assert my moral right to be in the IB, after having spent about 23 years in the organisation as an 'earmarked' officer. Some officers in the IB construed my moral stand as an act of foolishness. Others waited in the wings with machetes and kirsches to extract their pounds of flesh and ounces of blood, simply because they believed that I was a smarter Alec. To them IB was either pro-Narayanan or anti-Narayanan and India was either with Rajiv Gandhi or with the Devil. They had no alternative to name, after having 'betrayed' by V.P. Singh.

I reported to the office of the MoS Home a day before R.P Joshi was replaced by M.K. Narayanan. I was assigned the mouthful designation of Special Assistant to the Home Minister. I felt painfully lost inside the walls of the North Block rooms and very uncomfortable in facing crowds of favour seekers and dough makers. Professionally too I felt emasculated having been separated from my favourite operational fields in Punjab, PCIU and Assam. I was not cut out for the job of living as the shadow of a minister. This coveted job was normally chased by the WDF (wheeler, dealer and fixer) Officers from the Indian Administrative Service.

My ill reputation being a square peg in round hole was exemplified by a couple of funny incidents that were thrust upon me by the corridor stalkers.

There was this Bannu (not real name), a turbaned Sikh from Punjab who wanted an ambassadorial assignment anywhere in the world that hosted an Indian Mission. He was ready with fat moneybags and a strong recommendation from Chandra Swami as well as from Simranjit Singh Mann. He stalked around the corridors of the PMO and the Home Ministry. Some chance miscalculation on the part of the astute stalker brought him to my office room. He was under the impression that the windows to the inner chambers of Rajiv Gandhi were open to me and I could put a word to the proxy Prime Minister. He opened up his mind and a briefcase to offer me a tidy amount of Rupees 200,000. I persuaded him to realise that he was scattering the pearls before a pig. In fact, he should have gone to one of the aides to Rajiv Gandhi. He promptly closed the bag and later bagged the ambassadorial assignment to an African country after liberally contributing to the funds of the Prime Minister and the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs. Incidentally the enterprising person had also earned the kind

pouts of P. V. Narasimha Rao, courtesy Chandra Swami. The Indian PM was persuaded by the Swami and the ambassador to make an important diplomatic visit to a key African country called Burkina Faso.

I don't want to burden my readers with too many examples of my brush with the stalkers and the grabbers, who are far too many. But I must narrate the story of a senior officer of the Indian Police Service, who chased a top slot in a central police organisation. By the time Chandrashekhar had taken over the reins of the country such posts were auctioned and awarded to the highest bidders. Most of them operated through two personal aides of the PM and some of them operated through Chandra Swami and his henchman *Mamaji* alias K.N. Agarawal. The police officer approached me after being almost outbided by a fellow colleague. Another aide to the minister coordinated service matters and I was scrupulously kept out of such transactions. Out of sheer desperation the officer walked into my room and offered me a fat amount for obtaining the signature of the MoS on his file. I had ceased to be surprised by such offers. They came accidentally to my corridor and lighted up the chambers of my cranial storehouse. I feasted on these incidents but not on the offerings they brought. I simply took pity on the senior officer, walked into the room of the minister, and told him that my senior service colleague was ready to renegotiate the post. The minister obliged with a smile and directed me to request the Home Secretary to push up his file.

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Before I traverse back to the killing field of Punjab I must do a little plain speaking about the roles Chandra Swami and *Mamaji* played in running the affairs of the state and in acting as convenient siphon for the high and mighty in the land. The Swami acted as an intermediary in almost all the deals that Chandrashekhar could manage to conclude during the chance of a lifetime offered by Rajiv Gandhi. However, some of the defence, petroleum and heavy industry related deals were efficiently handled by Chandrashekhar's personal aides.

I met *Mamaji* for the second and last time in the office of the minister of state for home affairs. He said that his intentions were honourable and he wanted to liberate me from the misery of pecuniary constraints for all time to come. The Prime Minister, he said, was interested in two particular import deals. But he hesitated to clinch the issue, as he was aware of Rajiv Gandhi's live interest in the matter. Would I be good enough to speak to an aide of Rajiv Gandhi and request him to mediate an honourable solution between the former and the present Prime Minister? My visitor was ready to oblige me with a reward of Rupees five million for the services rendered.

I pondered over the offer and counted my pulse beat. My bank balance of Rupees 21,000 was good enough for rainy days. I was in the midst of negotiation with a nationalised bank to raise loan to purchase an apartment house. My deduction was that five million would accelerate my heartbeats beyond control and I would end up in an intensive care unit. *Mamaji* was sagacious to increase the offer to seven million to help me to tide over the financial crisis I was passing through. His depth of knowledge of my financial status amazed me. However, I managed to humour the Aladdin and later confirmed from a very delicate source that indeed there were nascent and sprouting tensions between Chandrashekhar and Rajiv Gandhi over some undefined financial deals. I dropped the hot potato and begged excuse of the Aladdin as politely as I could without ruffling his remaining few strands of hair. His departing words were prophetic: 'you'll die a poor man.'

It is a common knowledge that Rajiv Gandhi was mighty unhappy over inclusion of Sanjay Singh and Maneka Gandhi in Shekhar ministry. Rajiv Gandhi's missives to Chandrashekhar on IMF loan,

direct talks with Punjab militants, foreign policy matters, imposition of President's rule in Tamilnadu and the complex issue of surveillance on Rajiv by 'henchmen' of Om Prakash Chauthala, Devi Lal's son, are also attributed to be the provocations behind withdrawal of Indira Congress support from Chandrashekhar government.

These subterranean skirmishes were aggravated by the Intelligence Bureau reports and private studies that the time had come for Rajiv to go to the polls and harvest 280 seats. Rajiv was again wrongly advised. I had pointed this out to Dhawan, but he had very little say in the matter. Rajiv was very much guided by his intelligence fraternity. This scenario dramatis again proved that 'friendship' between the Chief Executive and his 'Chief Spy' often generated disastrous consequences. The history of Goerings, Berias and Hoovers should serve as exemplary illustrations.

I think it would be in the interest of current Indian history to carry out a study on the conflict of interest between the puppet and the puppeteer over certain financial deals. That was said to be the immediate provocation for sudden removal of the carpet.

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Minister Subodh Kant was a regular visitor to the Safdarjung Enclave abode of Chandra Swami. Some of his deals relating to purchases made for the police and paramilitary forces in Assam and Punjab were routed through Chandra Swami. A particular jeep deal for Assam was clinched after the minister and the targeted supplier had an exclusive meeting at the abode of the Swami.

I had almost irritated the minister by my persistent refusal to go inside the abode. Whenever I accompanied him I preferred to stay out in the escort car. I refused to meet the Swami even on the issue of his supposed mediation on the *Ramjanambhoomi* issue. Thereafter Subodh Kant kept me out of his private enterprises except on occasions when he demanded fat amounts from the secret service fund of the IB for 'missions in Punjab and Assam'. I acted as the carrier between two corridors of the North Block and often earned the ire of the IB chief. I had very little to choose between the donor and the beneficiary. It was part of the job and I accomplished it with full knowledge that the secret service funds were not utilised for the purpose these were drawn for.

I had no reason to feel happy with the affairs around me. But to make the best out of a lost situation I concentrated on the Punjab scenario again. But Punjab wasn't the same playground I used to know. By the first half of 1990 the curve of violent incidents had gone up sharply. The total figure of human slaughter had jumped to 2841 in 1990 from 1396 in 1989. A significant event was the blowing up of a railway track near Ferozpur and derailment of an Army special train. The terrorists later opened fire and killed a couple of soldiers. Under instructions from the ISI the Second Panthic Committee and the armed terrorist groups tried to bring about communal cleavage. A number of attacks on Hindu targets were made by the ISI inspired terrorist outfits headed by Wassan Singh Jaffarwal, Paramjit Singh Panjwar and Gurjant Singh Budhsinghwala.

A set of new players had taken over the reins of the movement. Jasbir Singh Rode had faded into near oblivion. Dr. Sohan Singh, Wassan Singh Jaffarwal, S.S.Mann and Daljit Singh Bittoo and others occupied the centre stage. Police and the paramilitary forces matched renewed terrorist thrust by imposing their own brand of terrorism. Counter-terrorist actions often resulted in counter-killing of innocent villagers, counter-kidnapping of the relatives of the wanted terrorists and extortion of heavy ransom for sparing the lives of the young boys and sanctity of women. For a while it transpired that Punjab had become a free field for the players who preferred to play soccer with human skull. Social, ethical and professional concepts were lost in the grim game of survival. A couple of senior central

intelligence operatives too took to freelancing and assumed the roles of executioners. No one in saner frame of mind could endorse what the terrorists were perpetrating and what was being pedalled as state response.

Rajiv Gandhi had left his touch unfinished, which surprisingly contained creative ingredients. V. P. Singh floundered through the muddled situation and was out long before any of his initiative could take shape, including a renewed peace initiative through Atinderpal Singh, in which I played a significant role.

Chandrashekhar was the most cavalier of the three. His idea of boldness was not based on proper study of the ground realities. He had grabbed power by the lock, but he was not destined to capture peace even by the whiskers.

Soon after assumption of power he was influenced by certain quarters to personally talk to Simranjeet Singh Mann on December 28, 1990. I don't think he was guided by professional organisations like the Intelligence Bureau and the police chief of the state. A Prime Ministerial initiative is supposed to be a strategic move based on assessed indicators provided by the Internal Security and the Armed Forces and the intelligence organisations. Chandrashekhar, an inveterate agitational politician, suffered from two handicaps: misplaced self-righteousness and incapability to match intelligence and strategic inputs to his political scheme of things.

The political establishment aligned to the Congress had inherited the techniques of administering a vast and complicated country. The others were kept busy for over 40 years with politics of opposition and agitational activities. They simply had no clue to the bricks and mortars of the Indian Establishment.

Chandrashekhar, therefore, preferred to overlook the resolution passed in a conference of the assorted Akali Dals at Fatehgarh Sahib on December 26, that had empowered Mann to talk to Delhi on condition that India should either finally decide on the fate of the Sikh '*Quam*' or give a free hand to the terrorists. Mann was neither an ideologue of the Sikh *Quam* nor the Chief of its factious Panthic Committees and armed groups. He was accepted as a totem and like most totems he came in the line of firing of the militant and terrorist groups as soon as the talks were initiated. The Panthic Committees headed by Dr. Sohan Singh, Gurbachan Singh Manochahal and Wassan Singh Jaffarwal disassociated from the talks. The armed terrorist groups were reluctant to extend support to Mann.

Important intelligence inputs at that point of time indicated that Pakistan was not at all interested in allowing its clients in Punjab to settle for peace. The ISI and the Chief of Army Staff General Aslam Beg had made it abundantly clear that they had two main objectives before them: 'strengthening collective defences of the regional Muslim countries' and 'augmenting the freedom struggle by the Kashmiri Mohalla (neighbourhood) fighters.' They considered Punjab as a strategic holding ground for the Indian military and paramilitary forces. Such strategic 'holding ground' theory was earlier tested with considerable success in the North East. The 'political government' in Pakistan was engrossed with the Gulf War and the 'other government' run by the Establishment were keen on exacerbating the proxy war in Punjab.

Rajiv Gandhi too was not happy over the direct contact between the Prime Minister and the Sikh militants. He had made this abundantly clear in a letter to the PM on January 24, 1990. To quote him, "I regret to say my information is that, far from showing any signs of improvement, things have only worsened in the last few days.....It is one thing to have contacts with insurgents and terrorists at intelligence and police levels, quite another for a Head of Government to engage himself in talks without pre-conditions with parties dedicated to the dismemberment of the country."

While Chandrashekhar was in the habit of delivering homilies he had never cultivated the patience

of receiving from others. He did not blow up his top but it was made clear that the weary socialist too was running out of options.

His minister of state, Subodh Kant Sahay, aggravated his discomfiture. He directed me to open up a line to Manjit Singh, President AISSF, for exploring the feasibility of opening up a parallel dialogue. The idea was not bad but I reminded the junior minister about the other initiative of the Prime Minister. Manjit and Mann were in conflicting camps and the former did not enjoy the support of the more virulent factions of the terrorists. Subodh Kant did not relent. I proceeded after keeping the concerned senior Punjab hand in the IB informed about the new twist. The IB, I gathered, was not unduly perturbed over such initiatives. They knew pretty well that Rajiv Gandhi was sure to stage a come back in another couple of months. Some segments in the IB worked overtime to prepare the 'home coming' of Rajiv Gandhi.

As the most knowledgeable informed person of India, the DIB had failed again to gauge the mood of the Indian people. The *janta janardan* (plebeians) were not yet in the mood of giving another try to Rajiv Gandhi. Any way, the IB functionaries were, rightly so, engaged in assisting the police authorities in eliminating and containing the scourge of anarchy in Punjab countryside and unearthing the 'encirclement posts' set up by the ISI in Nepal, Bangladesh and elsewhere in the heartland of India.

My contact with Manjit Singh was facilitated by XXXX Kanda, a petty trader but a large hearted nationalist. Manjit was ready to play the game and expected a 'personal compensation package' that I communicated to the minister. The AISSF president thereafter came out with the idea of launching a probing mission to measure the responses of the Central Government.

As an integral part of the initiative I contacted Gurbachan Singh Manochahal, leader of the First Panthic Committee and chief of the Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan somewhere near Harike. Harjinder Singh Ramdas, who had earlier featured prominently in Jasbir Singh Rode operation initiated by Rajiv Gandhi, facilitated the meeting. In the same vein I contacted Baba Joginder Singh, father of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and a senior leader of the factious Akali Dal.

The meeting with Manochahal had taken place under rather unusual circumstances. I was directed to board a boat near village Sirhali Kalan and follow the downstream of River Beas towards Harike. I took the chance because of my intrinsic faith in Harjinder Singh and dame fate, which had so far not betrayed me. It was a gamble, but it paid off. Our small fishing boat was intercepted by another fishing boat somewhere near a lake-island and was boarded by the dreaded terrorist leader. That was our third meeting. Manochahal was in favour of peace but was afraid to be the first one to lay down arms in the face of competitive terrorism and fear of reprisal from Pakistan. He did however, promise to support any move by the Central Government to hold elections in Punjab.

This time I had to attend to a personal request of the terrorist leader. He had a serious dental problem that was caused by an accidental fall while he tried to escape a police dragnet and ambush near Sohol in Amritsar district. He wanted to avail of the services of a dentist. At a later day meeting, the fourth one, I had to carry a dentist and his equipment all the way from Amritsar to a small village Gurdwara near Shero. The dentist performed the complicated treatment to the satisfaction of the most dreaded terrorist of Punjab. His face gave out an impression that he was asked to put his head in the mouth of a lion. This small mercy had earned me free passport to Manochahal until the police gunned him down.

The other two 'militant' leaders who were brought into the orbit of this new initiative were Atinderpal Singh, former MP, and Kanwar Singh Dhami, a Pakistan based leader of Akal Federation. Atinderpal was a ready game, as he had tasted the fruits of being a member of the Indian parliament.

His faith was restored in the political process.

Kanwar Singh Dhami was a sly fox as he ever was. He was contacted at a Model Town ISI guesthouse in Lahore, Pakistan, through a mutually agreed cut out (name withheld). It was not my intention to tackle Kanwar alone. I tried to explore the possibility of sounding out a few other Sikh terrorist leaders hosted by the ISI. By himself Kanwar was a spent force. But Subodh Kant overruled me and allowed the cut out to smuggle Kanwar into Amritsar. The beginning and end of this initiative were messy. A designated political aide (OSD) to the minister was empowered to handle Dhami. To my horror the foxy militant leader was brought to the North Block to meet the minister and me. I lodged a strong protest over such cavalier attitude of the aide. But the concerned aide enjoyed confidence of the Prime Minister and enjoyed immunity from official and security disciplines.

Dhami turned out to be a bottomless begging bowl. He demanded immunity from prosecution and a fat package of rehabilitation in addition to Rupees 1 million. The minister and his political aide were keen to oblige him and pressured me to draw the amount from IB's secret service fund. I refused to walk down to the room of M.K. Narayanan because I was not convinced about the efficacy of the talent and about the exact utilisation of the amount. I believe the minister had later secured the amount through one of his six other aides.

Dhami turned out to be unreliable. He did not have genuine access to the top militant leaders. He later spat venom against me in the media for letting him down and not recognising his cardinal contribution in bringing back peace in Punjab. Courtesy his machinations my 'under cover' identities were blown off to the leaders of the Second Panthic Committee and Pakistan based militant leaders, who in turn shared these with the ISI operatives. The Intelligence Bureau was alerted by a sister organisation about plans of the some terrorist groups to physically eliminate me. The IB shackled me down with a static armed guard at my residence. However, I refused to accept a personal security for my movement in and outside Delhi.

Kanwar Singh Dhami taught me a couple of precious lessons. The first and foremost lesson that I gathered was about operational policies of the ISI. The Sikh terrorist leaders living in Pakistan were not only subjected to indoctrination, but they were exposed to certain softer sides of human frivolities. Most of them were encouraged to visit professional women and imbibe the luxuries of greasy life. The austere 'Kalisthani' leaders, coming from rural background had succumbed to the greasy aspects of life. Most of them had lost the fervour to fight for their cause and easily connived with the ISI in making sporadic verbose statements and facilitating induction of arms and explosives to Punjab.

By early 1991 the ISI had almost stopped its earlier policy of supplying free weapons to the Sikh terrorists. The armed '*jathebandis*' (contingents) were made to pay for the hardware. For certain strategic reasons the ISI had also pruned down its earlier programme of exposing the Sikh terrorists to Afghan mujahedins and Pakistan's home grown militant groups. In fact, the ISI had shifted its main operational theatre to Kashmir and diversified its 'encirclement' operations to Assam and adjacent areas of the North East.

My talks with Dhami and three other Pakistan returned terrorists confirmed my suspicion that Muslim Pakistan did not trust the Sikhs, otherwise described as '*kesadhari*' (hair sporting) Hindus. They had not forgotten the haunting hostilities between the Sikh and Muslim communities on either side of the border on the before and after the transfer of power. The Sikhs had also not forgotten the Wahabi sect's crusade against Sikh territories in the Punjab and Frontier Provinces. These inputs spoke loudly that the core of the Sikh separatist movement engineered by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and a cacophonous group of Sikh Diaspora was about to collapse. The process was accelerated by

some spectacular security operations by K.P.S.Gill, the police chief and certain delicate intelligence operations of the Intelligence Bureau.

The second lesson that was pushed into my gullet was that in the intelligence and security operations theatre like Punjab the most precious ingredient was mature cooperation of the political government. Both Chandrashekhar and Subodh Kant lacked such maturity. Moreover, the political government headed by them was a constitutionally correct one but it lacked sanction of the civil society.

However, my fresh forays into the Punjab affairs did not go unrewarded. AISSF (Manjit), Panthic Committee (Manochahal), Atinderpal Singh, former MP, Gurtej Singh, former secretary SAD (M) decided to support the civic elections in Amritsar, Ludhiana and Jullandhar, in which the BJP emerged successful due to Hindu backlash against Sikh militancy in the urban pockets. Some militant groups aligned to Dam Dami Taksal and splinter groups of the KCF and KLF supported the urban civic elections.

The factious Akali Dals and the 'softened' militant groups showed greater enthusiasm when elections to the Punjab Legislative Assembly and Parliament seats were declared for June 1991. AISSF (Manjit) and the Panthic Committee (M) decided to field record number of candidates. A faction of the Babbar Khalsa supported them. A large number of relatives of the killed and detained militants too came forward to contest the elections. This neat national gain was achieved through acts of negotiations between certain separatist groups and representative of the political government. Chandrashekhar and Subodh Kant Sahay exhibited boldness in extending hands of conciliation to certain exhausted and disillusioned groups. I think I earned a space for myself as the trouble-shooter of the lame duck government.

Pakistan backed Second Panthic Committee, militant groups aligned to it, and Babbar Khalsa opposed the election process. They indulged in 'operation elimination' of election candidates and succeeded in killing over 22 of them. Under pressure some of the militant and aligned political forces declared that if elected to the state assembly they would pass a resolution demanding creation of Khalistan. However, Dr. Sohan Singh's outfit asked the people to impose 'people's curfew' on the election dates. Pakistan influenced groups were directed by the ISI to scuttle the elections at any cost. Success of the democratic process, they averred, would weaken the cloudburst of terrorism in Kashmir.

Interestingly enough, Dr. Sohan Singh had maintained a discreet contact with Indira Congress through one of his sons, a member of the Indian Administrative Service, and through the family of Sardar Swaran Singh, a former minister in Indira Congress government. What game was he playing and what was the game of Rajiv Gandhi? It is difficult to give a sure shot answer. A former director of Punjab Health services, Dr. Sohan Singh had established a vast network amongst the civil servants and elite members of the civil society. They wanted that the final negotiation on the 'pending issues' should be done through more credible and acceptable Jat than marginal figures like Jasbir Singh Rode, Atinderpal Singh and Manjit Singh. S.S. Mann had lost credibility as a negotiator and interlocutor. High velocity erratic swings on Khalistan issue had proved that Mann lacked firm psychological consistency that was expected from a former officer of the Indian Police Service. Incidentally Mann did not enjoy good vibes with the traditional Akali leaders and the 'aristocratic face' of the families of Dr. Sohan Singh and Sardar Swaran Singh.

The most bizarre incident of this phase was the decision of Subodh Kant Sahay to seek re-election to the Parliament from Ludhiana constituency. Elected to the Parliament from Ranchi (Jharkhand) in the wake of V. P. Singh's tirade against 'corrupt' Rajiv Gandhi Subodh had lost all credibility in his

home constituency. The idea to seek re-election was mooted by Manjit Singh with whom I was in dialogue and was supported by assorted 'truckers lobby' who operated enormous interstate fleets from the mine belt and industrial centres of Bihar and adjacent West Bengal. Kailash Nath Agarwal (*Mamaji*) and guru Chandra Swami pitched in with monetary support from Mumbai's film lobby and suppliers to the Union Home Ministry.

I seriously objected to his decision to contest election from Punjab when I was asked to give my opinion. My objections arose from two counts: the peace initiative, in which I was intimately involved, should not be used to serve limited political ends when Punjab was still in ferment. The Second Panthic Committee and the ISI were in cahoots to scuttle the elections and Operation Rakshak I and II launched by the Indian Army to flush out the militants achieved only limited success. The militants had achieved spectacular 'success' that had created a spectre of hellish helplessness.

Moreover, I pointed out that the 'transporters' were in no position to mobilise vote for him, though they could finance his election to a considerable extent. Subodh Kant overruled me and went ahead with his desperate effort to retain the parliamentary seat. The ambience of violence also affected him when the car he was travelling in was hit by an improvised mine. This was the final nail on the sieved election panorama in Punjab. In the face of serious breakout of violence the elections were postponed from June 1991 to 1991.

It would be unfair to ridicule the Punjab peace initiatives of Chandrashekhar and Subodh Kant Sahay. Rajiv Gandhi was unhappy with these initiatives as his agency based initiatives were short circuited by the protégé government for two salient reasons: Chandrashekhar firmly believed that with his background of anti-congressism he could break new grounds with the aggrieved Sikh community. He and Subodh Kant also believed that by wooing the Sikhs they could obtain electoral mileage. The forces under Pakistani influence sabotaged the later calculation. The former did result in some tangible results. It widened the existing fissures between the squabbling and warring militant factions. The badly divided movement had generated waves of violence to subjugate the Sikh masses and to please the Pakistani bosses. But the Sikh civil society had seen through the game. The increasingly criminalized movement had lost touch with the people, who were initially alienated by three great tragedies, Operation Blue Star, Delhi carnage and Operation Black Thunder. They now pined for peace and economic prosperity.

Chandrashekhar's was a more acceptable political face to the Punjab separatists, who had adopted an uncompromising attitude to the Nehru-Gandhi family. The fresh initiatives coupled with enhanced security operations had brought about qualitative changes in the security ambience of the state.

However, the Assam initiative of the new government did not make any progress. Between Operation Bajrang (November '90) and return of Hiteshwar Saikia to power in 1991 summer elections the ULFA had suffered certain body blows. Hiteshwar, true to his political salt, had succeeded in deftly manoeuvring the disillusioned cadres of the AASU and AGP and a section of the disenchanted ULFA cadre.

Though the top leadership of the ULFA had taken shelter in Bangladesh with active support of the ISI operatives and under the tutelage of the Director General of Forces Intelligence, an ISI type outfit dominated by Bangladesh Army, its massive organisational wings had managed to strengthen grassroots support inside Assam. Some of the top leadership were imparted training in Pakistan and Afghanistan and were spurred into fresh violent activities soon after Hiteshwar Saikia assumed power.

In one of his visits to Guwahati, Dibrugarh and other places in Assam Subodh Kant was given an impression by Governor D. D. Thakur that a section of the ULFA headed by its publicity secretary

Sunil Nath was ready for negotiation with the government. This move was based on certain false indices. Thakur's legal acumen was not matched by his political wisdom. Certain fringe associates of the ULFA, especially a few media persons were used to contact the local leaders at Nowgong, Nalbari and Tezpur. I had accompanied a group to Nalbari in April 1991, and returned with the impression that a good number of unemployed Assamese youth had become weary of the prospect of a prolonged armed struggle. But they were intimidated and silenced by the armed groups. My recommendation to the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs was that another round of tough armed action by the government was necessary to soften up the fringe elements. The hard core was still determined to carry on the struggle and they were in the process of establishing linkages with the NSCN (Khaplang), Kachin Independent Army (KIA) and other Burmese insurgent groups. They were already sucked into the ISI and DGFI network. The internal security imbroglio in Assam had acquired foreign support. That was the time to use 'military option' to soften the foreign linkages and to weaken the 'mass control' established by the ULFA.

In fact, these recommendations were partially implemented after Operation Rhino launched by the Army in September 1991, sometime after the government headed by Chandrashekhar bowed out of power.

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The final ignition that blew up the marriage of convenience between Rajiv Gandhi and Chandrashekhar was as absurd as the story of his coronation at the Ashoka Hall. The alleged farcical 'surveillance' on Rajiv's residence by two constables of Haryana police had triggered off the final break. The course of events on the fateful day have not been properly analysed and assessed.

Though the SPG cover was substituted by other security personnel, Rajiv Gandhi had a layer of security around him. Most of the non-VIP visitors were required to register their names at the entry point. The Intelligence Bureau had access to these materials. Besides the security personnel some Intelligence Bureau personnel were also deployed in the outer and inner security rings of Rajiv Gandhi. The Director of the Intelligence Bureau, M.K. Narayanan was a personal friend of the former Prime Minister.

It was correct that IB and other security agencies were regularly issuing security appreciation of threat to Rajiv Gandhi and his family members from Punjab terrorists, Kashmir insurgents and insurgent groups of the North East. These were, however, generalised alerts. There was no specific hard intelligence. Most of these were assessed alerts culled out from disjointed intelligence inputs. There was, however, no input that some people in Haryana were planning to harm the former Prime Minister. Two Haryana police officers, crude as they were, could do little to penetrate the security and intelligence ring around Rajiv Gandhi without the IB knowing about it. But on that 6th day of March, 1991, they were there and were identified by the security and intelligence people. The whole thing smacked of a dirty ploy.

Om Praksh Chautala's flare for such country gimmick is well known. He was the person who had despatched hundreds of drunken Devi Lal supporters to the heart of Delhi to discredit V.P. Singh and hasten his downfall. When asked to enquire into the matter by Subodh Kant Sahay I extended my antenna in the IB and Delhi police and gathered that the Rajiv's friends in the IB and some of his coterie members had overplayed the whole incident. The matter should have been brushed off as a joke and the prolonged telephonic exchange between Chandrashekhar and Rajiv should have not added another shady chapter in Indian politics.

In the din of the big political bang no one ventured to probe the role played by the IB in providing Rajiv Gandhi with an alibi to try his luck in the next elections. They had advised Rajiv that ‘the good days were round the corner.’ It was a wrong advice. Rajiv Gandhi had deduced that the right time had come to seek a mandate of the people. The IB and other fortunetellers again told him that Indira Congress was poised to win over 250 seats if the elections were held in the ensuing summer.

Om Prakash Cahutala had, in his characteristic rural Jat style, had provided Rajiv Gandhi with a ready scissor to cut the fragile linkage with the minority puppet government of Chandrashekhar. Rajiv Gandhi had committed another error by hastening the downfall of the constitutional interregnum. Providence had pushed him towards a course of action that ended a little after 10.20 pm on May 21 at Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu.

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Destiny had pushed Rajiv Gandhi to Sriperumbudur, a fateful journey that had started from Bhubaneshwar in Orissa, which had earned the ubiquitous distinction of bidding final adieu to two former Prime Ministers, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

It would not be prudent for me to comment on the failure of the intelligence agencies in protecting the former Prime Minister. Investigation agencies and Commissions have variably commented on the inadequacy of ‘hard intelligence on security threat from the LTTE’ to Rajiv Gandhi. The Jain Commission, which went into the issues related to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, has been variably commented upon by people wearing differently coloured glasses. Some portions of the Commission’s report were critical of the alleged failure of the IB in providing adequate intelligence and for arranging the required quantum of security for Rajiv Gandhi. Only a minor observation of Jain Commission report is quoted below:

“24.5 This reaction of the Intelligence Bureau to the extremely grave nature of fresh threats to the life of Rajiv Gandhi was obviously grossly inadequate and disproportionate in nature.

The fresh threat perception appears to have been conveyed to Shri Rajiv Gandhi as is evident from a letter dated February 13, 1991, written by V. George, Private Secretary to Shri Rajiv Gandhi, to the Lt. General of Delhi requesting the Delhi Administration to beef up Security arrangements for Shri Rajiv Gandhi in view of the threat perception given by the Intelligence Bureau. (Annexure S—75). From the letter, it transpires that the Intelligence Bureau had suggested the following measures in view of the fresh security threats to Rajiv Gandhi :—

“The latest intelligence report communicated by IB gives an alarming note with regarding to the security arrangements or Shri Rajiv Gandhi and his family members. IB has recommended a certain scale of security beefing up...

(The intelligence report communicated vide IB’s Secret circular memorandum No. 32/VS/90(3)-II dated 23rd January, 1991 states that “Besides providing adequate static armed guards, PSOs, Ring—round teams, Isolation Cordon, Pilot and Escort vehicle and other necessary security components adequately armed with conventional and automatic weapons, it would be necessary to enforce security precautions like searching, ensuring reliability of persons employed on armed duty, purity of food etc.)”

From the above, it gets reconfirmed that the suggestions given by the Intelligence Bureau were confined to a reiteration that the existing security arrangements be scrupulously followed. No fresh security arrangements were contemplated.”

Some leading members of the fourth estate had also elaborately commented on the failure of the IB

in providing Rajiv Gandhi with correct election assessment on two occasions—in 88-89 and 91-92 elections.

Whatever it is, destiny pushed in another man, Narasimha Rao to the central portal of power, who was preparing for a quiet retirement just about a month after Rajiv was assassinated by the LTTE. Most of Rajiv's coterie made way for the new power hunters. But the new Prime Minister, still lacking clear parliamentary majority, did not bring about any change in the leadership of the Intelligence Bureau. Many tongues had wagged about intelligence failure and inability of the IB to cater pinpointed intelligence estimate about the LTTE design. Attacks were directed against the R&AW as well.

As a close-circuit observer, however, I would like to add that the Intelligence Bureau had not succeeded in generating 'precise and penetrating' intelligence about the LTTE conspiracy to kill Rajiv Gandhi. The IB and the R&AW simply did not have the capability of deciphering the wireless codes used by the LTTE in maintaining contact with its India based cells. It is surprising that committees and commissions set up by the government did not dissect the performance of the IB and R&AW on the very critical issue of VVIP security.

Rajiv Gandhi, by a curious tryst of destiny, became the third member of the family to depart in Grecian tragic way. A noble person, high above many around him, however, was enormously misunderstood because of series of error of judgement. He was not cut out to tackle the jackals around him as his mother was. He had failed to understand that the Congress Establishment that existed almost all over the country, as residue of the original Indian National Congress had tried to use him for perpetuating their power bases. Rajiv did not possess the capability of fusing them into a pan-national political force. After the honeymoon period he was simply overwhelmed by them.

I had deep personal regards for the son of Indira Gandhi, whom I considered as a landmark national leader of our times. Unfortunately Rajiv did not get time to be burnt in the kiln of political ferment. Given the time he would have surely matured out of the influence of his scheming coterie and highly ambitious regional satraps. I could only silently salute the grieving family with which my destiny had become entwined, even though I was emotionally closer to the Sangh Parivar.

TWENTY-FIVE

BACK TO THE FIRING LINE

If you admit that to silence your opponent by force is to win an intellectual argument, then you admit the right to silence people by force.

Hans Eysenck

Soon after Chandrashekhar government demitted office I reported back to the Intelligence Bureau. I was offered by the MoS a deputation posting either to the Home Ministry or the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. I declined the offer mainly to prove that I had not walked out of the IB out of fear of the Director, who had not taken kindly the allegations of collaborating with his personal enemies and working against his friend-Rajiv Gandhi. Fear often blurs the rational thinking process; insecurity invariably makes a man aggressive. I was not afraid and I refused to be intimidated by subjective views of people. The inner knowledge that I contravened official regulations by dabbling in politics was always in the upper crust of mind. But I could not desist from the dangerous game. However, I never subverted any professional norm of the IB and I had not lost my personal regard for 'simple', sympathetic and innovative Narayanan, who later tried to emulate the curious hi-fi friends of the Prime Minister. Surprisingly once he brought in Sam Pitroda, a friend of Rajiv, to lecture us on intelligence technology. That was the high mark of sycophancy of Mr. Narayanan. He was sold out to the Congress and became a Gandhi family loyalist.

Amidst whispers of drastic disciplinary action against me for joining the office of the Minister of State for Home Affairs a couple of days before M.K. Narayanan replaced R.P. Joshi I prepared for the worst; reversion to my state cadre, West Bengal. At home we prepared for relocating the children, one at the IIM Ahmedabad and the other in a Delhi college. We redesigned our family budget and decided to cut a couple of corners to facilitate higher studies of our children.

However, the ire fell upon me from an unexpected flank. The Director was sure unhappy with me for extraneous reasons and not for professional incompetence. He might have not appreciated my 'pro-active initiative' in intelligence operations. No conservative intelligence boss would like his officers to exercise the four Is—'*initiative, imagination, innovation and invasive tactics*', at least not in India. Most of them preferred to follow the beaten furrows, according to rules of the game 'enshrined' in the 'tradecraft' Bible of the Bureau.

I must admit that despite his misplaced disposition towards me Narayanan was perhaps the first Director of the Intelligence Bureau who injected modernism in the Jurassic organisation. Besides progress made in the area of technology he had devised ways and means to draw up futuristic intelligence appraisal system on various facets of internal issues, including internal security problems. For the first time IB had started, albeit temporarily, systematic study of the 'fault lines' in the country. But this was surprisingly done from the law and order point of view and not in a comprehensive manner encompassing the socio-economic, historiographic and geo-political parameters. For certain reasons Pakistan, ISI, creeping American advances in Asia, the post-Cold War geopolitical realities, Islamist thrust in Afghanistan and its ramification in India and incursion of the mafia lords in the political and social system did not receive much attention. The situation had

slightly improved after V.G.Vaidya had taken over from M. K. Narayanan. But Narayanan was the third most important visionary in the IB after B. N. Mallick and T.V.Rajeswar. He made a precious second new beginning.

Being a parent for over 30 years I now understand that the parents are as much under scrutiny of their children as the children are by their parents. Most parents do not recognise this privilege of the children. That brings in social and parental tragedy. DIB's view about me had changed. However, my estimate of the metamorphosis of Narayanan did not undergo any major change when I was banished to the 'technical wing' of the Intelligence Bureau.

Instead of reversion to my state cadre I was posted as the chief of the technical wing of the IB. Be that as might be, for the first time in the history of the Intelligence Bureau an officer of the Indian Police Service and an intelligence operator was posted as the chief of the 'technical wing'. I was removed from the intelligence mainstream as a punishment for my 'alleged defiance' of the authority.

I was advised not to activate my 'political contacts' against this order. I had not turned to lobbying when I was clumsily removed from SIB Delhi by the machinations of M. L. Fotedar and V.S. Tripathy. This time too I did not run for cover and walked into the super secret technical wing with my head high and mind open. I knew I had a lot to learn and a lot to teach. I was prepared to face many hostile glances and suffer a thousand subtle cuts.

I may belie the expectation of the readers by my inability to completely undress the technical wing of the Intelligence Bureau. It is the final frontier of intelligence tradecraft that cannot be unmasked without destroying the core of the nuclei.

The technical wing of the Intelligence Bureau had a laboured growth. At its vintage youth of 117 years (2004) the Intelligence Bureau was conceived as a subordinate investigation and intelligence-gathering machine of the British Empire. Some experts trace its origin to the 'Thuggy Department' of Col. Sleeman in the post-1857 period. Its genesis is older than the MI5 and MI6 and interlocked with the evolution of the British Empire. I do not intend to narrate the history of the evolution of modern intelligence system in India.

The organisation, mostly police in character, depended basically on Human Intelligence (HumInt), which helped the district administration in criminal and revenue administration and keeping its powder ready against the malcontent and yet to be subjugated Indian potentates and nascent nationalist political activities. The earliest tools used mostly consisted of uni-focal field telescope, phone tapping (only eavesdropping) by using crocodile clips and wires and communication lines used by the railways and postal departments. The legendary *dakharkara* (postal runner), mule trains and pigeon mail continued to be the usual mail transmission system to the remote areas before the rugged First World War valve/diode/cathode operated wireless sets came into vogue. India under the firm boots of the Empire flanked by spoiled princely brats and a helpless and defenceless people did not require more sophisticated tools of technical intelligence. The boots, bayonets, bullets and the baboos were good enough to rule over the geo-cultural entity called India.

Introduction of police photography as an aid to criminal investigation and investigation against the nationalists revolutionised the concept of technical intelligence. The bulky and rugged German cameras gradually found way into the inventory of the Central Intelligence Bureau that helped in updating the 'rogue's gallery' of the nationalist leaders and the 'terrorists' who aimed to overthrow the foreign regime by violent means. The revolutionised concept of the use of clandestine cameras was adopted much later, that too by modifying the switching mechanism of the bulky cameras. The uses of micro-mini and camouflaged tiny electronically powered cameras were introduced in a limited scale much later in the last millennium, say around 1985.

The concepts of chip based digital micro cameras have been introduced only recently. Sometime in early seventies the use of telephoto lenses were used as a prop to clandestine photography. Some such devices were used on Indo-China borders and the borders with Pakistan. Border stations of the IB in Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Sikkim had used deftly these scantily supplied equipments in locating, identifying and mapping the enemy army formations and fortifications. Some of the young officers often drew excellent sketch of the Chinese formations based on observations made through high-resolution Second World War vintage binoculars. Very back in 1975 I was amazed to observe an enterprising officer using a tripod mounted vintage telescope (most used by amateur stargazers) at the remotest outpost at Dongkung (Sikkim) to map the Chinese positions at Lungzhang, Changlung and Gambaxoi. The junior officer, P.K. Majumdar, was an excellent artist. He made out good sketches of the Chinese fortifications. His performance convinced me that lack of scientific equipment often helped in sharpening up the inner skills of a person. In the IB I had witnessed many such wondrous initiatives from the young recruits.

Another stream of photography, video photography was introduced in early eighties and was sparingly used to cover politically significant open events. Two cameras available with the Technical Division were mostly used to please the top bosses on important social events. The camcorders were introduced well after 1984 and the uses of pinhole video cameras, concealed video transmitters were introduced well after 1990. The Intelligence Bureau has not yet opted for buttonhole video transmitters and other tiny video recorders and transmitters. Technology revolution came at snail's pace due to a number of reasons and constraints. I would like to elaborate this a little later. Let me first start with describing the feared and misunderstood wing of the IB as much as I am permitted by my commitment to the agency and duty to the nation as a knowledgeable citizen.

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Officers who are directly recruited as Junior Intelligence Officers (Grade I-Technical) and Assistant Intelligence Officer (Grade II-Technical) man the technical wing of the IB. The top position was normally manned by a reputed scientist on deputation from one of the scientific organisations of the government of India. He worked under nominal supervision of a generalist intelligence technocrat. The top scientific advisor was mostly accommodated on recommendations of some men of importance and based on who knew whom. No great scientific mind went behind the dust layers to revolutionise the scientific tradecraft for gathering and denial of intelligence. It's not that the hired scientific minds did not conceive ideas for upgrading the technical wing. But lack of awareness among the general intelligence officers, absence of initiative among the middle and upper level police officers, who manned the organisation and absence of appreciation in the controlling bureaucracy in the Finance and Home Ministry killed most of these pioneering proposals. The political and bureaucratic Establishment had started appreciating the need for using scientific gadgets to the aid of intelligence generation and other internal security duties (also normal police work) much after the Punjab thunderbolt hit them on the head and the country lost its most illustrious Prime Minister to the bullets of the assassins in 1984. That is another sordid part of the gap that exists between the prime intelligence organisation and the insensitive controlling ministries and politicians.

The raw workforce acted as the bulwark of the organisation. Trained along with the similarly recruited officers of the general intelligence wing they were subjected to rigorous police-type training and rudimentary skills in intelligence gathering. Most intensive training was imparted on aspects of wireless radio trans-receiving systems, maintenance and repair. They were also trained in Morse key

operation. At one point of time, especially during B. N. Mallick's regime productive efforts were made to fabricate indigenous trans-receiver sets to supplement the decaying First and Second World War contraptions and a few US manufactured backpack field wireless sets used against Japan. These bulky warhorses stood the IB in good stead until a few modern and compact German and US made sets were acquired well after 1985. Much slimmer Japanese sets were introduced well after 1990. However, by that time the world of communication had undergone revolutionary changes. I had used some of the sturdy backpack sets in the North East in monitoring back and forth movements of the Naga, Mizo and Meitei insurgent groups to Pakistan and China. I wish I had with me the pound sized radio transmitters and the modern day VSATs and other sleek communication gadgetry. But those old sets had their own charm both for Carrier Wave (CW) and Voice Communication (VC).

The directly recruited officers are selected from the cream of the universities, mostly first class science graduate and postgraduates. With a twist of luck and chance most of them can qualify for the All India Services and equivalent placement elsewhere. But the unimaginative human resources development programme of the IB mostly succeeded in milling, grinding and pulverising the excellent manpower to docile, submissive and tunnel visioned Assistant Central Intelligence Officers (grade II Tech).

Exposed to some aspects of police training, specially designed intelligence courses, the boys are given intensive training in wireless and other communication equipments and preliminary training in handling other TechInt gadgets before most of them are pushed out to BCPs (Border Check Posts) and difficult stations to man the wireless communication facilities. Cut off from the general intelligence and technical intelligence mainstream and mostly living in subhuman condition, often in non-family stations, the officers gather moss of anger, frustration and cynicism in no time. Subjected to police-style demeaning discipline and deprivation the officers started steadily shedding the veneer of high grade university education and aspiration to rise above the Mores keys, valves, transistors and resistance coils. They developed resistance to new ideas even. Some of them turn corrupt.

Heartless levels of hierarchy lack of upward mobility in lateral branching off and total absence of research and development facilities aggravated their disillusionment. Lack of exposure to modern equipments and advanced learning facilities clogged their minds with cobwebs characteristic of retarded baboodom. The officers were forced to stagnate for over 17/20 years in one rank, as the upper decks of the pyramid were very narrow, though mobility in the general intelligence side was slightly better.

The situation was ideal for godfathers in the technical units to select their serfs and the less favoured serfs bounced from post to pillar in search of newer godfathers. Favouritism, nepotism, groupism and corruption flourished in uncontrolled mutation process creating sadist bosses and saddest subordinates.

In fact, I walked up to the designated floor of the sprawling complex amidst cynical smiles and disinterested looks of outright rejection. The 'specialised technical officers' were at a loss to understand whether to greet or boo the rank outsider. They had known me as an intelligence operator but had very little faith in my knowledge about transistors, diodes, carrier waves and analogue and digital transmission modes. Moreover, the groups loyal to godfathers in Narayanan's coterie were in no doubt that I was pushed out of the mainstream and dumped in the TechInt section for screwing my balls out.

I was determined to deny them this vicious pleasure and to extract out the best out of the suckers and barnacles that had made the TechInt wing as a breeding ground of inefficiency and corruption.

The first few officers to nudge closer to me belonged to two categories: adopted children of the

godfathers and the godfather-less orphans. The former conveyed messages of their proximity to A, B, C and D in the organisation and the latter were ready with stories of deficiencies and hints of hidden fault lines.

I preferred to take a tour of the peaks, gullies, furrows and crevices of the sprawling TechInt unit by ordering a presentation by different wings along with complete inventory of men and materials within seven days. That had set off a massive earthquake. The nodal heads failed to come up with the presentation within the stipulated period except YY Bose, a brilliant officer on deputation from the Department of Electronics, and ZZ Kaushik, another officer on deputation from Telecommunication department. The former oversaw the fledgling satellite communication and a little bit of the computer wing that was lorded over by an IPS officer with dubious efficiency in computronics. The latter efficiently handled the telecommunication and related subjects and helped out the computer division.

After the stipulated seventh day I called up the 'unit heads' and made it clear that most of them were due for transfer out of Delhi and I proposed to carry out the reshuffle in next ten days. That did the magic. They came up with whatever they lorded over. The findings both shocked and surprised me. I was shocked by the stagnation and morbidity of the vital wings of the TechInt edifice, mismanagement of stores and sordid maintenance. Somewhere putrid smell of corrupt practices nauseated my mind.

To start with I used a scissor to snap the bonds between the godfathers and their favourite siblings and made clear that they had none else but me to look up to. This was resented. Some godfathers even used the restricted area phone to request me to 'protect', 'help' and 'to be considerate' to their loyalists. The process also helped me to free about 18 'security assistants' from the TechInt units from 'serfdom' at the residences of some of the godfathers. I reallocated these rescued 'serfs' to fieldwork.

The next move was to establish direct contact with the workforce bypassing the sectional satraps. Personal meetings with the lowest level of unit cells helped me to develop rapport with the grassroots level technical hands.

After delivering the initial shiver I prepared a project appraisal paper for my boss outlining the need for accelerated weeding out of the junked inventory, acquisition of modern equipments, upgradation of the R&D facilities, modernisation of the monitoring services, cipher section and the computer Division. Two revolutionary suggestions mooted by me were well received: maximum utilisation of the satellite communication facilities and formation of Joint Scientific Advisory Body of the Intelligence Bureau and the leading scientists in the fields of communication, interception, cipher breaking and fabrication of TechInt gadgets.

A grand conference organised with the presence of the leading scientists of the country and the officers of the Intelligence Bureau offered a unique opportunity to project the need for indigenously manufacturing a number of gadgets required for intelligence generation. The Joint Scientific Advisory Committee functioned well for about two years. The Intelligence Bureau benefited from the experiences of the DRDO, BHEL, DOE and the IIT faculties of Delhi and Chennai. However, the technocrats of the TechInt unit and the supervisory police officers lost interest soon after I demitted charge of the technical wing. The TechInt technocrats were more interested in importing certain sensitive equipments as the deals left fat cuts for them. The supervisory officers, barring one or two, did not develop any interest in indigenising the equipments. Police culture that ran through the veins and capillaries of the agency prevented them from opening the doors to the scientific community.

Though pushed out from the mainstream of intelligence generation and analysis I revived the proposal to allow reputed academics to assist the IB in the fields of back up research on fault lines inside India and the fault lines in the neighbouring countries. This proposal was also shot down. I was

of the view that open market talents should be inducted into the organisation to head certain analysis desks encompassing socio-economic fields and trans-national security parameters covering the geopolitical arch beyond South East Asia (SEA), Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asian Republics and some of the Middle Eastern Islamic countries. The vested interests in the IB, which suffered (continue to suffer) from the stranglehold of police culture, did never agree to the proposals for lateral hiring of talents from the academia, media and the scientific community. I would like to comment on this in the concluding chapters.

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After establishing my credentials as an honest jack and a work-termite I succeeded in overcoming the prejudices and reservations of the senior formations of the TechInt wing and some of their mentors. That offered an opportunity to overhaul the Jurassic Caesar's Wife of the Intelligence Bureau. Major progress was made in the field of procuring compact and versatile High Frequency and Very High Frequency trans-receivers from external sources. A few ultramodern sets were procured to augment the SigInt section.

A B Bose and some other enterprising colleagues helped in developing indigenous Direction Finders, which were deftly used in Punjab and Kashmir. It may be mentioned that the entire SigInt division of the IB was taken over by the R&AW in 1969. My efforts at revamping the SigInt operations along Indo-Pak land borders and other sensitive fault lines in the North East and Tamil Nadu produced encouraging results.

The Indian ether space was crammed with open and clandestine and enclaire and cipher traffic from radio stations operated by the Afghan mujahedins, ISI supported Islamist groups and Russian controlled stations located in the Central Asian Republics. The Intelligence Bureau had no access to this vast pool of intelligence. The R&AW and the Directorate of Military Intelligence hardly shared SigInt materials of real time value. The IB did have a cipher section, which managed the in house cipher usage and acted as the custodian of cipher materials. It had no capability to decode intercepted messages, which were sent either to R&AW and the Joint Cipher Bureau for decryption. In 99% cases they reacted after months and with negative nods.

The pitiable condition of cipher breaking capability was exemplified by challenges posed by the LTTE cipher traffic between the island nation and Tamil Nadu. Some Tamil knowing officers laboured exclusively to decipher the traffic in Tamil. But they were incapable of deciphering alphanumeric, numeric and alphabetic and sign ciphers. Much crucial cipher traffic between the LTTE high command and its safe houses in the Southern Peninsula remained unbroken for months together, being tossed over between the IB, R&AW and the JCB.

The precious life of Rajiv Gandhi could have perhaps been saved had the intelligence organisations acquired the capability of breaking LTTE ciphers. Both the IB and the R&AW did not have powerful first generation computers and required software to break enemy codes. My plea to seek collaboration from Israel, Germany and the USA for commercially obtaining computers and software was rejected by the Home Ministry mandarins after prolonged consultations with the Finance and External Affairs Ministry. My attempt to procure digital auto-encryption/decryption modules from Germany was also frustrated by the mandarins of the ministry. It was another example of the baboos getting the better of the technical experts and intelligence operators.

However, against vehement objections of some of the higher formation I located HF interception stations in Delhi, Ahmedabad, Jodhpur, Ganganagar and Amritsar. This was followed by total

overhauling and revamping of the cipher units of the IB. I would like to comment on the cipher matters a little later.

The ISI had supplied Japanese and Taiwanese HF/VHF communication and monitoring equipments to the Punjab militants, which enabled them to monitor voice transmission by Punjab police and the paramilitary forces. The rural telephony system also depended on Local Area Radio Transmission (LART). The sophisticated equipments offered the militant groups easy access to telephone calls between Amritsar and local police and civil administration detachments.

While the telephone authorities were appraised of the peril of the rural telephony system the VHF interception sets deployed in Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Khemkaran, Makhu and other border posts in Punjab provided invaluable leads to the intelligence and security fraternity. Interception range of the sets was enhanced by improvising intermediate relay stations which enabled a TechInt operator located at Amritsar to intercept voice transmission from Dera Baba Nanak on Pakistan border and even from Pakistani locations at Kasur, Rampura, Bhasin, Padhana, Uppal and Qadiwind etc. One of such SigInt inputs from Qadiwind, etc had helped the security forces to intercept a militant gang infiltrating from Pakistan under cover of firing from the Pakistani Rangers.

I understand that my colleagues have improved upon the facilities and have added new dimensions to communication interception protocol. Signal interception has become the daily salt of security operations in respect of internal security.

Around 1990-91 we did not have access to equipment to monitor the communication channels that used fax, telex and Internet media. We laboured for a couple of months and came up with an indigenous solution to intercept suspect fax communication. Some such fax intercepts between Delhi and Islamabad helped the Ministry of External Affairs and the Union Home Ministry in reorienting their strategic approaches. One such intercept related to a long assessment on the likely fall out of the Ramjanmbhoomi stir by the BJP and other tentacles of the Sangh Parivar.

Sophisticated imported equipments have now replaced these rudimentary contraptions. However, back in 1991 our boys performed a miracle and offered a new tool of intelligence gathering to the IB. This breakthrough was supplemented by fabrication and installation of equipment that enabled the IB to intercept targeted telex transmissions of the foreign Missions; Delhi based foreign correspondents and corporate houses having business links with targeted countries.

Another menace that gnawed at our face was the sudden proliferation of ISD and STD facilities all over the country. The installed capacity of the IB to monitor local and overseas calls was pitifully limited. The terrorist groups in Punjab, Kashmir, North East and their collaborators used ISD facilities with impunity. The PSTN hubs in the metropolitan cities were not difficult to tackle as the monitors were supplied with target lists and numbers.

The outgoing and incoming overseas calls were routed through the Gateways in Mumbai, Dehradun and Jullandhar. The Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) was not readily agreeable to give IB access to its hubs. Moreover, neither the VSNL nor the IB had any software to identify the numbers of calling and called parties. After a prolonged negotiation a crude methodology was devised to place special consoles in the Gateway hubs to intercept identified target numbers and to obtain print out of the numbers in the target local area exchanges. It was a modest beginning and it worked as best as it could. I understand that my colleagues have vastly improved upon the crude beginning and have now procured faster computers and efficient software. They have also attained the capability of intercepting mobile and satellite telephone systems.

I was not trained in the use of alphanumeric, numeric and alphabetic ciphers. I did not know anything about the intricate mathematical exercises that involved in deciphering coded messages.

However, while in the North East I had learnt the tricks of ciphering and deciphering based on pads supplied by the Intelligence Bureau and the JCB. Some of the technical officers helped me out in understanding the basic characteristics of cipher traffic and their logarithms. The officers in the Cipher Unit (CU) of the IB were surprised when I ordered an inspection of the unit. I discovered to my horror that the 'experts' in the CU were not at all equipped to break even the low-grade ciphers used by the Pakistani Rangers and police forces. The entire traffic was sent to the R&AW and the JCB, who sat over the piles for months before conveying their inability. I considered it a national shame and decided to carry out some home cleaning operations and adding new values to the CU.

In the face of rejection of my suggestion to depute officers to the MI6, CIA and the Mossad for training in cryptography and importation of fast computers and software I opted for the next best I could lay hands on. A group of young TechInt boys with strong background in mathematics was selected and made to undergo crash courses in computer operations. They were also trained in handling cryptographic logarithms, permutation, combination and alphanumeric substitution techniques. Very soon we were rewarded with the capability of breaking low grade ciphers originated by the Sind and Pakistan Rangers and police formations in Sialkot, Lahore, Multan, Bahawalpur, Rahimyar Khan, Sukkur and Hyderabad, etc. However, we could not make any breakthrough in breaking high-grade codes.

I faced tooth and nail opposition from the TechInt subordinates in organising a research and development unit. It was a necessary corollary to the Joint Scientific Advisory Board that was earlier set up with the help of distinguished scientists of the DRDO and the IITs. I forced the decision on the recalcitrant veterans and pooled together some of the bright boys to work on fabrication of miniature radio transmitters, compact receivers and improving the facilities of fax interception and satellite communication monitoring. The younger officers welcomed the move. They were keen to prove their mettle and were denied opportunities by the fossilised higher echelon of the TechInt unit. Some of the boys did extremely well.

We fabricated two compact vehicles for mobile surveillance duties. The utilities included VHF radio trans-receiver, still/video photography, spot telephone tapping by using crocodile clip system and direction finders.

Another innovation was the use of concealed digital VHF communication in the surveillance cars and motorcycles and the use of mercury battery powered concealed radio earplugs synchronised with concealed microphones. These were ideally suited for foot and static surveillance.

Another experiment of locating a master VHF trans-receiver at the TV tower for enhancing communication facilities all over Delhi and the National Capital Region met with astounding success. The boys in the R&D unit also successfully devised mobile HF radio telephony between Delhi and destinations like Aligarh, Saharanpur and Agra by fabricating a special bumper mounted high gain antenna. These were no mean achievement for the boys who had all along been rotting in the border check posts and had been undergoing humiliating stagnation.

Despite Rajiv Gandhi's sincere efforts the government departments were reluctant to embrace the computer culture. The IB had procured a few PC ATs and XTs for data processing and storing. A few trained clerical staff used the computers as substitutes for Remington typewriters with limited memory. The senior echelon, however, managed to get computers installed in their office rooms simply because the computers came along with air conditioners, the holy boxes were kept under permanent wrap and the cooling machines kept both the biological and artificial brains cool enough to make the government tumbling along. Only a few favourite of the top boss managed to be showered with computers and air conditioners.

Back in 1984 I had acquired in Canada a primate PCXT that was used by the kids. I was virtually afraid of handling the magic box and to use MS-DOS and Word Perfect medium for simple word processing. But my sons had cajoled me into learning the tricks of the rudimentary machine with vast potential. Gradually I understood the immense potential of the virtual brain and started browsing through advanced study materials on the aspects of application of computer in intelligence work. I was offered an opportunity to submit a paper to the Director IB on the aspects of application of computer in: a) data processing and storing, b) immigration control, c) on line communication, d) integrated data and voice communication, fax, satellite communication included, e) cryptography, f) project presentation and g) manpower rationalisation. B. K. Kaushik helped me immensely in preparing the PAR (Project Appraisal Report).

I also pointed out that the existing satellite communication facility was a white elephant. The main hub in Delhi was a stand-alone system having no connectivity with the analysis and operations desks. The other hub in Bangalore contributed very little to the communication facilities of the organisation. I offered a daring proposal for shifting the Delhi hub and integrating it with a Central Communication Command Module (3CM).

My colleagues up and down the hierarchy were shocked to see me entering the room of M.K. Narayanan and sharing a cup of tea with him after about 200 days. We discussed both the project papers and were directed to explain my ideas to the upper echelon of the IB in a specially convened meeting. YY Bose, the bubbling Deputy Director and XX Kaushik, a pragmatic Assistant Director, helped me in preparing the computerised projection of the intricate schemes. Most of the senior officers smiled behind their cuffs and advised me not to confuse them with strange ideas. Narayanan slept over the proposals for a while and summoned me again to discuss the feasibility of providing connectivity between the Delhi satellite hub and his main camp. I explained that installation of a leased PSTN line covering a distance of 18 kilometres would cost about Rupees 10.2 million. UHF connectivity, on the other hand would cost about Rupees 10.5 million. My scheme of establishing the 3CM would cost a little over Rupees 2 million. He threw a challenge and asked me to complete the job in three months before his retirement. At the same time I was given the command of the fledgling computer unit of the IB.

The boys of the TechInt accomplished the magic a couple of days before Narayanan retired. The 3CM was set up somewhere next to the heart centre of the Union Home Ministry that provided integrated connectivity to most of the field detachments of the Intelligence Bureau all over the country. A special extension was provided to the functional room of the Director, which offered him the facility of keeping an eye on the system, if he so desired. The doubting toms and the dark pit intriguers were foxed to see that my 'arch enemy' Narayanan danced a small tango and declared that a breakthrough was achieved in the field of integrated data and voice communication. I would not like to elaborate the facilities that were installed and integrated. But the 3CM included all conceivable communication facility that could be afforded by the IB without resorting to importation of costly hardware and software.

The next rational step was to dismantle the old satellite communication regime that was strangely handled by an officer who presided over the 'security' set up of the agency. My resolve to decentralise the satellite communication system and integrate it with intelligence production units was strengthened after a brief holiday trip to Leh. That godforsaken place near the volatile LOC, Siachen battleground and the Chinese border depended on antiquated HF wireless for connectivity to Srinagar and Delhi. The PSTN system remained mostly dysfunctional. In fact, the Army also mostly depended on HF communication and line communication exclusively maintained by the Signals Corps.

On my return to Delhi I decided to shift two satellite sub-hubs to Srinagar and Leh with provision of setting up another dish at Jammu. I forced through the proposal and transported the Leh instrument through Manali, Rohtang Pass, Drus and Kargil. It was a daring operation but the boys suffered and enjoyed the thrill of the treacherous journey through the ravaged terrain. It was again a celebration time. The beleaguered staffs in Srinagar and Leh were allowed to have free connectivity to their home telephones through the patching facility at the 3CM. Intelligence flowed at faster pace and in secured manner. Later the scheme was extended to Guwahati, Itanagar, Calcutta and Chennai. I could not complete the scheme of connecting Guwahati hub to Imphal, Kohima and Shillong through exclusive leased PSTN lines.

Suddenly the satellite communication wing of the IB took a quantum jump and my proposal to set up another 30 stations was processed with usual caution, delay and dramatics by the mandarins in the ministries of finance and home. I believe the proposal has finally has seen the light of the day and very soon the IB is going to be garlanded with a white albatross.

The satellite technology has been revolutionised since I chanced to handle the technology way back in 1992. The government of India had at that point of time turned down my proposal to digitalise the voice and data transmission via satellite hubs. They should have, in fact, gone for VSATs and briefcase mounted SATCOM equipment for the remote locations. The easiest option to connect the remote and rugged locations is the use of SATPHONE, Videophone, and Internet connectivity through the VSAT equipments. It will probably take another 50 years for the ministry mandarins to elongate their cranial capabilities to the periphery of technical revolution in SATCOM and Information Technology.

However, my efforts to cut out a slice of monitoring operations of the ‘footprints’ of Chinese and Pakistani communication satellites and tracking down some of the US communication and spy satellites were scotched by the ministry. The Research and Analysis Wing of the Cabinet Secretariat, they concluded, should exclusively handle the domain. In the face of strong opposition I abandoned the idea but not before my boys succeeded in zeroing on some of the transmissions by Islamabad based hubs exclusively used by the Inter Services Intelligence. I am still in favour of sharing of efforts by the IB, R&AW and the MI in matters of SigInt operations and pooling of the results at the level of National Security Council. Single window handling often leads to technological and human blindness. This has been amply proved by the Kargil fiasco. Security matters of the nation, I think, should not be left to the idiosyncrasies of individuals belonging to a single agency. Multiplicity with tight coordination often brings out the best results.

Handling the SATCOM problems was far easier than handling the computer wing of the IB. Besides the shortage of hardware and software I faced two insurmountable obstacles. The major obstacle was the National Informatics Centre (NIC), a public sector undertaking that handled computer networking, and monopolised supply, installation of hardware and software. I resented the fact of state control of the information media. But that was not the age of globalisation and privatisation.

The other obstacle was the reluctance of the senior IB officers to switch over to computer culture and similar opposition from the secretarial staff. They did not agree to remove the curtain of ignorance. Another unexpected sector challenged the establishment of an integrated computer system in the organisation. A dynamic but close minded egocentric officer who handled Punjab operations and his clones in Kashmir operations wanted to ‘own’ stand alone systems, separated from the ‘mainframe’ operations. I found it futile to explain to them that data security in respect of their respective fields of operation would not be jeopardised by the proposed integrated system. They

would control their specialised software and accessibility would be governed by unique key system. I failed to convince them. Some of them are still around and still they run their own mini e-empires simply because they are not willing to adopt revolutionary technological breakthrough.

I had to literally wage a war with the NIC on matters related to the choice of hardware and software for the immigration control centres in Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai. I wanted to opt for powerful CPU based computers that could store several gigabytes of data and provide real-time connectivity to the mainframe computer in Delhi. The NIC tried to push an 'array system' comprising of 4/6 low capacity computers, minus the facility of connectivity with the mainframe. It's difficult to disagree with the Indian system and walk out unscathed. The NIC had developed several well-oiled alleyways inside the governmental departments. The greasy alley stalkers defeated my loud protests. But I took out some concessions here and there.

I faced the most miserable experience with the computerisation of the immigration system at Attari railway station that handled Indo-Pak traffic. The hardware was new and the software efficient. But the police officers operating the machines did not find the computerisation programme conducive to their oily practices of extracting money from the violators of the immigration control system. Most of the computers became 'inoperable' due to intentional sabotage, mishandling, and disinclination to punch in the database.

I also failed to achieve online connectivity between the mainframe computer and the immigration terminals at the major air and seaports. The database, very funnily, were physically carried to Delhi for feeding into the memory of the mainframe computer.

Another area of failure was to computerise the databases of arriving and departing Pakistani nationals. The IB unit in Delhi operated by old fogies refused to venture into the computer culture. Though a small beginning was made in Delhi the Foreigner's Registration Officers in the states were not equipped with computers to log and store the relevant data. Exchange of data between the IB and the states were abnormally delayed and the flawed system allowed hundreds of Pakistani and Bangladeshi nationals to melt into the milieu. The security hazard posed by this anomalous situation was conveyed to the Union government after conducting grassroots level research. But the soft democracy that often tends to lapse into anarchy was very tardy in responding to the menace. Vote bank compulsions and 'minority wooing' strategy of the political parties severely neglected this vital aspect of national security.

Nothing exemplifies better the security menace to a nation from a flawed immigration control system than the horrendous crime against humanity perpetrated by the Islamist terrorists in America on 11.9.2001. India has already tested a similar assault on the symbol of its political power when the Islamists mounted an attack on the Parliament building. It is very difficult to convince the key mandarins and politicians that Immigration Control is as much a tool to fight terrorism as the men in uniform and their Kalashnikovs are.

I failed in two other vital sectors. My efforts to synthesise the officers of the intelligence generation and analysis wing (G officers) with the officers of the Technical Intelligence wing (T officers) did not take off. Most of the G officers, irrespective of rank and profile treated TechInt as a servicing unit. They were summoned whenever TechInt operations were required to be mounted. The Technical officers very often did not feel emotional attachment to the task and were not concerned for perfect matching of the edges of the two wings. The 'T officers' maintained distance from the 'G officers' smarting under genuine perception of step-motherly treatment. My proposal to integrate the two streams at training and functional levels was not accepted by the policy makers of the organisation.

The other failure was related to modernising the TechInt unit by importing certain sensitive devices. The baboos again stood like firewalls in between the burning needs of the IB and their genetic cranial deformities. Most of them were of the opinion that sophisticated TechInt equipments were as mundane as the ashtrays on their tables. However, Narayanan had succeeded in squeezing out some juice from the ministries and I was allowed to import some sensitive equipments. Later, during my visits to the South East Asian markets and the markets in the USA, UK, Germany and France I was astounded by the abundance of such miniature equipments that were regularly purchased by foreign nationals including the Bangladeshis and Pakistanis. For some reason or other the Indian saints had put a screw on procurement of such equipment through independent efforts of the IB. The mandarins exercised and even now exercise strict control on the procurement system that is plagued by kickback and commission benefits.

I did not like to remind them that Pakistan had acquired its nuclear technology through open market shopping and shoplifting. In any case, the baboos are supposed to be brake applicers to any locomotion system that tends to roll forward.

I expect the readers' anxiety to peep into some of the sensitive TechInt operations that were undertaken during my tenure. I must restrict the temptation of dramatising some of the sensitive operations. A few innocent expose would not perhaps break the vaults of national security.

A unique opportunity was offered by a friend who had bagged the contract for constructing the chancery and residential premises of an embassy somewhere in Delhi. He offered me a free tour of the construction site. I was astounded by the defensive and offensive security and intelligence measures taken by the concerned country in designing and securing the sensitive segments of the chancery and the residential premises. The heart of the security core was the chamber of the ambassador, his three deputies and the communication room. These were treated with thick lead sheets and other soundproofing materials with a view to denying energy emission from communication equipments. The concerned country imported most of the screws and bolts and electrical circuits and switches. They were suspicious about Indian supplies.

I was offered an opportunity to install three infinite radio microphones connected to the main power source at some targeted locations. The proposal to permanently bug the heart of the mission was turned down by the Ministry of External Affairs and the PMO. The IB lost an excellent opportunity that could provide important leads to the acceleration of Islamist thrusts in India. A senior functionary in the PMO later called me to explain that India hadn't yet accepted the culture of proactive intelligence gathering at the cost of diplomatic constraints. I was not given an opportunity to explain that aggressive intelligence gathering is as much a part of diplomacy as diplomacy itself was.

Around February 1992, soon after the flop Ekta Yatra of Murli Manohar Joshi, I was directed to arrange technical coverage of a key meeting of the BJP/Sangh Parivar. The meeting, I was told, was to be attended by Lal Krishna Advani, M. M. Joshi, Rajju Bhaiya, K. S. Sudarshan, Vijaya Raje Scindhia, H.S. Sheshadri, Vinay Katiyar, Uma Bharti, Champat Roy etc. I literally faced a crisis of faith. I was a self-proclaimed friend of the Sangh Parivar and I genuinely expected them to do better in the forth-coming national elections. But my bondage to the agency and profession forced me to overcome the reservations. I took necessary measures to get equipments planted to record the proceedings of the meeting.

Thank God, I did. The audio and videotapes rattled my emotional attachment to the Hindutwa protagonist organisations. The February meeting tapes disillusioned me. The contents proved beyond doubt that the high priests of hatred had helped the Sangh Parivar to adopt a strident Hindutwa programme soon after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. The Rajiv interlude had sent them to

political oblivion but the lessons learnt during the JP movement and anti-Rajiv campaign had convinced the Parivar leaders that the right moment of history had arrived for the Hindu forces to make a determined bid for political power. The February meeting proved beyond doubt that they had drawn up the blueprint of the Hindutwa assault in coming months and choreographed the *pralaya nritya* (dance of destruction) at Ayodhya in December 1992 that had disfigured the India I knew. The RSS, BJP, VHP and the Bajrang Dal leaders present in the meeting amply agreed to work in a well-orchestrated manner. A particular advice to Uma Bharti that she should hold back her emotional leanings to Gobindachariya till the assigned mission was complete, intrigued me. My family and I were witnesses to several intimate moments shared by Uma and Gobind. I would like to comment on this a little later.

I retrieved the tapes after about two days by resorting to a minor break in and personally handed over the materials to my boss. I have no doubt that he had shared the chilling contents with the Prime Minister and the Home Minister. But the man at the helm of affairs of Indira Congress was an indecisive person. He had regained some jest for life and had started dreaming of short-circuiting the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty and writing his name on the tablet of time. He dithered. And L. K. Advani and his colleagues crossed the ramparts of history and generated passion that demolished an insignificant mosque, which was converted to a symbol of civilisational conflict between Hinduism and Islam that had taken roots in India for over 1200 years. History cannot be corrected by demolition. A civilisation can be rewritten by hatred.

The recent Gujarat pogrom also rattled my bones. I wish there were some mad people like me to gather audio and video evidences of the scheme of minority annihilation by Narendra Modi, the third 'lauha purush' (iron man from Gujarat). Anyways, history has the bad habit of re-running like a stuck film spool.

*

I tumbled against another TechInt operational coup rather accidentally. In January 1992, I was assigned the task of electronic sweeping/cleaning of the PM offices in South Block by using certain bug detecting equipments. I tumbled against an unexpected bug and a forgotten micro-radio monitoring machine. The bug was implanted inside the phone of an aide to the Prime Minister, planted by the IB during V. P. Singh's regime. That provided IB with vital clues to the happenings in the PMO. The end products, I understand, were delivered to Rajiv Gandhi even when Chandrashekhara warmed the seat for the former. In the melee of fast political and bureaucratic changes someone had forgotten to remove the spy contraption from the PMO. I carried out the rescue operation while doing some electronic debugging operations.

So much so for the sanctity of the highest office of the land!

The other device was installed at a point of time when Rajiv Gandhi and Zail Singh had developed irreparable hostility. The device mounted somewhere on top of the PMO picked up telephone conversations from certain 'treated' phones in the Rashtrapati Bhawan. The recorded tapes were regularly made available to Rajiv Gandhi, which provided him with deep insight into the machinations inside the walls of the Luyten's palace. I would rather refrain from narrating some of the choicest expletives used by the intriguers. The thet (rural) Punjabi was no less beautiful than any other accomplished language that described the user's adversaries in most colourful idioms and phrases.

Some of the tapes also included, fortunately and unfortunately, some delicate talks by personalities

in the PMO, which amply highlighted financial deals and favours. A few reels pertained to an efficient and infamous field gun that has not stopped chasing some of the hidden skeletons in political cupboards.

To the best of my knowledge these highly sensitive tapes were consigned to the archives of the Intelligence Bureau.

The other TechInt operation was thrust upon me a little before the Indira Congress cabal installed Narasimha Rao. I was directed to gather technical intelligence on a particular woman journalist whose friendship with the 'Prime Minister to be sworn in' was a hot topic among Delhi's chatterati and glitterati. It was a dirty order. I could only presume the source from which the request had originated. After a detailed survey of the living accommodation of the journalist I advised against mounting the intended TechInt operation. The place was congested and it was very difficult to break into the home for implanting listening and recording devices. The authorities did not relent.

Finally I bribed the domestic hand and gained access for three hours. That valuable time was utilised to implant bugs in the home telephone and a miniature video transmitter in her bedroom. The results gathered over a period of one month did not leave anything to imagination.

I have no idea about the exact utilisation of the exotic audio and videotapes. But I can presume that the innermost core of the Indira Congress establishment might have had used these at some point or other against the man who was catapulted by destiny to the highest slot of the political system.

Cryptic narration of the above TechInt operations has obviously not quenched the thrust of the readers. The nasty sides of human life are often more charismatic than the cultivated saintly paradigm. Certain truths, I believe, are better protected when buried under permafrost. But the events signify that the ruling class has all along misused and abused the intelligence apparatus. The machineries have mostly been used for spying on political opponents rather than on priority areas of national security. The Establishment has perpetuated this aberration. No sane political and judicial luminary has yet come up with the demands for bringing the intelligence organisations of the country under Acts of the Parliament and making them responsible to statutory bodies. Personalised use of the powerful internal and external intelligence organisations militate against the constitutional and democratic edifices of the country. My personal efforts to arouse reasonable response from the opinion makers inevitably ended in prophetic replies like 'why waste your sleep' and 'you don't legislate to give better rights to your housemaid'. Well! That's what the status of the spy outfits is. They are better off below bed sheets and inside kitchen pots.

TWENTY-SIX

BACK TO MY LOVE Downloaded from GA PP AA.ORG

He that is born to be hanged shall never be drowned.
Thomas Fuller.

My tenure with the TechInt unit came to an end soon after V.G.Vaidya took over the reins of the Intelligence Bureau from M. K. Narayanan in March 1992. Vaidya was a small statured and slightly built person and could be easily passed on as a Charlie Chaplin clone, if he had sported that famous butterfly moustache. But he was no joker and entertainer. A man of serious business sense he had developed appreciable grip on the entire panorama of the security and intelligence parameters of the country. He was a thorough but low profile professional. Little later I discovered that he was not averse to taking risk and resorting to 'pro-active' intelligence operations inside Pakistan.

I had my first brush with Vaidya in Calcutta, way back in 1975, when he dropped in at my modest office and asked me to brief him on the affairs of the North East. He was on his way to take charge of his new assignment at g a p p a a dot org Kohima. We spent a couple of hours together and exchanged operational information and discussed the appropriate keys to certain individuals, both in the political set up and the underground set up, who shaped the course of history in the North East. I was impressed by his keenness to learn operational details and I hoped he was impressed by my earthy linkages with that yet to be integrated part of India.

Vaidya was honest enough to call me to his office and ask if I wanted a change. I enjoyed my work in the TechInt unit. But my first love was operational intelligence, especially operations pertaining to terrorism, insurgency and Pakistan.

We frankly discussed the aspects of my closeness to some of the RSS and BJP leaders and my proximity to a couple of leaders in Indira Congress. He wanted to know if it was possible for me to sever linkages with my political friends. I admitted that I had been suffering from contradictory pulls from my young days. Son of a gun wielding revolutionary congress worker, not a *satyagrahi* (non-violent) type, I felt a natural attraction to Congress, as a symbol of mainstream political force. As a victim of the partition I had acquired a passion for hating the Muslims and I had chosen the RSS and the Jan Sangh as my ideological vehicle to avenge the civilisational vermin. I was often torn within myself. As said by Robert Frost, I was... "a both insider as well as a rank outsider," in matters related to the ruling party.

Like most young Maharashtrians, Vaidya too had his tryst with the saffron brigade during early adolescence. He appreciated my dilemma and did not demand my severance of linkages with them but expressed in clear words that I should keep him informed at personal level about sensitive developments in these organisations; particularly, events that could have direct bearing on national security.

I was immediately shifted to the Pakistan Counter Intelligence Unit (PCIU) with additional responsibility of certain operations in Punjab and supervision of the Computer and Satellite Communication wings.

By the time I reported back to my favourite unit the battle order inside battleground India had drastically changed.

P.V. Narasimha Rao was directed by the Indira Congress cabal to unpack his baggage and shift over to the South Block prime ministerial seat. He was supposed to be a night watchman and make space either for Sonia Gandhi or a cabal satrap, more acceptable to the regional power traders. Narasimha Rao was saddled with a couple of intractable problems. He did not have a clear majority in the parliament and was desperately in search of defectors and allies.

India's war against its own citizens in Punjab was still not won. Pakistan was still pumping in weapons and imparting training to the directionless kamikaze type terrorists. Punjab was still smouldering. K.P.S.Gill's ruthless operations did not remain confined to legal policing. The police, military, and intelligence agencies perpetrated murder, rape, looting, inhuman torture and amassing of wealth like their terrorist counterparts did.

The Kashmir walnut was still in blazing fire that was fuelled by Pakistan and its dreaded Establishment arm, the Inter Services Intelligence. Mishandling of the gangrenous fault line both by Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi had added new dimensions to the problems even before Rajiv Gandhi demitted office and made way for his rival V. P. Singh. The new *Intifida* launched by the Kashmiri militants with active support of the ISI signified a strategic victory for Pakistan. Afghan experiences had taught the Islamic nation the important lesson that low-key proxy war with heavy religious overtone was a less expensive way to grab Kashmir.

Amidst politically fabricated violent movements in Assam and Punjab Indira Gandhi had staked her personal reputation in the Kashmir assembly election of 1983. Farooq Abdullah's National Conference had badly humiliated Indira Congress by securing 46 of the 75 seats. Indira Gandhi refused to accept the defeat gracefully. G. M. Shah, who was known as 'Gul-e-Curfew' (the curfew flower) interlude had exposed the raw side of the political personality of Indira Gandhi. It widened the fault line fissure. The sense of alienation was deepened after Rajiv Gandhi and Farooq Abdullah carried out a blatant rigging of the 1987 elections. By 1989 the valley of flower was turned into a valley of death. The situation was aggravated by V. P. Singh government's action of inducting the 'Turkman Gate bulldozer' and Sanjay Gandhi acolyte Jagmohan as the governor. India had again entered into a war against our own citizens in Kashmir, where Pakistan had already occupied the elevated strategic ground.

Narasimha Rao government was simply not equipped to meet the proxy war challenges from Pakistan. Mere military domination was no answer to the ailments that afflicted the people and the strategic territory.

Pakistan too had experimented with certain democratic interludes with personalities like Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. But the regime of Zia-ul-Haq had permanently changed the soul-texture of Pakistan. The process of '*gradual sacralisation of the national political discourse*' was elevated to the pedestal of radical Islamisation and the inheritor of the sub-continental civilisational and cultural values tagged itself to the tail end of Islamist fundamentalist values of certain Middle Eastern Arab countries. The Civil Service of Pakistan, the Armed Forces and the ISI had hijacked the country and Benazir and Nawaz Sharif were in no position to reverse the process of aggravated segmentation of the Pakistani society and changing the course of confrontation with India.

Zia-ul-Haq had initiated the process of catapulting the ISI to the pedestal of a parallel state and it

served Zia's strategic aim of converting Afghanistan to a client state. He also gave a free hand to the organisation to turn the heat on India by actively exploiting the Indian fault lines in Punjab and Kashmir. According to an estimate the ISI pumped in over \$5 million every year to carry on Pakistan's proxy war in the western sector alone. Most of the dough came from drug money.

Narasimha Rao was also saddled with growing Hindu militancy that aimed at providing an alternative and viable political plank to the Sangh Parivar. The night watchman perilously swerved between the extremes of alleged financial scams, flexible indecisiveness towards Hindutwa protagonists and not too nascent hostility towards the widow of Rajiv Gandhi. He also depended on god men and manipulative advisors.

Starting with the June 1989 Palampur (HP) resolution of the BJP on Ram Janambhoomi the Sangh Parivar and its affiliates did not look back. It made a giant leap in 1989 elections and made dramatic gains in 1992 by bagging 120 seats and 20% of valid votes polled. It virtually emerged as a national alternative to Indira Congress. A Hindu upsurge was clearly visible. In the absence of charismatic national leader and powerful regional satraps the Congress fumbled along the route to putting India back on the constitutional rail. Damages caused by the Mandal programme of V.P. Singh and the 'kamandal' (religious bigotry) programme of the Sangh Parivar had threatened the inner soul of India. P.V. Narasimha Rao, a mere political passenger on the gravy train, was in no position to stem the rot. Sonia Gandhi, for well-considered reasons, did not like to take the mantle on from her late husband and Indira Gandhi. This provided the Sangh Parivar a unique opportunity to ride the dual tiger: the socially engineered caste parabola and religiously hypnotised Hindutwa tigers.

Perilously enough both the Congress and the BJP failed to take into consideration the regional strategic factors and global strategic developments while pursuing their respective internal political policies. They also failed to measure up the intensity of Pakistani interference along the existing Indian fault lines before opening up newer tectonic fissures. The Indian political leaders did not take into consideration that Islamist *jihadi* forces had almost assumed the stature and character of a state within the state of Pakistan and that international Islamist terrorist forces had embarked upon a global programme against the *jahiliya* (non believer) enemies of Islam.

The growth of Hindutwa passion and the political agenda of the Sangh Parivar, therefore, generated reactions amongst the Muslim organisations all over India and it offered a unique opportunity to the Pakistani Establishment to implement a well-researched action programme of radicalising the 'secular' Indian Muslims. The Islamist and fundamentalist organisations spawned by the ISI were directed to infiltrate the Indian Muslims and establish 'modules of sabotage and subversion' in India and adjoining countries like Nepal and Bangladesh. It was a virtual 'intelligence encirclement' programme adopted and executed by the Pakistani establishment.

My interactions with the Sangh Parivar and BJP friends left no doubt that they were determined to use the Ram Janambhoomi card in a decisive manner for electoral benefits. I vehemently opposed the idea of destroying the mosque at Ayodhya and tried to convince them that brinkmanship had its limitations, especially when it played with human sentiments for love and religion. Most of them, especially K.N. Gobindachariya, Ved Prakash Goel, Rajinder Sharma, S. Gurumurthy and Sushma Swaraj etc were of the view that accelerated Ayodhya campaign was not likely to result in the demolition of the mosque. It would rather build up 'Hindutwa Bhavna' (Hindu sentiment) and bestow electoral dividend to the party. However, O. Rajagopal, a former police officer, who happened to visit me with Rajinder Sharma, gave an impression that the Sangh Parivar was determined to 'correct the course of history' and put the civilisational aberrations in correct perspective. S.C. Dikshit, a retired IPS officer and a course mate of Sunanda's father, expressed similar views. His views were

fortified by an important acquaintance in Uttar Pradesh unit of the Shiv Sena, the extreme parochial organisation headed by Bal Thakre. Other evidences gathered by the Intelligence sleuths left no doubt that the Sangh Parivar was determined to demolish the mosque.

While I shared my concerns with the Director IB I tried to argue, at least once, with Rajendra Sharma that demolition of the mosque was sure to unleash communal upsurge and the instable regime in Pakistan was sure to mount retaliatory operations.

From my talks with the Sangh Parivar stalwarts I gathered impression that they had adopted a multi-layered operational plan by assigning specific role to each segment of the Parivar. The VHP, Bajrang Dal and other associate bodies were under instructions to go ahead with the demolition of the 'vitarkit dhancha' (disputed structure) and their volunteers were trained at different locations under expert supervision.

The BJP leadership was assigned the role of putting on 'mukhotas' (masks) of political rhetoric mixed with frenetic religious appeal. Leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L. K. Advani managed to display the moderate face of the plan. However, most of them, especially Lal Krishna Advani was fully aware of the plan of demolition of the mosque on a date coinciding with an auspicious Hindu celebration. The Sangh Parivar was determined to 'avenge the demolition of the Somnath Temple in the Muslim ruled state of Junagarh seven times over by the Mahmud of Ghazana (modern Ghazni in Afghanistan) that arose virtually from the ruins of the Abbasid Caliphate. The Caliph had rewarded the Gahnivids for these acts of destruction of *jahiliya* icons. The Parivar friends pointed out that, soon after renovation of the temple the Muslims in Karachi and other places in Pakistan had demonstrated against dedication of the temple to the nation. The Parivar friends were determined to demolish the "Babri Mosque" seven times over if it were possible. It was an act of faith, I was told, when I pleaded with some of them to stop that action of madness.

Uma Bharti and Gobindachariya had, in the meantime, suffered severe emotional stresses. Their personal relationship had flourished into a full-blown affair of love and affection. My late wife and I were close witnesses to the intimate relationship between the two. Unfortunately for them the South Indian Brahmin man and the tribal woman from Madhya Pradesh were not destined to be united around the holy fire and amidst the Vedic mantras, not at least in the near future. The RSS had disapproved the affair as Gobind was a *pracharak*. The BJP did not approve of any diversion at a critical point of time when the party was preparing for a definite bid for power. Uma Bharti was directed to concentrate on the Ram Janambhoomi movement as a force multiplier to Sadhvi Ritambara. We were pained to share the pains of the couple. But they gulped the poison of rejection and submitted to the Fuehrers of the Sangh Parivar. I sincerely believe that the bonds of love between the two are intact and sooner than later they are going to formalise it around the sacred fire.

Other trends that amazed me at that point of time were bitter hostility between Murli Manohar Joshi and Gobindachariya. His relationship was also not exactly smooth with Atal Bihari Vajpayee. L.K. Advani too was often intolerant of Gobindachariya's charismatic display of understanding of the ground level politics. The top leadership was, as I understood, weary of the brilliance of the man, who, given the opportunity could replace them even before he reached geriatric maturity, a brand speciality of the RSS. But he brushed aside my subtle hints by saying that the Sangh was a well-knit family and he did not expect any trouble from any quarter. Events later proved that his brilliance was his undoing. He is a visionary, not a politician. The power hubs in the Parivar and the party were simply not ready to allow him to grow beyond a point. Gobindachariya, to my assessment, is a revolutionary spark. He has the material to make the grade of a top national leader, a real secular one, whose vision is not blurred by fanaticism. He recognises that India is a multicultural, multi-religious

and multiethnic country, where there is enough space for everyone. I wish he can touch the finishing line.

The Intelligence Bureau had built up an impressive array of evidence about the real intentions of the Sangh Parivar and its associates and had kept Narasimha Rao and his Home Minister updated on all possible scenario. To honour the gentleman's agreement I shared whatever information and assessment I managed to gather with the Director. I did not renege on the Sangh Parivar and its Hindu ideology. I simply did not agree with the strategic decision that was being implemented by the hawkish leaders simply for grabbing political power. I had no doubt in my mind that militant Hindu outburst would be reciprocated by the Islamist forces from within and outside. That would be an unfortunate day for the country, more unfortunate than the attack on the Golden Temple by the Indian Army on another 6th day in June 1984, just eight years ahead of the shameful day on 6th December, 1992.

Just before that catalytic event I happened to meet L. K. Advani along with Piyush Goyal, son of Ved Prakash Goyal. The astute politician that he is Advani tried his best to draw up a thin film between his intrinsic intentions and my inquisitive enquiries. He harped on the public slogan of symbolic Karseva at Ayodhya and assured that generation of controlled impulses was aimed at enhancing Hindu '*chetna*' (consciousness) and using the newfound booster to fire the political rocket of the BJP. His slow but shrill words could not camouflage his real intentions and that of the Sangh Parivar. His eyes betrayed him. His words did not vibe with his looks. I returned with one conclusion that Advani, like most other politicians, was an expert in the art of camouflage. I was left with no doubt that the Sangh was determined to commit a bigger blunder than imposition of emergency and marching of the troops to the Golden Temple by Indira Gandhi. I sulked over the shock and prepared myself to witness another cataclysmic event.

TWENTY-SEVEN

IN SEARCH OF THE KERNEL

The dictum that truth always triumphs over persecution is one of those pleasant falsehood which men repeat after one another till they pass into commonplace, but which all experience refutes.

John Stuart Mill

My renewed association with the Pakistan Counter Intelligence Unit (PCIU) turned out to be a torrid affair. Before I proceed with my tryst with the professional subject I love most, I think, I it is better to have a look at the situation obtaining in the subcontinent and the region.

Rajiv Gandhi's assassination had left a political vacuum in the country. The Indira Congress, once again rejected in North India, was resurrected by sympathy vote in the South after Rajiv's tragic assassination. For a while it appeared, though tragically, that Congress could win an election only on sympathy or negative vote. Whatever it is, the badly divided and rudderless party finally accepted a retiring senior politician from the South, P. V. Narasimha Rao as Rajiv's successor. The chronic Nehru-Gandhi followers felt that it was a temporary compromise. They wanted Sonia Gandhi to step in. But the wise lady decided against it. She knew that India and even the regional Congress satraps were not ready to accept a person of foreign origin as the prime minister of India. Whatever it is, a marginally minority Indira Congress government headed by Rao was in position at the Centre, though the warring factions continued to look up to Sonia Gandhi to lead the party.

A veteran politician and a scholar at that Rao was not new to the corridors of political intrigues, power brokering and marketing the Indian brand of democracy he headed. His anxiety to overcome the handicap of arithmetical deficiency in the Lower House of the Parliament had propelled him to orient his telescope towards the smaller parties like the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and the genetically defined defector Ajit Singh and his group of lawmakers. He was ably aided by god man Chandra Swami and N.K. Sharma, another astrologer cum soothsayer, who was dubbed as Rao's *raj jyotishi* (court astrologer). In fact, Sharma was another troubleshooter like Chandra Swami. Rao's political aides like Buta Singh, Satish Sharma and other hunter-gatherers were deployed to sniff around and spread the baits for the perennial '*ayarams and gayarams*' (defectors).

A close Indira Congress friend had approached me for exploiting my supposed closeness to one of the collectors and gatherers of Ajit Singh. I was in no mood to oblige the friend for two reasons: he was trying to dump Sonia Gandhi and ingratiating with Rao for a ministerial berth.

I did not like the deceptive pout of the PM. His supposed direction to a political adventurer from Assam, MMM Singh to influence me was the most insulting experience I ever had with any political creature. I literally reprimanded the bully and advised him to try his muscle in Assam. Rao was beset with scandals. Association with Chandra Swami had smeared his name. Later came in the sordid episodes of Harshad Mehta, the stock market plunderer. Personally I rated Rao as one of the worst hunter-gatherer of Indian politics. His alleged corrupt practices had fattened his own pocket and not the party coffers. His scholarly slough did glitter but like that of a black cobra.

Though I had positive aversion for Rao, I acted under moral pressure of my friend and made a bridge between him and the fabulous collector and gatherer from Western UP. However, Satish

Sharma and god man Chandraswami edged my friend out of the manoeuvres. As long as I was associated with the informal negotiations I was given to understand that the US educated Jat scion, the perennial defector, was not likely to settle for less than Rupees 500 million. I had kept the Director IB informed about the personal request made by the emissary of the PM and the lines of action I intended to adopt. He was not happy to hear what I had to say and cautioned me to tackle the new PM cautiously, as he enjoyed the reputation of a 'friendly hangman.' He was not to be trusted. V. G. Vaidya, a Maharashtrian should know better as Rao had spent his formative period in Maharashtra and had significant brushes with the RSS people.

At a later stage Rao managed to cobble up a parliamentary majority by purchasing support of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and other splinter groups and individuals. A number of cooks had cooked that broth for Rao. Some of them, Rao including, had later faced the process of the law for alleged subversion of the constitutional propriety. The law courts rarely convict the high and mighty of India. The priests of the law court (advocates) and the high *mahants* (judges) of the portal of justice and the serpentine process of the law insulate them from the poor and less privileged people, for whom the law of the land often behave like a steam-less locomotive.

Though embroiled in numerous allegations of financial corruption and graft, Rao provided a shaky political stability. His reign, however, was marked by the decline of Sikh terrorism in the Punjab. It was more of a natural death than a sudden death brought about by the state machineries.

By 1992 Pakistan was disillusioned with the Sikh terrorist factions and realised that the ferment in the Indian Punjab could not be sustained by training ideologically inept, angry, hungry and criminalized youths. It was not interested in direct intervention in a territory where Muslim population was insignificant. The fire of hatred fanned by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale had almost subsided. The convoluted political ideology of an independent Punjab under Pakistani tutelage did not make any sense to the affluent Sikhs, who had not forgotten the partition scars. The movement, however, chugged along for a little while on exhausting steam before it was firmly put down by a competent police chief and his determined political master. Pakistan too had, in the meantime, found out a better killing field in Jammu and Kashmir.

Pakistan's fresh drive in Indian Kashmir had coincided with its involvement in Afghanistan and tango with Sikh militancy. The thrust was buoyed up by crucial input from the Inter Services Intelligence managed *mujahideen* outfits, which were floated to fight the Cold War enemy of the USA in Afghanistan and to establish Pakistani stranglehold on strategically and economically important Afghan territory.

The Zia regime had witnessed rapid Islamistaion of Pakistan and growth of sectarian war between the Shias and the Sunnis. Proliferation of sectarian armed groups was encouraged by Saudi Arabia (Wahabi), Iraq (Sunni) and Iran (Shia). For a while Pakistan had emerged as the proxy battleground for Iran and Iraq. The Afghan war fallout and the sectarian clashes proved problematic for the democratic forces. Both Benazir Bhutto (1990-92 and 1997-98) and Nawaz Sharif (1990-93 and 1997-99) had failed to consolidate the democratic forces. The combined forces of the Pakistan Army and the Taliban elements nourished and nurtured by the Pakistani establishment and Al Qaeda al Sulbah and the ISI had scripted a blood-curdling scenario. They envisaged restoration of medieval Islamic rule in Afghanistan, sharpening of sectarian conflicts at home and sharpening of the proxy-war edges against India.

After 1992 the International Islamist Forces headed by Osama bin Laden had set up firm linkages with the Sunni *mujahideen* organisations like Highb-ul-Mujahideen, Harkat-ul-Ansar, Sipaha Sahaba, Markaz -Al-Dawa al Irshad, Lashkar-e-Tayeba and scores of other splinter jihadist groups. The ISI

had expanded its operational orbits in Chechnya, Bosnia, Kosovo and the Philippines. Its involvement with the Uighur East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in the Xinjiang province of China and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) had drawn international attention. The WTO bombing incident highlighted the involvement of Osama bin Laden's outfit against US targets. It prompted Washington to declare that it was considering branding Pakistan as a terrorist state.

India was badly trapped in police and military actions in the killing field of Kashmir and the new government headed by Narasimha Rao did not succeed in giving political direction for the resolution of the internal problems of Kashmir.

Pakistani operations in India had spilled over the brims of militancy in Punjab and proxy-war in Kashmir. The combined forces of the Joint Intelligence North, Joint Intelligence Miscellaneous and Joint Intelligence X-the three dreaded arms of the ISI expanded to newer fields. They assisted the terrorist groups in the North East (The NSCN-IM, ULFA, BODO and TNLF etc) from their bases in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan.

The Inter Services Intelligence headed by Lt General Shamsur Rahman Kallue (May 1989-August 1990), Lt. Gen. Assad Durrani (August 1990-March 1992), Lt.Gen. Javed Nasir (March 1992-Ma7 1993), Lt.Gen. Javed Ashraf Khan (May 1993-) thrived under the democratic regimes of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. The extended arm of Pakistani Establishment did not deviate from the committed Pakistani national policy of destabilising the *jahiliya* and *kafir* nation of Hindustan.

Lt. Gen. Javed Nasir, an engineer by training was a fundamentalist to the core. A member of the Jammāt-e-Islām and Tablighi Jammāt he was responsible for escalating the international operations of the ISI and firming up relationship of the Pakistani sectarian and jihadist groups with the forces of the Al Qaeda al Sulbah and the global fundamentalist elements elsewhere.

In fact, from Z.A. Bhutto to Zia-ul-Haq there was no looking back for the most important establishment of Pakistan. It had turned into a pseudo-political organisation under Zia. Absence of political accountability, Russian occupation of Afghanistan and US patronage had conferred upon the ISI an aura of invincibility. General Hamid Gul, an enigmatic military leader, had not only masterminded the ISI's Afghan saga, he had also helped the military regime to fashion its strategic thrust in the Indian Punjab and Kashmir.

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Though my desk was primarily concerned with Pakistan Counter-Intelligence I formulated the scheme of studying the entire gamut of ISI operations in the subcontinent, proximate geo-political region and its international connectivity and ramifications. I laid stress on exploring the concept of 'intelligence encirclement' of India by Pakistan and its direct involvement in promoting and escalating Islamist Jihadist movements in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. V. G. Vaidya, Director IB, was receptive to my ideas and encouraged me to enlarge the orbits of activities beyond the charter drawn up about 3 decades ago.

A section of the senior hierarchy had opposed my plan for studying Pakistan's intelligence, sabotage and subversion activities by a centralised unit of the IB. The territorial section heads were opposed to the idea of an essentially counter-intelligence unit taking over the burden of studying, analysing and devising ways and means to thwart the ISI operations regionally and globally. They wanted me to keep confined to the beaten track of catching embassy-based spies once in a while. They were not unaware of the need for such a centralised unit. Nevertheless they were opposed to the idea of some smart Alec grabbing the credit lines. I did not bow to their demands simply because they

themselves were doing precious little to combat the main enemy of India. I had not succeeded in convincing them of the need for studying the ISI as a whole, but I did not yield to their parochial pressure. I had seen enough of these dark tunnel mice, which were afraid of sunlight. There was no option but to ignore them and to make an honest effort to prepare a comprehensive paper on the ISI operations. I knew I was taking on too many heavyweights who formed the inner layer of the onion. Failing to resist my rationale by any credible alternative they agreed grudgingly, only to stab me from the back, at a moment when I became most vulnerable to adverse political pressures.

Under the stewardship of V. G. Vaidya I redefined the operational techniques of the counter-intelligence unit and added fresh inputs from the TechInt wings, which I headed a couple of months ago. Modernisation of technical inputs and adoption of pro-active surveillance measures had helped the PCIU in neutralising over half a dozen embassy-based operatives of the ISI and MI. The unit operatives succeeded in unearthing several ISI networks spanning the States of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

The pressure on the embassy-based operatives was increased by several degrees, which invited matching retaliation from the ISI against Indian diplomatic personnel in Pakistan. PCIU operations were reciprocated, often brutally, by the ISI. A sister intelligence organisation approached the Prime Minister's office to advise me to slow down. After a particular act of brutalisation of a suspected Indian intelligence officer in Islamabad I was asked by the PMO to go slow and not to demand open declaration of 'persona non grata' status for neutralised ISI/PMI operatives. They were, henceforth, to be deported without fanfare. However, restraint on the Indian side was not reciprocated by Pakistan. The ISI continued its brutalisation process. But, I must assert that for a couple of years we had succeeded in restraining considerably the embassy-based operations of the JIM, JIX wings of the ISI and the Pak MI.

Certain constraints prevent me from discussing some of the important counter-intelligence operations. But to quote a diplomat of a western country, as narrated to me by an Indian journalist, "India has put the heat on Pakistan after a long time. They are simply starving for intelligence."

The credit for this goes to my colleagues, who laboured ungrudgingly and tolerated my 'jihadist' attitude with smiling faces. I enjoyed working with the young officers. One of them, a discarded junior officer, was resurrected by me and was placed inside an important coterie of Pakistani collaborators after giving him a foolproof Muslim cover. The cover had lasted until I retired and the daredevil officer had rendered salutary services to the country. I must plug in the temptation of telling a few more stories to protect a number of ongoing operations by the PCIU.

However, the process applied in Delhi had vastly opened up new challenges almost all over India and in neighbouring Nepal and Bangladesh. The ISI had succeeded in casting classical intelligence network in almost all the States of India and had built up impressive operational bases in Nepal and Bangladesh. In addition to the classical intelligence gathering operations the ISI had initiated the process of 'Islamisation' of vulnerable sections of the Indian Muslims by establishing network that spanned India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. The concept of 'Islamic Jihad' was injected effectively into the contorted psyche of a section of fundamentalist Muslims. In this task the ISI was ably aided by jihadist *mujahideen* organisations, which had spawned out of Pakistani madrasas, and special tanjim operated training camps run in collaboration with the ISI. Some elements of the Al Qaeda and organisations affiliated to it were also drafted in to assist the process of 'militarisation' of the indigenous Islamist forces in India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

My initiative to sensitise and reorganise the Pakistan counter-intelligence units of the IB in the states received mixed cooperation from the subsidiary units. Political intelligence is the bread and butter for most of subsidiary units except units operating in disturbed North Eastern States, Punjab and Kashmir. The Southern State of Tamil Nadu, rocked by the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi had woken up to the reality of threats from the LTTE and its international linkages. But other subsidiary units were not interested in diverting their resources to strengthen the counter-intelligence units. The concept of counter intelligence was limited to the ghosts of the CIA and in some cases the KGB suspects. Pakistan was no priority for the southern states. By counter terrorism they understood threats from the LTTE. Most of them ignored my arguments that Pakistan had started paying greater attention to the southern peninsula, especially in the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. I lived with the jibes and jokes.

Frequent visits to the subsidiary units and interaction with the officers had yielded significant results in Assam, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. The key unit in Bihar, however, responded slowly in expanding its network inside the State and in Nepal. The West Bengal unit lurched for a while but was finally motivated to wake up to the realities of accelerated ISI operations from Bangladesh and Nepal.

I was disillusioned with the subsidiary units in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. Some of the unit heads ridiculed the idea of looking out for ISI operatives and setting up cells to study the growth of 'Islamic militancy' in their respective units. Some even complained against me to senior officers in Delhi and stigmatised me as a 'Pak-phobic' officer. Fortunately they did not call me anti-Muslim and a Hindu fundamentalist.

I was steady on my fundamentals. I had convincing proof to substantiate the suspected ISI penetration in some of the defence installations in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. I had also gathered valuable data on establishment of cells in certain Muslim pockets in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu by the ISI sponsored Pakistani jihadist groups. They had started functioning under the cover of organisations like the Islamic Students Movement of India (SIMI), Al Ummah and Islamic Defence Committees etc. These cells, often independent of each other, had started sending volunteers to Pakistan for training in camps organised by the ISI. Though I was given a short shrift by some of the units in South India I must say that I had succeeded to some extent to make them to listen to me reluctantly and to follow up the studies initiated by my officers. Events after 1992 proved beyond doubt that the southern peninsula had been targeted by the ISI and Al Qaeda and Islamic militancy had started emerging as a potent threat to national security.

Pakistan's success in Nepal and Bangladesh had paved the highway for smooth transit of ISI's operational assets and materials to the heartland of India. Bangladeshi Army and intelligence agencies (DGFI, NSI and BDR intelligence units) continued to serve Pakistani interest, especially after the assumption of power by Zia-ur-Rahman, who claimed to be the foster father of Bangladesh.

The initial connectivity with the insurgent groups of North East India was established by the PIB from its Dhaka based stations. But these operations were taken over by the ISI after 1960. The saga of Pakistani and Chinese collaboration with the Naga, Mizo, Meitei, ULFA, Bodo and Tripura insurgents/terrorists has been adequately exposed and partially neutralised. The ISI collaboration with the insurgents included: provision of safe houses in East Pakistan/Bangladesh, training in guerrilla warfare, supply of sophisticated weaponry, travel and banking facilities and establishing linkages with the Chinese authorities in the early sixties and with various Human Rights groups in the west in late nineties. Presently these operations are being implemented in collaboration with the

DGFI, NSI and BDR of Bangladesh. Friendly elements in the Bangladesh Armed Forces have not failed to offer adequate assistance to the JIM/JIX operatives.

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The JIM has powerful fundamentalist friends in Bangladesh in the Jammat-e-Islami (political ally of the BNP), Islamic Chhatra Shibir (ICS), Islamic Oikyo Jote (third important political force), Al Badr, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami (HUJI) and Al Qaeda affiliated Al Jihad. In addition to the above, two groups of the Rohingya rebels (Myanmar Arakan Muslims) operate freely in collaboration with the Bangladeshi and Pakistani operatives. The Rohingyas aspire for establishment of an independent Islamic state in the Arakan region of Myanmar.

The ICS is liberally funded by the ISI. The Islamic Chhatra Shibir operates from 6 territorial divisions and over 200 sub-divisions. It is affiliated to the International Islamic Federation of Students Organisation (IIFSO) and has strong fraternal links with the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI).

The HUJI, with its 20,000 strong contingent is considered to be the strongest ally of the ISI and the Al Qaeda. A large number of HUJI volunteers have been infiltrated in Assam and West Bengal with a view to establishing Islamist modules and to prepare the vulnerable local Muslims for armed struggle. Over years the JIM and JIX have achieved spectacular success in Assam, where over half a dozen militant and Jihadist groups function, often with blessings of civil political groups. It is estimated that the JIM and the JIX have achieved the capability of turning Assam into a volatile communal battlefield.

Bangladeshi HUJI recruits are taken to Pakistan through Nepal and are trained as guerrillas and terrorists. A number of them were assigned to Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya etc operational theatres of the multinational Islamist forces, i.e. the ISI and the Al Qaeda.

Recent reports from South East Asia analysts indicate that Bangladesh had provided safe sanctuary to important Al Qaeda stalwarts like Al Jawahiri. It is estimated there are 5 Al Qaeda camps in Bangladesh in the districts of Sylhet, Chittagong and Komilla. Similarly a number of Jemmah Islamiya operatives of Malaysia and Indonesia and Moro Independent Liberation Army (MILA) had found sanctuary in Bangladesh and they had used Dhaka as transit points to Pakistan and Afghanistan. There are dependable reports that Al Qaeda affiliates among the Rohingya Muslims and Muslim rebels from southern Thailand have found sanctuary in Bangladesh

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The ISI made strategic advances into Nepal between 1985 and 2001. India's lackadaisical diplomatic relationship with Nepal helped Pakistan in establishing strong diplomatic and economic bonds with the Himalayan Hindu kingdom. That the ISI, especially the JIM and JIX operatives, have been providing support and sustenance to the Sikh terrorists and the Islamist operatives from Kashmir have been proved by several sensational unmasking operations by the security and intelligence operatives of Nepal and India. These included recovery of RDX explosives from the residence of an accredited diplomat, recovery of fake Indian currency and neutralisation of several ISI safe houses in the capital of the kingdom. The June 12, 2001 issue of India Today, a credible weekly, had carried some authentic revelations about ISI activities in Nepal and growing Islamist fundamentalism in the Hindu kingdom. As a former Pakistan hand in the Intelligence Bureau I have intimate knowledge about the

rooting and expansion of Pakistan's influence in Nepal and the use of Nepal territory by the ISI and other ISI and Al Qaeda supported jihadi *tanjims*. A few points will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs, for which I do not require to quote from any scholar.

It is an acknowledged fact that the NSCN (IM) leaders have lived in Kathmandu over several spells and David Ward, a so-called friend of 'Naga Vigil' has used Kathmandu as an operational base. Other terrorist organisations, which have used Nepal as safe bases in Jhapa, Ilam, Tapleganj and Panchthar etc areas, are the ULFA, NDFB, KLO of West Bengal and the NLFT of Tripura.

The Maoist movement in Nepal has come to notice for strengthening its linkages with the MCC, PW groups in West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The Left-Extremist movement in India, which continues to afflict Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Maharashtra, are steadily developing linkages with the Nepal Maoists. In fact, the Coordination Committee of the Maoist Parties and Organisations (CCOMPOSA) was formed in a formal meeting between the Maoists of Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Some recent reports suggest that the JIM and the JIX are pumping in financial resources and weapons to help the Maoists with a view to install a more friendly government and to psychologically de-Hindueise the staunchly Hindu population. Reports of clandestine meetings between the Nepal Maoist leaders like C.P.Gujurel (foreign affairs), Krishna Bahadur Mahara (chief of armed group) and Hisila Yani and ISI operatives in Karachi, Dhaka and Patna are required to be treated with utmost care. The linkages of the Nepal Maoists and the Indian MCC and the PW with the Sendero Luminiso of Peru and Revolutionary International Movement (RIM), which enjoys Chinese backing, requires deeper probe by the security and intelligence organisations.

The allegations of complicity and collaboration between a section of Nepali politicians and bureaucrats with the Inter Services Intelligence are not without substance. The Indian intelligence community have some tangible evidences that the ISI is using some influential Nepali figures to augment their operations against India and to develop firmer grip on the kingdom.

Some Pakistani banking and financial institutes operating from Kathmandu have also been used for funding the Indian terrorist groups, especially the Sikh, Kashmiri, ULFA, Bodo and Kamtapuri (West Bengal) rebel groups. A Pakistani construction company selected for road construction in Pokhara area had successfully infiltrated the Indian ex-army men living in the neighbouring villages for priming some of them as vital intelligence assets. Similar other contracts awarded to Pakistani companies have been infiltrated by the ISI.

The most significant incursion made by the ISI is amongst the growing Muslim population in Nepal Terai area. The latest census figures indicate that growth of Hindu population has gone down by 6%, whereas the Muslim population in the southern part of the country bordering India has shown an astounding growth of over 15%. Besides progressive procreation there has been liberal influx from India and Bangladesh

Growth of population has been accompanied by mushrooming of madrasas (250). Institutions and organisations like Jamia Mohammadia (Tulsipur), Jamia Sirajul-Uloom (Boundhiyar), Jamaitul Banatun Salehat, Jamia Ittehad-e-Millat and Darul-Uloom-Fazi-e-Rahmaniya etc have taken up the task of spreading radical Islamism. There are confirmed reports of regular visits to these bordering Muslim villages by Kathmandu based diplomats of Pakistan and other Islamic nations. These institutions and madrasas receive generous funds from Pakistan, Indian Islamic Institutions, Saudi Arabia and other Islamic countries. Recently some units of the HUJI of Bangladesh have taken root in the Muslim inhabited Terai areas of Nepal. Rapid demographic changes along India Bangladesh and Indo-Nepal borders are intricately linked with the Islamist terrorist activities and growing

collaboration between the terrorists and the crime cartels.

Over last one decade about 300 Nepali Muslim students had earned scholarship to undergo religious studies in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Not very many students have joined the institutes of Islamic studies in India, simply because scholarships to carry out religious studies come from Pakistan, Saudi and Iran based organisations. These students, on return are supposed to preach pure Wahabi Sunni tenets in the local madrasas and to work as linkmen to the jihadi *tanjims* in Pakistan. Neither India nor Nepal has carried out census of such *talibs* (students) trained in Pakistan and their suspected linkages with the jihadi *tanjims*.

Besides the above-motioned organisations Nepal Islamic Yuva Sangha, Jamat-e-Islami Nepal (1990), Nepal Muslim Seva Samiti, Jammat-e-Millat-e-Islam, Nepal Muslim Ittehad Association, Muslim Democratic Welfare Association, Jammat-e-Ahle-Hadis are actively involved in promoting 'talibinisation' of the madrasas and forging links with SIMI and HUJI as well as with organisations like Markaz-Al-Dawa-Al-Irshad and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen.

It may be recalled that the key planners of the hijacking of IC 814 from Kathmandu to Kandahar received clandestine support from the HUJI and Pak Embassy based operatives. Nepal, indeed, like Bangladesh has emerged as a launching pad for the JIM and JIX operations against India. Linkages of the Jais-e-Muhammad leaders with the former Taliban regime of Afghanistan, ISI and Al Qaeda have been well chronicled by the Indian and United States' intelligence and investigation agencies.

Preliminary studies carried out by the PCIU, mostly shared with the Ministry of Home Affairs, brought about qualitative changes in the thinking process of some of the key politicians and the bureaucrats. However, the political and administrative establishments reacted slowly to the requirements of texturing the security needs of the country with the diplomatic policies pursued with the neighbouring countries.

N. N. Vhora, the Union Home Secretary had responded favourably to these reports and reports compiled on immigration infringement by the Pakistani nationals. He had suggested action for initiation of bilateral dialogues with Nepal and Bangladesh and prodded the State and Central government enforcement agencies to augment security measures on the porous borders with the neighbouring countries. This was the time when decisions were made to raise border fencing on Indo-Bangladesh borders, though the Left Front government in Calcutta had initially exhibited uninformed concerns.

In fact, I had taken up informal and politically and diplomatically unapproved measures to raise intelligence talents inside Nepal and Bangladesh. Suitable communication channels were devised to communicate with the selected and productive talents. These measures had helped in mapping the degree of penetration by the ISI in Nepal and Bangladesh. A particular desk in the IB that looked after Nepal and Bangladesh had objected to my advance operations. I simply ignored them. They themselves were doing precious little and were reluctant to allow others to operate on a vital aspect of national interest.

Such transborder operations cannot be carried out with approval from the connected ministries, simply because each one of them is concerned with tunnel view of its limited interest and perspective. The MEA and the R&AW would have never agreed to allow the IB to operate in a neighbouring country. But on issues vital to the internal security threat from such neighbouring countries they were either incapable of gathering intelligence or sharing their knowledge with the sister agencies. Such incompatibility still exists on the ground, which hamper proper internal security planning by the IB and other Internal Security organisations of the government of India. My aggressive forward operations did not please anyone. But I was not there to please certain 'portfolio masters.' I

was there to secure the country's interest. I displeased many and pleased a very few.

N. N. Vhora was the first to respond to some of the burning issues thrown up by my study reports on irregularities and inadequacies in immigration control concerning the Pakistani and Bangladeshi nationals. Methodical studies proved convincingly that certain category of Pakistani visitors:

- repeat visitors through land and air route,
- frequent *sawari* (smuggler) traffic through land boarder and
- Multi station long-term visitors...

were involved with the ISI and as resident agents of Pakistan. The juggernaut of the official machinery finally moved and some attempts, though inadequate, were made to strengthen the immigration protocol with Pakistan. The Bureau of Immigration that came into position around that time had conferred upon the Intelligence Bureau greater responsibility to bring about perceivable improvement and modernisation in immigration control matters.

I was impressed by Mr. Vhora's pragmatic approach and felt elated when I was directed to assist him in preparation of the materials to establish linkages between the politicians and criminals: in short, a poignant study on criminalisation of politics. His stupendous labour of love was later submitted as a report to the government, which, as usual, is gathering dust somewhere in the black hole of the North Block.

But, I was not fortunate enough with some of the officials in the PMO and the External Affairs. On one occasion I was summoned to explain my reports on Nepal and was told to restrain my 'direct intelligence intervention' for the sake of delicate bilateral relationship both with Nepal and Bangladesh. The point was not lost on me. A sister intelligence organisation was upset over my proposal to the government for appointing officers of the IB as undercover operatives to generate intelligence from within Nepal and Bangladesh. The approach was turned down. But intelligence inputs from the sister organisation did not show any qualitative improvement. It was a frustrating experience to live with the tardy intelligence production by the R&AW.

On a particular occasion the topmost bureaucrat in the PMO rang up to express his displeasure over the manner in which I had concluded a particular counter-intelligence operation. A non-diplomat functionary of the Pakistani High Commission was picked up by my boys while in the act of accepting defence related documents from an Indian contact. On a couple of previous such operations I had managed to record the incident of interception on clandestine video cameras. I had resorted to that methodology after I was harassed by the aides of Rajiv Gandhi in his presence after the interception of Zaheer-ul-Islam Abbasi, a Brigadier posted in Pak High Commission.

The high functionary wanted to know if I had video taped the incident. I hadn't. The location of conclusion of the operation was so awkwardly situated that I could mobilise a video team only at the cost of scuttling the operation. The PMO boss called me names and asked me to appear before him. I did. He was made wiser about the tradecraft of the intelligence trade and was told in no uncertain words that the nitty-gritty of intelligence operations should be left to the professionals. It did not amuse him, I believe, as this category of bureaucrats feign to be direct descendants of God Almighty Himself.

On most occasions I gave such honeybees of bureaucrats a patient hearing but did not restrain my efforts to penetrate the intelligence targets in the two neighbouring countries and to pursue my other professional commitment. They often frowned upon my defiant actions. But I had my own way of outmanoeuvring them and pursuing my professional goals. The constraints of professional ethics and diplomatic cobwebs restrain me from revealing some of the achievements of the Intelligence Bureau in studying, analysing and counteracting the ISI intelligence and sabotage and subversion thrusts

against India directed from the soils of Nepal and Bangladesh. I can add that my Darjeeling and Gangtok day's personal rapport with the leaders of the Nepal Sadbhavana Party and the Nepali Congress paid high dividends. Bangladesh was a different ball game, which I played according to the rules of remote controlling of talents through trusted intermediaries.

TWENTY-EIGHT

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It is required for the Imam (leader) of the Muslims to despatch the army routinely once or twice a year towards the kufr countries. It is also the duty of the Muslim public to assist the Imam in this noble cause. If the Imam does not send an army, he will be considered sinful.

Fatwa Shami. (On offensive Jihad).

The ruling Establishment of Pakistan have fashioned itself as the Imam of the entire Ummah in our geopolitical region, if not all over the world. The present study does not offer the scope to elaborate upon the trans-national operations of the ISI and Pakistan based jihadi *tanjims*. Nevertheless Pakistan has made untiring efforts to whip up the ghost of Islamism amongst the Muslims of India.

The growth of 'Muslim militancy' and 'Islamic terrorism' inside India are inseparable parts of the diabolical game played by the Pakistani Establishment and the ISI. The JIM and the JIX have achieved another spectacular breakthrough in India. The Iranian revolution and the *mujahideen* wars in Afghanistan had transcended the concept of geopolitical nationalism and revived the era of multinational militant Islamism, which embraced the Ummah as well as the *kafir* countries. It was different from the national struggle of the Palestinians and simmering growth of nationalist identity amongst the Balkan and Central Asian Muslims. Besides Pakistan's renewed foray into the killing fields of Kashmir, which is the proxy-war area of responsibility of the JIN, the ISI made systematic efforts to inject the Jihadist poison amongst a vulnerable section of the non-Kashmiri Indian Muslims. The thrust went beyond the parameters of the oneness of the Ummah. It was directly spawned in the hatcheries of the multinational Jihadist identity of Pakistan. The post 9/11 and post Afghan war diplomatic cooperation by Pakistan with the USA should not make the rock-hard observers to assume that the cat has become vegetarian. Pakistan still has the potential of exploding on the faces of the 'free world'. The latest disclosures about clandestine transfer of nuclear technology are the best instances of such danger from a failed and instable country.

The special cell in the PCIU made sincere efforts to understand this new Islamist thrust from the Imam of the geopolitical Ummah-Pakistan. It was not an easy task. The insulated and isolated Muslim community was segregated from the mainstream by the narrow apartheid interpretation of secularism. Indian Muslims have always used religion for furtherance of their political objectives. They are still doing the same, though India continues to swear by the apartheid policy of secularism. I faced resistance from the Muslim community as well as from the 'secular' Hindu leaders in carrying out the studies on growth of Islamic militancy in a section of Indian Muslims. The politicians did not want any prying eyes to look into their captive harem like vote bank.

There are some impressions that militant Islam had established toehold in India after the demolition of the Babri Mosque by a fanatic Hindu fringe and after the retaliatory serial bomb explosions in Mumbai. This observation by the 'secularist' historians reflects partial truth. In fact, the ongoing process of 'Islamisation' of the 'secular Muslims' of India by the Pan-Islamic forces did not cease with the partition of India. The fundamentalists loathed the 'assimilistic' tendency in Indian

Islam and socio-religious practices of the Hindus polluting their 'khalis' (pure) identities.

This new 'war' is aimed at transforming 'nationalism' of the Indian Muslims to trans-Arab 'Islamism'; the concept of Islam wedded more to the fundamentalist values of Sunni Wahabism of Saudi variety. The hard-core Islamists had never ceased to operate once they realised that even in a democratic British India they would be ruled by the 'once ruled upon' Hindus. They were not ready to accept the 'Ferengi Raj' to be substituted by Hindu Raj. That historical mechanism, conceived way back around 1898 finally took the shape of Pakistan. Since 1925 the Islamists continued to make conscious efforts to erase the 'Indianness' of the sub-continental Muslims and link them up with the Indus variety of Islamic identity; as opposed to the Ganga-Jamuna-Narmada-Kaveri and Brahmaputra variety of Indian identity. The people of the Indus, they said, were different from the people of the Ganges.

Pre-Zia forces in Pakistan pursued this policy with dogged determination. Zia had turned Pakistan into a theocratic state and he fortified the efforts of Islamisation of the Indian Muslims with the help of some of the Afghan veteran Mujahidin organisations and a few freshly spawned fundamentalist Jihadist groups, that were being readied for the on-coming 'liberation struggle' in Kashmir. Her democratic façade notwithstanding, Benazir Bhutto gave a free hand to the ISI to diversify the 'Afghan veteran' Islamists to infuse militancy amongst the 'nationalist' Muslims in India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

The JIM and the JIX have deftly exploited the flimsily carpeted fault lines reopened by the Hindu chauvinists through their accentuated religion-tinted political activities from mid 1987. Like their Congress predecessors the extreme Hindu fringe failed to recognise that the Afghan experience had infused a new Islamist identity amongst the radical Muslims all over the world and the Indian Muslims were as vulnerable targets as the Muslims of Indonesia and the Philippines were. A couple of Indian Muslims had taken training in the ISI and Al Qaeda run camps. They had fought in Afghanistan. Like the Malayan and Indonesian jihadis they returned to India for spreading the messages of universal jihad. Pakistan was no more a simple neighbourhood hostile nation. It had emerged as the Imam of the Islamist fundamentalists. The geopolitical interests of Pakistan coincided with the neo-Islamist thrust propelled by Al Qaeda-al-Sulbah and its worldwide affiliates.

The 'Hindu forces' did not appreciate that Jihadist thrust from Pakistan could be contained only by balanced and pragmatic state policies and not by reenergizing the 'Hindutwa' forces. Hindu chauvinism was not the answer to the reenergized Islamic jihad. Genuine non vote bank secular state forces are the only weapons that can thwart Pakistan's Islamisation thrust in India. Hindu unity and not belligerence could help strengthening the secular edifices of the country.

The growth of 'Hindutwa' forces was a historical necessity of the mid nineteenth century and the period that witnessed rapid engineered growth of 'different nationalities inside the Indian nation'. Assertion of Hindu identity is an essential building block of the nation. But the idea of fighting the Islamist Jihadist forces with equally powerful religiously fired political weapon can only give rise to civil turmoil. It cannot fight the enemy that targets the vulnerable sections of the Indian Muslims. Hindu consciousness can at best unify the Hindu society and strengthen the building blocks of the nation. The job of fighting the Jihadist thrusts is better left to the secular machineries of the state.

The JIM and the JIX had taken full advantage of this emerging contradiction and due to their untiring efforts the Islamist strain of jihadism has come to root in firmly on Indian soil with possible devastating consequences. The symptoms of Jihadist infection have been characterised by:

- Rapid growth of linkages with the multinational Jihadist forces and proliferation of secret modules and cells.

- Acquisition of ways and means to use violence for reassertion of distinct Islamist identity.
- Rapid retaliatory and pre-emptive response to perceived acts of injustice and offensive actions emanating from the majority community.
- Formation of underground *tanjims* and armed groups etc.
- Delinking of the Indian Muslims from the ‘acquired Indian traits and symbols.’
- Revitalisation of the Tabligh institutions and madrasas to teach and preach pure tenets of Islam.
- Secret hate campaign.

This strain of ISI sponsored Jihadist virus is different from the one generally described as ‘proxy-war’ and ‘communal divide.’ Pakistan’s proxy-war against India had started way back in 1958, in the North East. It had hit the Punjab like a devastating tornado and it is still tormenting the country in Kashmir. Hindu-Muslim communalism is as old as the history of Muslim occupation of India. But the process of assimilation was characterised by rapid social cohesion.

The PCIU researched out that the Indian Muslims, mostly converted from Hindus had assimilated non-Islamic social, cultural and religious practices of the respective provinces they inhabited. The Muslims of Bengal, Maharashtra, Bihar etc provinces had assimilated several social practices and despite Islamist propaganda continue to be Bengalis and Maharashtrians first and Muslims next. Pan-Islamism dreaded these polluting factors more than ‘ferengi’ influence. These forces had never ceased working on purification of the sub-continental Muslims out of such impurities.

Pakistan’s efforts to inject ‘Islamist’ militancy have traversed beyond the Pan-Islamic efforts of unifying the Ummah. The JIM and the JIX, in collaboration with the fundamentalist organisations have penetrated the madrasas where Middle East brand of fundamentalism and jihadism are taught more than any other secular or vocational subjects.

Attacks on Hindu temples in Gujarat, Jammu, Uttar Pradesh and violent incidents in West Bengal, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, and Rajasthan and in Delhi etc landmarks are symptomatic of the ‘Islamist’ war against the Dar-ul-*Kafir* and *Jahiliya* Hindu society. This new war is aimed at rekindling the religious fault line that had resulted in the division of the country and it now aims at creating ripples and waves of a ‘second two nation’ movement, demanding formation of Mughlistan and Osmainistan (former Hyderabad).

History is often made in a second and very often it takes several decades to peak the events up that generate devastating tectonic forces leading to assertion of ‘new national identity’. This has happened in the Balkans and the same process is bursting forth in the Central Asian Republics. The Pakistani Establishment and the ISI have researched well on these intelligence operation projects, for which they draw support from whichever government happens to be in power in Islamabad and international Islamist organisations like the World Muslim League and Al Qaeda-al-Sulbah etc. These operations are carried out by Pakistan based mujaheds and mujaheds recruited from the madrasas and over 5000 Islamist modules set up all over India and Islamist associates in Bangladesh and Nepal.

Countries like India where the Muslims constitutes an integral part of the secular democratic system are most vulnerable to the Islamist and Jihadist thrusts of the type espoused by the Pakistani Establishment and the Al Qaeda. Similar tectonic fissures are being infused amongst the traditionally secular Muslims of Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. The symptoms of the most important dimension of ISI operations in India are palpably perceivable and visible. These symptoms are not a part of the proxy-war. These are integral parts of the ISI’s multinational and geo-political role in South and South East Asia.

It was suggested to the government that the Indian masses should be appraised of this emerging trend and a well-planned strategy should be devised to wage psychological warfare against the Jihadist expansionism of Pakistan and its associates. Unfortunately no tangible step was taken in the name of the Holy Ghost of secularism.

As a grassroots researcher I feel that it is high time for the Indian social scientists, the political breed and politicised religious fringes to understand the intricacies of the corrosive changes that Indian Islam has undergone in the wake of Zia-ul-Haq's transformation of Pakistan to a theocratic state and the Afghan experience and exposé to competitive religious dogmatism and fundamentalism. Islam in India has started gathering the storm particles sown by the ISI and other Pan-Islamist forces. The same trend has been noticed amongst the alleged impure Muslims of Bangladesh, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia. Only good political, economic and social management can dissipate these contaminated storm dusts.

Way back in 1992-93 the 'Islamisation' process and the process of 'transplanting armed modules' in the heartland of India had started taking cognisable shape. Some of these cells were identified in Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Kota/Ajmer region of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. The Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) had already started deputing 'volunteers' to Pakistan for training alongside the *Mujahideen*, Taliban and Al Qaeda cadres. They established firm linkages with the leaders of the Islamic Chhatra Shibir; Al Qaeda affiliated Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami (HUJI), Al Badr and Al Jihad etc organisations in Bangladesh. A couple of misguided Muslim youths from Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Assam were trained in facilities located inside Bangladesh and under the very noses of the DGFI and BDR.

My tryst with the growth of Islamism in post 1980 period gave me to understand that the key to generating intelligence on this front depended on:

- Enlightening the IB officers in the subsidiary units and in Delhi.
- Generation of assets in the target organisations.
- Convincing the governments of the day in Delhi and the States that there is a need for generating intelligence on this front and adopting administrative measures to contain the sinister thrust from Pakistan.
- The enlightened and secular Muslims should be enlisted to decontaminate the extremist fringe.

The government responded tardily. But I took upon myself the 'mission' of convincing my colleagues in the IB and state intelligence. I found it a daunting and unpleasant task. I must have had annoyed my colleagues and compelled them to squirm their facial muscles at my back by repeated visits and delivering vexing sermons. My colleagues, I must admit, did not dishearten me, though they were slow to react and respond. However, they came out of slumber after the Bombay serial bomb blast. The incident was a loud announcement by the ISI that it had mastered the techniques to take the 'proxy war' and *mujahideen* thrusts deep inside India's heartland.

I did not find difficulty in communicating with the State governments in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Assam. States like West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh did not entertain my overtures with kindness. The Left Front government was still suffering from the hangover of honeymoon with the minority vote bank. Similar were the cases with Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Some individual officers cooperated on the service network, which was not sufficient to combat the threat. On a particular occasion the Left Front government refused permission to arrest a few

suspected youths trained in Bangladesh camps.

In Bihar I received a rebuff from the reigning chief minister who debunked me as a Hindu communalist. For this new incarnation of caste politics any legal action against his captive vote bank was sacrilegious. He is one of those modern holy persons of India who does not hesitate to sacrifice democracy and constitutional liberalism to the altar of political expediency.

The story was not different in Uttar Pradesh. A similar caste baron stood firmly on the way of law simply for protecting his vote bank. A brother of a top political leader had stormed into a police station to 'free' a suspect trained in Pakistan. The vote bank compulsions had overshadowed the national security concerns. Their concept of secularism had become synonymous with placating and protecting known saboteurs and trained agents of the ISI. They had created an 'apartheid wall' around the minority community. Had they allowed the Intelligence Bureau and the State Intelligence Branches to penetrate the 'Islamist modules' way back in 1991-92 India would have achieved an early edge over the ISI. We lost at least a decade beating around the bushes of 'secularism', 'democracy' and non-existent constitutional and legal constraints.

As there was no specified intelligence generation unit on this front the PCIU took up the responsibility and stretched its existing resources to penetrate the secreted cells of sabotage and subversion. Specific steps were taken to tap certain elements which hovered over the edges of 'Islamic militant groups', fountain organisations like the All India Milli Council, Jammat-e-Islami and a few Institution of Islamic studies.

As an officer of the IB, which is predominantly staffed by Hindu operatives I found myself in more disadvantageous position than a Mossad agent finds in infiltrating the Palestinian hubs of terrorism. To my astonishment I discovered that though the Brahmin priests had virtually lost their legendary iron grip on the Hindu folks the Muslim Imams had not only retained but also substantially increased their grips of the followers of the Allah. A Hindu could go to any temple at will and offer his prayers to a God/Goddess of his choice. Social changes had liberated him from the shackles of being lead to his prayers by a covenanted Brahmin. The Hindu priest still enjoyed the rights of forwarding (Utsarg) the offerings of the faithful to their gods in accompaniment of prescribed mantras. But there was no rigid rule that compelled a Hindu to approach his God through a priest.

No doubt the Brahmins were still required to chant the mantras in a specific language understood, perhaps, by them and the Gods alone. But he had ceased to be the shepherd of the community. In fact, over the centuries Hindu religion had become more personalised and more secular in nature, devoid of hatred to other religions.

On the other hand the Imam invariably lead his folks to the prayers and his 'appointed *darogas*' (enforcers) maintained a vigil on the community to ensure that the faithful folks of the Allah invariably offered their prayers in the area mosque nearest to his habitat. The Imam acted as an arbitrator on personal law matters and dispensed justice based on prescription of the Shariat and Hadis. They dispensed justice on minor local disputes.

I was intrigued by the refusal of my friend, a Muslim professor of Delhi University to lodge a complaint with the police against his servant, another Muslim, who had stolen a two-in-one music system of his master. After a heated debate that I should be allowed to call in the police my scholar friend told me that the servant was in touch of the '*daroga*' of the mosque, where both he and his servant attended prayers. The servant had threatened him to lodge a complaint with the Imam on two counts: the professor did not say his daily quota of 5 namaj and did not scrupulously observe the Ramadan fasts. Such a complaint, I was told, could invite a hefty fine and degradation by the Imam before the entire community. It was a revelation to me. However, I used my policeman's identity and

forced the servant to return the music system.

The mosques and madrasas strictly controlled the life styles of the faithful. In addition to the Imams the various alevs attached to the madrasas too ensured that the faithful did not venture out of the strict bondages of Quranic prescriptions. A Muslim generally lived in a close society. He and his social and religious institutions had closed the doors and windows on other communities.

I knew I faced a very difficult task. But, I was not very unfortunate in my major venture of penetrating the community for generation of security related intelligence. Major help came from a few 'concerned' Muslim leaders whose views on Pakistan and Pan Islamic and fundamentalist activities were clearer than a Hindu had about his homeland. Some of them understood very well that basically the Urdu speaking Muslim leaders of central India, Bihar, Bengal, Maharashtra had pioneered the Muslim League movement and the 'two nation' theory. They had migrated to their 'promised land' and lost out the political battle and economic edges to the Punjabis, Pakhtuns and Sindhis. They had no business to interfere in the lives of the Indian Muslims who had accepted India as their political, social and economic home. I was impressed by their egalitarian attitude and exploited their concerns to infiltrate vital areas of the community.

Some steps were taken to plant a few Muslims *Talibs* (students) in a couple of key madrasas and a few boys were motivated to join the organisations that fronted the jihadists. Results came in trickles. Nonetheless, a good beginning was made.

The Muslims dominated certain criminal groups and organised mafia bands. They were active everywhere, in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Assam. I did not have to discover that the criminals and mafia members followed a greater religion: the religion of Money. Crime and motive of gain united them more than the concept of secularism did. Even after the Bombay serial bomb blasts, in which the ISI tapped the underworld dons, the mafia members, largely maintained their clan solidarity. They were not irreparably divided on communal lines. I was helped by certain gang members in Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Gorakhpur, Patna and Calcutta to penetrate the jihadist periphery of the ISI's sinister thrust among the vulnerable sections of the Indian Muslims. Though Dawood Ibrahim and Chhota Rajan had fallen out and gunned for each others blood I had no difficulty to obtain cooperation of both Muslim and Hindu underworld; especially in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

This was not a bad beginning. But I was dismayed by the progress made by the subsidiary units. They were not yet convinced by my frenetic urgings that Islamic militancy and jihadist movements were just another phase of the proxy war and international jihadist movement spearheaded by the ISI and Al Qaeda. Some senior colleagues laughed in front of their cuffs, not behind. Other colleagues virtually lambasted me when I tried to explain to them the involvement of Al Qaeda trained terrorists in Kashmir and increased collaboration between Osama's outfit and the ISI. One of them had called me a schizophrenic. Perhaps I was a little ahead of my time.

*

V. G. Vaidya, Director IB was not averse to taking risk in planning the roadmap for 'pro-active' thrusts against Pakistan. I was allowed to carry out limited operations inside Pakistan. These special projects had penetrated targets in Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore and Peshawar. The period between August 1992 and October 1993 was highly productive. The operations were designed to obtain clinching proof of involvement of the ISI with certain Pakistan based Jihadist organisations, which were involved in Afghan war and were being diverted to India. One of the talents had succeeded in

undergoing training in one of the East Afghanistan camps established jointly by the ISI and the Al Qaeda.

Constraints of legality restrain me from disclosing some of these operations. However, these pro-active operations were winded up after October 1993, perhaps under pressure from a sister organisation and pressures from the External Affairs Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office. The political and intelligence infrastructure of the country was simply not ready to hit Pakistan along its own fault lines. They readily offered Pakistan all the opportunities to exploit the Indian fault lines. It was a frustrating experience. But I had to concede ground, as it was a matter of turf war and elusive diplomatic protocol. I was already earmarked as a rogue intelligence officer and I did not aspire to earn the ire of the top bosses of the MEA and Cabinet Secretariat.

Officially my turf was limited to a small patch of grazing ground. I had trampled on too many toes by adopting a 'pro-active' agenda for the counter-intelligence cell that I headed. I believe certain leading figures of the Track II diplomacy and certain officials of the R&AW had restrained the hands of the PMO. Vaidya gave me the go-slow signal and I had to obey him. Perhaps, that was the end of 'pro-active' intelligence activities, at least by the Intelligence Bureau. I am not aware if the new *avtar* (incarnation) of 'pro-active' policy, L. K. Advani had given clearance to his machineries to exploit the fault lines of Pakistan. I have a feeling he had not.

TWENTY-NINE

A CHAPTER OF NATIONAL SHAME

Doctrines get inside of a man's own reason and betray him against himself. Civilised men have done their fiercest fighting for doctrines.

William Graham Sumner.

It is time I take the readers to the biggest political eruption that was transmitting tremors since the later parts of 1988. The Sangh Parivar, as I said earlier, had adopted the agenda of exploiting the political vacuum caused by the death of Indira Gandhi and inept handling of the affairs of the nation by Rajiv and his rebellious deputy V. P. Singh. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had, for the first time, adopted a resolution on Babri Masjid (mosque allegedly constructed under orders of *Babur*, the first of the Great Mughals) in its June 1989 national executive session in Himachal Pradesh. Babri Masjid became a new totem of faith, as it was allegedly constructed on the ruins of the janmasthan (birthplace) of Lord Rama, the legendary incarnation of Lord Vishnu, one of the holy Hindu Trinity.

The Hindu card had paid high dividends in 1991 Parliament elections. Thereafter the Sangh Parivar and its fronts like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal etc swelled up the momentum initiated up by L. K. Advani's '*rath yatra*' and subsequent communal upheavals. The climax was reached when about 50 *kar sevaks* (volunteer workers) were killed in police action under orders of the chief minister Mayyaram Singh Yadav. The Indira Congress government headed by Narasimha Rao failed to arrest the trend and to bring the feuding parties on the negotiation table. His dark horse emissaries like Chandra Swami, Satish Sharma and Arjun Singh failed to divide the Hindu solidarity. They did not succeed either in making the militant fringe of the Muslims to strike some compromising notes. Some critics of the PM often described him as 'khaki knickers turned Congressman', linking his past association with the RSS.

I was out of the Ram Janambhoomi imbroglio, though I was in constant touch with my friends in the RSS and the BJP. My involvement with Pakistan operations failed to dampen my appetite for national politics.

Around November 12 a friend in the Congress party approached me with two requests: arrange his meeting with the Imam of Jama Masjid, and arrange a meeting between the Prime Minister and the Sar Sangh Chalak, supreme leader of the RSS. The meeting between my friend and the Imam was not a big deal. This was arranged in the private quarters of the Imam. They discussed, in my presence, the possibility of restraining the pro-active Muslim leaders. It was a good cause and I encouraged my friend to keep touch with a couple of Muslim friends from the Muslim Personal Law Board and Milli Council.

But I hesitated to open my cards on the RSS front. Moreover, I had no access to the top man of the Sangh. The Prime Minister, I was aware, had used other channels to explore the possibility of meeting late Rajju Bhैया, the Sar Sangh Chalak. On one occasion he had offered a plum post to an officer of the Indian Police Service on account of his family relationship with Ashok Singhal, the top VHP leader.

My hesitation prompted my friend to drag me to the PM. In the dim lit room I found that the Prime

Minister was seated in a dejected posture with a frustrating pout on his mouth. A chronic diabetic and a heart patient, Narasimha Rao gave an impression that he was a temporary trader, eager to sell out his wares and go home before the sundown. I did not find any determination on his face and resolve in his eyes. All that his eyes emitted was uncertainty and untrustworthiness. In monosyllabic words he asked me to arrange a discreet meeting between him and the RSS supremo. I conveyed that the RSS supremo was beyond my reach, but I could possibly arrange his meeting with another top functionary. It sounded more like an order, which I was not bound to obey. But I was aware of the peril that would have followed if I had not.

I exploited a non-RSS and non-BJP friend to pick up the RSS supremo from his Keshav Kunj abode and drop him at a point where my Congress friend waited for his prize guest. Later I found out that the meeting between the consummate RSS leader and the Prime Minister did go very well. The Prime Minister, I was told, had old linkages with the Sangh when he was located in Maharashtra as a student. One of the key functionaries in his office was also a former member of the khaki knicker brigade. The Prime Minister was given to understand that the Sangh Parivar had no agenda to demolish the disputed mosque but expected the government to take tangible steps to facilitate construction of the temple at the earliest. He had reportedly assured that the Sangh would wait until the verdict of the Allahabad High Court was pronounced. He beseeched the PM to expedite the legal process.

I was not interested in the outcome of the meeting. After surveying the political and administrative ambience I had reached a conclusion that Narasimha Rao was a good provincial leader. He did not have the intrinsic qualities to handle the complicated affairs of the nation that had reached a crucial junction of history. He was more comfortable in the company of questionable characters like god men and wheelers and dealers than with shakers and makers of history.

My lack of interest in Narasimha Rao and his tainted regime did not propel me to the arms of the RSS and BJP friends. I had no illusion that they were determined to strike and send the country into a perilous spin. My linkages with the Sangh did not blind me to the imperatives of history and geography of India. Over the millennium India had become, in the words of Tagore, 'ocean of the great humanity.' India could survive by practicing pragmatic secularism and India's national edifices could be strengthened by Hindu unity and not by Hindu militancy.

On November 25th I received a call from K. N. Gobindachariya inviting himself and two other friends to my home to dinner. I enjoyed their presence but did not like them to spoil my fish curry-dinner. The entire RSS breed, except Devdas Apte was vegetarian and frugal eaters. I appreciated their austere living style and high intellectual achievements. I appreciated their dedication, though I did not entirely agree with their post 1990 political objectives. Apte relished fish curry and often escaped the rigours of the Keshav Kunj and BJP office by sharing dinners with us.

On that night Sunanda laid out a sumptuous vegetarian dinner, which was shared with us by Gobindachariya, S. Gurumurthy and V. P. Goyal. Post dinner discussions went past midnight. What I gathered from my friends sent a shiver of chill in me. They gave enough indication that the Sangh Parivar was not against the idea of pulling down the mosque and put up a temple structure on December 6, 1992. Such an ugly incident, I pointed out, would result in catastrophic consequences. The demolition of Somnath could not be replicated in 1992. History could not be rewritten through demolition. My friends did not agree with my fears. They said that they would restrain the *kar sevaks* from demolishing the '*dhacha*' (structure) by deploying RSS volunteers around the mosque. I was afraid that their brinkmanship was sure to whip up uncontrollable emotional tsunami. Would they be able to control the frenzied mob? Yes, they said. I did not feel comfortable with their tight-rope-

balancing act. It could end in a disaster.

They expected a gathering of a million *kar sevaks* (volunteers) from all over the country and hoped that the proceedings at Ayodhya would be able to generate Hindu solidarity.

There was no use in stiffly opposing their arguments, but I pointed out that by demolishing the mosque in 1992 they couldn't pull down the Congress government in Delhi and force another election. If capturing political power was the goal they should wait until the time matured for the next polls. I tried to put across the delicate internal political situation in Pakistan, blood-curdling events in Afghanistan and the fluid law and order situation in the North East, Punjab and Kashmir. The world capitals, I pointed out, would not appreciate a sudden Hindu explosion and Muslim backlash, if the mosque were destroyed, even by accident.

My friends did not agree with me. Gobind maintained silence, which could be tactical. They were oblivious to the developments in geo-politically proximate region and the world at large. They did not take into account the potential of the Islamist forces hitting out against Indian targets and alienating a large chunk of Indian population. My friends told me that the gathering at Ayodhya was likely to be a symbolic display of strength.

Why in December only? I asked. Gurumurthy replied promptly that I should read my history once again. Had not Mahmud of Ghazni demolish the Somnath temple in December 1025?

I dusted out two history books after they departed, one by Majumdar and the other by Romila Thapar. Yes, my friends were correct. Mahmud had appeared at Somnath in the middle of December 1025 and was wonder struck by its wealth worth over 20,000 dinars and the cleverly installed hanging Shiva Lingam. The idol, probably made of iron was kept floated in air by powerful magnet stones installed over the canopy and below the base. It was indeed a marvel, besides being very holy to the Hindus.

That night I went to bed after satisfying myself that the December gathering was indeed symbolic. It was impregnated with the symbol of destruction of the Somnath temple, so dear to the Hindus and a symbol of national shame. For no other reason Advani had started his *rath yatra* from the historic city. The symbolism was as clear as pristine morning air. The nation, I thought, was on the verge of facing a serious tectonic shiver.

I did not hold back the information. Next morning I sought out the Director IB and shared with him my concerns over the likely developments of December 6, 1992. He agreed with my assessment and assured that the government was fully in the picture and there was no intelligence gap. I drew his attention to the activities of Bal Thackeray and Moreswar Save of the Shiv Sena, another Hindu outfit. There were indications that the *Shiv Sainiks* were embroiled in competitive Hindu chauvinism and were eager to outmanoeuvre the RSS and VHP volunteers by taking law into their hands. On that point too the Director agreed and advised to use my technical knowledge to arrange video coverage of the days event at Ayodhya. I deployed a team apart from another team deployed officially by the IB. My team was deployed under the cover of a popular English daily and gained access to the very core of the gathering. The formal IB team operated under psychological stress and mainly depended on powerful telephoto lenses capturing the events in still frames.

Some authors have attributed a conspiracy theory that was hatched up by the RSS, VHP, BJP and Shiv Sena leaders. They, as well as official agencies cited a reported meeting at the Keshav Kunj on December 5 in which L. K. Advani, M. M. Joshi, etc attended. I had a clear understanding about the meeting. There was no pronounced conspiracy. There was silent resoluteness and agreement that Ayodhya offered a unique opportunity to take the Hindutwa wave to the peak for deriving political benefit. The iron was hot and this was the time to hit.

The meeting had discussed the practical details of the Ayodhya meeting and clearly opined that the *kar sevaks* should be deployed in depth to prevent stray members of the Parivar and agent provocateurs from breaking the cordon and disturbing the mosque. There was no formal or informal decision to demolish the structure. In fact, I had submitted a detailed report to the Director and had added that the Sangh leaders might not be able to control the frenzied mob. By agreeing to adopt precautionary measures they had kept an option open for breaking the law and deriving benefit out of the chaotic actions of the frenzied mob. All that I want to add is that there was no deliberate culpability on the part of any of the RSS/BJP leaders. But there is no harm to ask as to how they were so sure of their brinkmanship? How could they be sure that after stirring an emotional tsunami they would be able to order, like king Kanute, the waves to freeze? I always felt that waves of all kinds couldn't be frozen in action, unless superior natural forces initiate such actions.

The video footages later confirmed my apprehension. I had no doubt in my mind that a couple of Shiv Sena volunteers took the initial plunge, broke the cordon of the *swayam sevaks* and climbed the fences by defying the RSS cordon and police barriers. The BJP chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, who later tried to wash himself in secular milk, stood as a mute witness, either on his own volition or under instructions of the RSS elders. He did not act on the instructions of the central government. I do not think all the milk of the cow-belt can put a brush of white on his calculated inaction. The initial breach caused by the Shiv Sena volunteers later broke the floodgates and the events were left to the imagination and ingenuity of the mob, which was disoriented by irresponsible rhetoric of some of the Sangh Parivar speakers. The much-touted self-confidence of the RSS was dashed to the ground. It proved that tongues of fire often go out of control of the fire-maker. L. K. Advani had spat fire from the pulpit, but he failed to control the flames. Taped videos substantiated that he was progenitor of the tsunami effect that he failed to control at the vital moment of destiny. India still suffers from that tsunami caused by deliberately generated civilisational conflict.

The elation exhibited by a section of the Hindu society was no less ugly than the gleeful celebrations observed by sections of the Sikhs after Indira Gandhi's assassination. The sense of betrayal and humiliation suffered by the Muslim was no less than the humiliation suffered by the Hindus by repeated destruction of the Somnath temple and desecration of the holy places at Mathura and Kashi. But, wrong doings at a particular historical period cannot be corrected by subsequent wrong doings, simply because one cannot travel back in time. Shame of one community cannot be removed by inflicting shame on another community. The radical Hindu elements and the offended Muslim community forgot these basic lessons. India again lapsed back into another bout of ugly communal violence. It appeared that for them time and history had frozen.

The Hindu-Muslim communal carnage that followed the demolition was as intense as the partition blood bath. In fact, on January 9, 1993 I was caught in between the frenzied Hindu and Muslim mobs at Jogeshwari locality of Mumbai. Both sides tried to torch my unmarked official car. An ingenious officer, who escorted me to a safer spot and advised me not to move out of the hideout till I was escorted by an armed police force, took me out of the mess.

The fire-vomiting Shiv Sena and Hindu fanatics took full advantage of the indecisiveness of the government in Delhi and political skulduggery amongst the Congress power barons of Maharashtra. Narasimha Rao proved again that he was not made of the mettle to rule a complicated country like India. He simply did not have any clue to the complicated texture of events. Amidst the ruins of Ayodhya and the lurking flames of communal outburst he got himself busied in consolidation his position in the party by isolating Sonia Gandhi, as if that act alone was going to confer upon him political immortality. The 'insider man' ironically proved to be a rank 'outsider.'

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I would like to briefly mention about small-scale bomb blasts in Mumbai area in January 1993. These bomb blasts were later traced to the Ahl-e-Hadith (Hadis) group headed by Dr. Jalees Ansari, a medical professional. Dr Ansari's group was involved in serial train bomb blasts on December 5/6 1993 in five prestigious trains near Kota (Rajasthan), Surat (Gujarat), Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh), and Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh). Five criminal cases were registered and the CBI was entrusted with the investigation. One of the cohorts of Ansari Abre Rehmat Ansari alias Kari had received training in bomb fabrication from Pakistan based ISI operatives. It is interesting to note that the same Ahl-e-Hadith group is said to be involved in the 2003 Ghatkopar bomb blast case, near Mumbai.

The Ahl-e-Hadith (People of the Book) movement is a puritanical Islamist movement, which considers itself more reformists (in retrograde sense) than the Wahabis. One of the main centres of the Ahl-e-Hadith group is located at Darul Uloom Jamia-tus-Salehath at Malegaon, Maharashtra. The movement has tentacles all over India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. All the four major sects of Islam, the Hanafis, Salafis, Humbali and Maliki are affiliated to the purist of perfection by the Ahl-e—Hadith movement, which prescribes from time to time *fatwas* for guidance of the followers of pure Islam. It draws sustenance from the purist Islamist groups in the Arab world and Al Qaeda. The ISI of Pakistan is known to back the Ahl-e-Hadith group in pioneering a couple of Jihadist organisations in the Jammu and Kashmir State of India.

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The videotape and about 70 still snaps that my boys had managed to capture constituted vital evidence of the act of vandalism at Ayodhya by the *shiv sainiks* and presumably the tsunami-affected devotees of Lord Rama. I had privately screened the video at my home, which was viewed by Rajendra Sharma, K.N. Gobindachariya and Uma Bharti. They agreed with me that the Shiv Sena volunteers launched the initial attack on the mosque. The tape was later handed over to the appropriate authority as a piece of valuable record.

Much later, soon after the NDA government assumed office in Delhi and the BJP top guns were summoned by the Librehan Commission to depose before it, I was twice summoned by L. K. Advani, through late Rajendra Sharma. He wanted to know the details of the videotape and demanded that I should produce it as a piece of evidence. I simply did not have any copy of the tape with me. The only copy was probably consigned to the 'archives' of the IB, somewhere outside Delhi. I gave a verbal account of the event and requested him to obtain the tape from the Director Intelligence Bureau.

I don't know if the Director IB obliged Advani. The intelligence organisations are not in the habit of digging up their archives, even with a view to correcting the history of the nation. The then Director had established close rapport with certain officials of the PMO and I was told that he was advised by them to not to produce the tape that could take Advani off the hook. The Sangh Parivar obviously was not a happy family. Advani was still considered a powerful contender for the office of the Prime Minister.

There is another version of this story about which I have no comment: the Director had produced the evidence to Advani and Vajpayee and secured a gubernatorial post for himself. There is no need to wreck heads on this issue. Such things happen in the government day in and day out-*yeh sab chalta hai*.

THIRTY

TERROR STRIKES BACK

No one can terrorize a whole nation unless we are all his accomplices.

Edward R. Murrow

Soon after the Ayodhya incident I, on my own initiative, had issued circular requests to the subsidiary units of the IB to be on the lookout for possible and probable retaliatory actions by ISI sponsored militants and Islamist modules. This was different from routine security alerts issued by the IB, Home Ministry and other organs of the government. Unfortunately IB alerts were focussed on the communal front and indeterminate action of the government that had resulted in arrest of a few RSS, BJP and VHP leaders and banning of the organisations. The cascading upheaval that ensued in Bangladesh and Pakistan and spate of protests from Islamic nations were telescoped into the morbid perception of post-partition Hindu-Muslim animosity and hate campaign.

My alert was specific and was based on intelligence inputs received from a single delicate source in Pakistan. Some Bangladesh based friends managed to transmit communications giving some precise intelligence on planned infiltration into India by ISI affiliated saboteurs belonging to ICS, HUJI and Al Jihad.

But the most sensitive piece of intelligence was received from XXXX, from one of the forward talents that I had managed to locate informally without government permission. The message, camouflaged by tradecraft devices, read like this: “The ISI here and in Dubai has taken final steps to send explosives and weapons to India through the coastal landing points in Gujarat and Maharashtra. These will be received by Muslim communal elements with a view to avenge the demolition of the mosque at Ayodhya.”

In consultation with the Director, I tried to reach back to the talent. However, an intermediary advised me that ‘my friend’ had moved out of YYYY station and it would not be safe to contact him immediately. We did not have a second asset in Pakistan to cater that kind of intelligence. We were not sure what feedback had come to the R&AW.

I was not sure about the authenticity of the information and the level from which it was gleaned out by the talent. In intelligence parlance it was a piece of unassessed raw material that could not be shared with the government.

This was to be routinely filed. Nevertheless, I issued a detailed warning teleprinter circular on or around December 23, 1992 to the subsidiary units in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Punjab. The units in West Bengal and Assam were also sensitised. Though I did not have specific information I listed out some of the traditional landing sites of the smugglers in Gujarat and Maharashtra. These were shallow water minor ports or unfrequented and unguarded landing sites. The IB, until the Bombay serial bomb blasts devastated the country, was blissfully ignorant about threats from the shallow water landing spots and Pakistan’s capability to hit India from that sector. These areas of coverage were left to the imagination of the state police and Central Excise and Customs Department.

I listed out over a dozen suspected landing sites in Gujarat from Jakhau in Bhuj to Jam Salaya in

Kathiawar to Valsad on Gujarat-Maharashtra border. In Maharashtra emphasis was given on the landing sites in and around Bombay, Thane, Diva, Alibag, Bhalgaon, Dande, Ratnagiri and Jaitpur.

The warning circular also requested the subsidiary units to bring the contents to the notice of the state administrations and request them to take appropriate preventive measures. I did not issue a warning to the government of India as my seniors thought that I was overreacting on the basis of a single piece of information that could not be corroborated by any other internal and external asset. The Director simply scrawled his signature on the office copy and it was filed. Procedurally their decision was correct. But if the stupid piece of information were evaluated in the backdrop of happenings inside the country and abroad they would have probably made different deductions.

As I said earlier the Intelligence Bureau had gathered the habit of combating the ISI in isolated test tubes-Punjab, Kashmir, North East and the communal virus. Each time they stirred up the concoction they came out with different results. It was a difficult task to convince my senior and junior colleagues to study the ISI as a whole, a single piece of geopolitical carcinoma that had become invasive.

On or around January 13, 1993 I received another communication from the same Pakistan based friend to meet him personally at a point due north of Bhuj, just a couple of kilometres inside the Rann of Kutch. The crucial meeting took place at the wrong side of midnight and the friend briefed me in details about the consignments of explosives and weapons being shipped to India in mechanised dhows from the general area of Goth Khirsar and Kati Bandar, both in lower south-east Sind. He did not have precise idea about the handlers of the explosives and weapons but was of the general view that some fishing magnets were tapped by the ISI for ferrying the materials to the Indian coast. He was also not specific about the likely landing point in India. He simply did not have access to that information, but was sure that the ISI had tapped some Gulf based Indian criminal gang to carry out the operation.

On my return to Delhi another circular alert was issued emphasising the immediate nature of the threat and likely involvement of Muslim criminal/communal gangs in Bombay and Ahmedabad, Jamnagar and Jodia Bandar in Gujarat. This time too the government was not informed. I could not do that without clearance of the boss and the rules of the game said that only assessed and processed information should be catered to the consumer.

Most subsidiary units responded in routine manner and dithered in arranging coverage of the Muslim gangsters in their respective areas. They simply did not have access to these species of predators. These matters were vaguely left to the undefined jurisdiction of the Customs and Excise department and the state police. They too did not display any interest in the matter, though they were briefed. Neither the central government agencies nor the state government had in position any apparatus along the vast coastal area to check incursion by the ISI and other inimical forces around the time the deadly consignments were despatched to India. Some skeletal patchwork was done along the vulnerable points in Tamil Nadu after the LTTE bombers assassinated Rajiv Gandhi. That too was eyewash.

The Coast Guard in its present form was inaugurated on August 18, 1978 to protect the territorial waters of the nation and prevent smuggling and poaching activities. It, however, paid more attention to the blue waters. It did not maintain regular vigil on the shallow waters and the minor ports and unspecified shallow landing sites. It was not designed to carry out the sieve work to filter the flourishing dhow traffic between India, Pakistan and the Gulf destinations.

This ambiguity in planning the safety of the vast coastlines of India was fully exploited by the ISI to send shipments of explosives and weapons to Maharashtra and Gujarat landing sites in

collaboration with the cartel of Dawood Ibrahim that operated in Bombay, Karachi and Dubai. It pains me to add that even today hardly any security and intelligence attention focussed on the minor and unregulated landing sites in Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat coastal areas.

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The front paws of Dawood Ibrahim and the ISI collaborators hit Bombay on March 12, 1993, in which 257 persons were killed and 713 were injured. India was put on another fire-walking test and it was proved beyond doubt that the ISI and the Islamist Jihadists were capable of hitting India anywhere and anytime. The Islamists had already proved this point by attacking the WTO in USA and expanding their activities to theatres like the Balkan countries, Chechnya, Uzbekistan, Xinjiang and the Philippines etc.

However, it did not dawn on the Indian intelligence community that by 1992 the ISI and the al Qaeda had become full partners in International Islamist terrorism and they had attained the capability of retaliating against the Hindu chauvinists in India. The point was lost on the Sangh Parivar too, who had failed to recognise that the events at Ayodhya and Bombay had transformed the low-key communal outbursts to global Islamist jihad. The vulnerable sections of Indian Muslims were systematically targeted with a view to expanding the orbit of the proxy war from the bordering states and ethnic broiling points to the heartland of the country.

After the Bombay serial bomb blasts an outcry was raised about intelligence blackout. An unpardonable amnesia had gripped the Intelligence Bureau. However, I fished out the old reports and communications and apprised the Director about the existence of some forewarning, which were shared with the key state governments. I believe these pieces of isolated and 'unauthorised' actions taken by me had saved the skin of the teeth of the agency.

No one was to be blamed. The IB had simply not matured to combat the ISI and other jihadist forces in an organised manner. There was no project paper in position; there was no intelligence infrastructure and the IB officers were not trained and motivated to take on the ISI and its affiliates as a part of the Establishment of Pakistan and as an ally of the international jihadist forces like the al Qaeda. I understand my friends in the agency have now devised ways and means to combat these forces in more organised manner.

As far as the Research and Analysis wing is concerned I have very little to comment. But as a remote consumer in the IB I can assert with confidence that we did not receive any intelligence input from the sister organisation either directly or through other organs of the government. Only a national level enquiry can ascertain the truth. But who cares for truth in a nation where the national slogan is *Satyameva Jayate* (only truth shall be victorious)? Slogans are tools of mass hypnosis. These are not grains of truth!

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After a few days of the serial blasts I had a discussion with the Director and asked if I could help in any way in unearthing the criminal conspiracy that had resulted in the stunning blow imparted by the ISI. On my demand that I should be shown the current inputs from Bombay and Ahmedabad I was informed that the reports he had were based on uninformed guesswork and intelligent collage of post-incident data. These were statistics, not hard intelligence. The HumInt and TechInt inputs produced very little lead to give an insight into the intricate connectivity between the ISI and the mafia groups

of Bombay. No cell of the ISI and Pakistan based Jihadist organisations were identified either by the IB or the State police intelligence. It was, I argued, a 'commissioned transaction' of the ISI. The agency must have had hired some Muslim criminals to carry out the sinister plan. The argument was convincing but nothing tangible had yet emerged except some tenuous linkages with the Tiger Memon family.

I did not make any promise to the Director, but I decided to explore the uncertain waters. After initial interaction with the top brass of the IB's subsidiary unit and the state police I decided to walk past some unconventional tunnel.

The first stop was the Sofia College street residence of Haji Mastan, one time dreaded smuggler. My line to the notorious smuggler was opened up about a year ago through a Chennai based collaborator of the don. He had flourishing connection with the Bombay underworld, Tamil Muslim leather processing barons of Gujarat and certain questionable Tamil personalities in Sri Lanka. For certain security reasons I would like to protect his identity. The friend flew into Bombay and arranged my meetings with Haji Mastan. Over a few sessions Haji opened up and indicated that the major landing site used by the ISI was located in Uran/Alibag area. After repeated pestering he referred me to a person at Behrampada, a Muslim dominated slum near Bandra railway station.

For a Hindu getting in and out of the Behrampada slum was a real life nightmare. The Hindus specially avoided certain segments of the slum after the January riots and the serial bomb blasts. The person assigned by Haji Mastan (name suppressed) arranged my meeting with the concerned person, who was a known associate of Dawood Ibrahim. Though a Muslim he was married to a Hindu woman, Koli (fishing community) by caste, and was ready to speak for a fee. He spoke after three meetings and disclosed the clear contour of the operation carried out by the ISI and his Bombay based associates, who had decided to collaborate with the ISI with a view to punishing the Hindus for demolition of the Ayodhya mosque and subsequent communal holocaust. It was a good beginning.

This underworld associate of Dawood was the first one to point fingers at the Tiger Memon family, the possible landing site (later confirmed) at Shekadi, in Raigad district. He had also indicated that some of the explosives were dumped at Thane creek, to be fished out later and used against selected targets.

This was some breakthrough. I kept the Director informed without going through the official channel of the Bombay unit of the IB. I was, in fact, freelancing in Bombay at my own risk, as a journalist from reputed English daily. I had, in my possession at least three faked identity cards of the leading papers, and one identity card of a TV channel. Obviously our boys in the technical wing of the IB had manufactured these.

The second person I contacted was Dhirubhai Ambani, the billionaire industrialist. I had known him for a while through a Delhi based common friend. Ambani was amazed to see a comparatively junior officer approaching him on mundane matters like opening up the roadblock to my meeting with Bal Thackrey, the Shiv Sena supremo, Keshu Bhai Patel, a BJP leader from Gujarat and Chhabil Das Mehta, than Chief Minister of Gujarat.

Dhirubhai was acclimatised to the officials in Delhi in other contexts; the contexts of money, business and transactions. To my amazement the much adored and vilified tycoon was more than cooperative. I found him to be highly patriotic and concerned about the stability of the western region of the country where most of his major ventures were located.

I may have different things to say about Ambani's clever manipulation of the Indian system and his questionable ways in promoting his business. He did not do anything new. He simply took advantage of the hunger of the politicians and bureaucrats to promote his business and industry by hoodwinking

the system. The law of the country has not been able to catch up with him. Why should I wreck my head over an issue that is beyond my comprehension?

I took advantage of Dhirubhai's willingness to help the country out. I did have no complaint about this giant entrepreneur as far as his love of the country was concerned. He and his entire family: Kokila Ben, Mukesh, Anil, Neeta and Tina happened to accept me as a member of the family. The family had, on a couple of occasions, also accepted Sunanda and my two sons. We shared their home hospitality (non-transactional). I was wonderstruck by the simplicity of Kokila Ben and the tour she gave me of the entire residential complex, her special room stuffed with Ganesha images and the rooftop Champaka tree. Our friendship lasted until I cooled off after Sunanda was diagnosed suffering from invasive carcinoma and the children took to the wider world to discover themselves. I had no material favour to ask from the bountiful billionaire.

Dhirubhai did not only arrange my meetings with the key characters in Bombay and Ahmedabad, he also ferreted out, through his own channel certain sensitive information from Dubai. I had kept the Director about my linkages with Dhirubhai and very valuable contributions made by him.

I had very little material resource to return the favours of Dhirubhai. I did not belong to any moneymaking wing of the government. However, on the request of Kokila Ben I inspected the entire Sea Wind complex and suggested ways and means to improve its physical security and personal security of her family members. In return she and her two daughter-in-laws sat down on the breakfast table and shared their morning meal with me. Kokila Ben personally served a specially prepared dish. With all the wealth around her she had not changed a wee bit from the days she spent in a chwal (middle class tenement). That's what had charmed me more. Dhirubhai is no more. But his voluntary services at a critical point had helped the country to augment its security by a few notches.

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As usual layers of gun wielding private security personnel surrounded the Shiv Sena supremo's home. Minus his standard behavioural peculiarities he received me cordially and over 4 sessions introduced me to certain members of XXX Rajan and YYY Gawli gang. These characters drove me down to the deeper niches of Bombay underworld and I bumped against the names of Salim Kutta, Dadabhai Abdul Gaffar Parkar, Bhai Thakur, Mohammad Dossa, Pappu Kalani and Javed Chikna. From them I came to know about deputation of about 12 Muslim youths to Pakistan for training by the ISI camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan and safe arrival of the Memon family at ZZZ, in Pakistan around March 17, 1993.

One of them offered me a ride to a place near Shekadi to have firsthand view of the terrain. But I declined as the ambience temperature was very high and it was not safe to be seen with a member of the Bombay underworld. However, I enjoyed my brief encounters with the dreaded characters of Bombay who are so frequently portrayed in most exaggerated manner in Bollywood films. Most of them are as dangerous and honourable people as some of the Indian system managers, who manage to twist the voting process to climb the top slots of the nation.

I was impressed by two aspects of the character of Bal Thackrey: His firm commitment to narrow Maharashtrian cause, Hindu nationalism and his sway over sizeable sections of the underworld and organised groups of criminals. However, I did not appreciate the tinges of intolerance in him. But he is made like that and one cannot ask a cheetah to change its spots. A meticulous study of Balasaheb may help the contemporary social scientists to trace the genesis of politician-criminal nexus in Indian politics. One need not essentially run after the fodder thieves and briefcase grabbers.

Chhabil Das Mehta, the aged Congress leader and the Chief Minister was particularly helpful in providing me access to a couple of Muslim roughnecks from the walled city of Ahmedabad. These characters in turn helped me to get a fascinating run down on the illegal dhow traffic between Gujarat and minor and unspecified ports in Pakistani Sind. One of them drove me down to Jam Salaya and exposed me to the real life dhow traffic between India, Pakistan and the Gulf. He was the person to indicate the fact of landing of explosives and weapons somewhere near Jam Salaya around the time Dawood Ibrahim and the ISI delivered their deadly consignments at Shekadi.

Keshu Bhai Patel had come down to the guesthouse, where I was holed up in my private capacity and exchanged views on the fundamentalist livewires operating from behind the walls of the old city of Ahmedabad and their linkages with fishing community along the coastal region, from Kutch to Saurashtra. He introduced me to XXX Athwale, the uncrowned king of the fishing communities in the coastal region of Gujarat and Maharashtra. I was referred to certain key figures amongst the fishing community, mostly Hindus, who were eager to help in curbing the questionable activities of the smugglers, human traffickers and Muslim fundamentalists.

In Gujarat I came to realise that the underworld had started splitting on communal lines. The great divide that was brought about by the persistent efforts of Pakistan and the unfortunate incident at Ayodhya had started blurring the professional and ethical bonds (whatever it is) amongst the underworld. Criminality, for a short while, had ceased to be the red blood corpuscles of the underworld.

I continued to work on this front until the government of India constituted a Special Task Force comprising the IB, CBI, R&AW and the State police to investigate into the blast incidents. One of my worthy colleagues was deputed to the team. I was again cooped up in my love affairs with the PCIU.

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My forays into the Bombay serial bomb blast and subsequent events brought out another naked truth: the prime intelligence agencies of the country did not have any idea whatsoever about the coastline of India-from Gujarat to West Bengal, which enjoined the key security regions in Pakistan, The Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The coastline was open to threats from the Arabian Sea, The Indian Ocean to the Bay of Bengal.

I took upon myself, in consultation with the Director, the self-imposed task to start a systematic study of the major and minor ports along the entire coastline, recorded and unrecorded landing sites, creeks and inlets. Simultaneous study of the population and political complexities were taken up. Several smuggling cartels and criminal gangs were identified and modus operandi of transportation mechanism between the coastal areas and hinterland niches of the smugglers, hawala operators and the underworld gangs were charted out. My worthy colleague V. K. Joshi helped me immensely in this maiden venture.

There was initial resistance from the IB units in the coastal States. In most cases they did not have the work force. More importantly they had no training in generating maritime intelligence that affected the shallow waters and connected the external inimical forces with the internal saboteurs. I had devised a preliminary training manual for the IB officers on coastal security. I hope this has been improved upon and coastal security has also been added to the grains of daily salt of the IB.

I must admit that the IB officers in different units reacted promptly and had started flooding the PCIU with basic materials that was used to build up a somewhat sensible structure for generating coastal intelligence. By end 1993 the State governments had in position some rudimentary shallow

water patrol system, though it was pitifully inadequate. The Coast Guard too had diverted some attention to the shallow waters for a while. But the police efforts more often ended in futile chase as the slow moving dhows were no match for GPS and Satellite communication fitted fast boats used by the smugglers. Most of the times the police used rented dhows belonging to fishing magnets. The intricate linkages between the fishing-boat operators and the smugglers often defeated the secrecy part of police operations.

Land based coastal policing too proved to be futile as the police forces were more committed to normal and abnormal policing duties elsewhere inland. I understand that the system has not been properly integrated with the policing system of the concerned states. In certain sectors the Border Security Force attended the job and in most of the sectors the job was left to the violators, the seas and the God, precisely in that order.

In fact, there is a case for creation of a central coastal security force, appropriately equipped with modern boats and communication and surveillance equipments. It should be delinked from the BSF, Coast Guard and state police. It may be mandated to have regular liaison with the Coast Guard and other land based enforcement units. There is an urgent requirement of involving the State police machineries and upgrading their capability to guard the vulnerable pockets along their respective coastlines. I hope the security planners will pay adequate attention to this requirement before another catastrophe hits the nation.

I have reasons to believe that the coastal intelligence sub-unit of the IB had lapsed into disuse and oblivion after I left the agency. Other priorities forced the IB to return to its conventional tunnels and fire fighting business in Punjab, Kashmir and elsewhere in the country. They fancied that after the Bombay serial blast Pakistan and other unfriendly forces had lost the appetite for violating India's security from the coastal regions. That is the limit of memory bank of a national intelligence agency!

THIRTY-ONE

THE RIDER OF DREAM

I have great faith in fools; self-confidence, my friends call it.

Edgar Allan Poe

A comet orbits around the Sun by borrowing forces from the Sun itself and Big-Bang gravitational imperatives. If a comet had human consciousness it would have dreaded the journey, because the merciless life-giver Sun chips away millions of tonnes of the comet's particles. It is often hurtled out of the gravitational orbit and made to plunge on the nearest planet having greater gravitational pull.

I think the same was happening to me. My dream journey through the PCIU had started chipping away my sensibilities. I had started suffering from a notion that intellect and hard work were good enough to steady me on the back of the tiger called, the Establishment. It was a dream journey of a fool, say of an over confident person, who did not know the exact source of his gravitational energy.

As 1993 started panting near the finishing line with loads of famous and infamous events on its back I too got embroiled in certain affairs, which did not strictly relate to my charter of duty.

V. G. Vaidya was about to retire. His leadership had brought sanity and openness back to the IB and the coterie system that came to haunt the IB with M. K. Narayanan had receded considerably. Sheer grit and professionalism had added a few layer of respectability to the organisation. Efficiency was the only yardstick that Vaidya used to evaluate an officer. It was refreshingly different from the Rajiv Gandhi-style coterie rule.

The Intelligence Bureau is a pyramidal agency. The top alone decides the policy matters, not very often in consultation with his immediate deputies. The routine work was not affected by the change of leadership. But operational policies, special projects and sensitive operations heavily leaned on the personal proclivities of the top man. Only a few adventurous officers dared to take initiative in conceiving pro-active operational projects and pursue the same with conviction and faith. I was one of those fools.

The impending change in leadership had, therefore, brought several intelligence operations to standstill. The unit conceived by me to cover 'Muslim Militancy' was taken away on the pretext that I was heavily preoccupied with my counterintelligence duties. No doubt a competent officer took over the responsibilities, but the manner in which an old associate staged the coup behind my back left a bitter taste. There was simply no consultation and formulation of operational policies. The officer who was entrusted with the job had very little idea about Islam and the Islamists. I was given to understand that some key figures in the IB considered me suffering from ISI and Muslim paranoia. I believe a few dynamic colleagues have now revamped this delicate front of intelligence generation activity and they have achieved some spectacular success in thwarting the forward thrust of the Inter Services Intelligence.

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I had, in the process of discharging my duties had obliged a number of senior bureaucrats, just for the

fun of helping people when I was capable of helping. One of them was Zaffar Saifullah, an IAS officer of Karnataka cadre, much senior to me. Saifullah and I had drifted together back in the days of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. He had allegedly crossed certain lines drawn by service codes and proprieties and was embroiled in CBI cases. At least two cases against him were fabricated by an important Pakhtoon politician close to the family of Indira Gandhi, on matters very personal to their lives. I had succeeded in explaining the circumstances to the Director CBI and two important functionaries in the PMO. They agreed with me that the officer should not be penalised simply because he wanted to marry a woman working in the office of the person close to Indira's family. After some efforts he was taken out of the hook and later I introduced him to certain friends who helped him in straightening his service records and climbing to the topmost slot of Indian bureaucracy. Our friendship, therefore, was based on mutual trust and understanding, though I was placed several layers below him in the hierarchy.

At that point of critical situation in the IB Zaffar Saifullah consulted me to suggest a name for Vaidya's replacement. He was the topmost bureaucrat and he had no reason to consult me. Yet he did, because he believed that I would not misguide him.

Saifullah had asked me a very difficult question. The line up of succession inside the organisation was very delicately poised. Next in seniority was S. D. Trivedi, an officer of 1960 seniority. An old IB bird he hadn't earned universal admiration either for his professional competence and personal relationship with the corps of officers in the agency. He was described by most as a '*bandobast*' man (fixer/arranger) with little expertise on operational and analytical intelligence. They alleged that in the recent past he did not anoint himself with glorious social behaviour. I saw no reason to disagree with my colleagues.

I was informed that Trivedi's rejection for the top post was caused by two factors: Rao's reservation caused by certain enquiries conducted by the former against him under instruction from late V. S. Tripathy and his alleged involvement in serious auto-accident when he was travelling in his official car with a female Congress worker from Uttar Pradesh.

As it might be the next choice was D. C. Pathak junior to Trivedi in the same batch. Pathak was a non-controversial officer with very little achievement in operational intelligence and analytical accomplishment. He was a directionless and to some extent a disoriented person. He lacked the personality to lead a vast force of seasoned sleuths and to interface competently with the higher echelon of the bureaucracy and the politicians. But he was not the one who was capable of harming the agency through any positive action. He had the potential to do so by his non-performance. That was considered a lesser danger.

I had sounded some of my colleagues on the issue of succession. Barring a minor string of 'managerial section' in the IB and the upper caste Uttar Pradesh lobby, the senior corps of officers were averse to the idea of Trivedi succeeding Vaidya. They simply did not want Uttar Pradesh Brahmin feudalism to take over the otherwise reputed agency. They were also not sure if Pathak would be able to lead the organisation at a critical point of time. However, the majority of the corps of senior officers preferred Pathak to Trivedi. The underlying consideration was that a 'raw material' like Pathak could be moulded and supported with the best possible assistance to lead the organisation. None of them wanted an outsider as the DIB, as some years later Arun Bhagat, a pure and simple police officer, had intruded into the agency for a while.

I shared this analysis and views with Zaffar Saifullah.

But another problem haunted the top bureaucrat. Pathak was an unknown commodity. He was neither known to the politicians nor to the senior bureaucrats. He was, in reality, a silent backroom

officer. He personally did not believe that he would ever make the top grade.

I physically escorted Pathak to Saifullah. They met for the first time and discussed several facets of management of the Intelligence Bureau. Zaffar Saifullah was not happy with the choice, but he felt that the new head could rise up to the expectations. He had also separately interviewed S. D. Trivedi and was reportedly disillusioned with his record of accomplishment. I have no direct knowledge. It's Saifullah who sold D. C. Pathak to his colleagues in the bureaucracy and to the Home Minister and the Prime Minister.

A new Director IB was thus born.

I did not feel comfortable either. Pathak was too demagogic to give direction to delicate intelligence operations and lead the organisation with unchallenged phalanx of support behind him. I had a nagging feeling that a weak link was placed in position at a very critical moment. I only hoped something better would come out of it. We had a very limited choice before us.

To outsiders the Intelligence Bureau might appear as a monolith. It is not. Like most other spy agencies all over the world the IB too is faction ridden. I had spent over 29 years in the organisation to understand and live with the factious love-hate game. The only difference with me was that I did not belong to any gang. I was born a free bird and my passage through the agency was marked by my individual idiosyncrasies and a sense on mission for the job I happened to handle from time to time. I did not care any more about individuals and groups. I was fond of riding dream and tiger, though I was not sure of the mechanism of touching the dream and alighting from the tiger. This strength and weakness did not arise out my connectivity to political and bureaucratic friends. It came from within. I had learnt to live for conviction and not for convenience. Such blasphemous work-attitude normally procreated conflict situation. From day one I had mounted that tiger and it was not possible to dismount without being scratched.

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After V. G. Vaidya's departure the organisation was pushed back to inconsequential position. The rating of the organisation was not only done on the basis of quality of intelligence it produced, but also by the visible proximity of the Director with the fellow top bureaucrats and the Home Minister and the Prime Minister. The Intelligence Bureau is an appended department of the Home Ministry and the consumers expect personal offerings from the Director, in addition to the intelligence catered.

D. C. Pathak was handicapped by his unfamiliarity with the powerful secretaries to the government of India, the Defence Services Chiefs and the key politicians. The absence of his frequent presence in the durbars of the HM and the PM sent wrong signals to the power-meter-readers in Delhi. Moreover, Pathak had failed to click with the Director CBI, Vijaya Rama Rao and the chief of the Research and Analysis Wing of the Cabinet Secretariat, Ranjan Roy. In fact, he was not even in speaking terms with the CBI chief, who happened to hail from the home state of the Prime Minister and was perceived to be close to him. Plainly speaking the PM required the services of a committed CBI chief, as he was getting embroiled in one scandal after another.

V. Rama Rao was a fine human being and an excellent officer. But like most heads of the CBI he had to submit to the wishes of the PM and HM. No CBI Director has yet been able to function independently. This organisation has been used for political ends in as much as the IB has been used. Recent fabrication of certain rules under instruction of the apex court has presumably put the CBI under scanner of the Vigilance Commission. I would rather not like to comment on this aspect as the CBI continues to function under directives of the political masters. The hallowed organisation enjoys

the image of an impartial investigating body and suffers from the stigma of being manipulated by the political masters.

So, there was nothing special in V. Rama Rao collaborating with another Andhra Gadu, son of the soil of Andhra, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. *Yeh sab chalta hai*, (things happen like that), which was the street slogan, and most of us went by that.

People around the PM knew that the accidentally installed top politician was beleaguered by one scandal after another and he was more intolerant than his predecessors. God men and wheeler-dealers unduly influenced him. To a PM like him the Director CBI was more valuable an asset than the chiefs of the IB and the R&AW. Pathak had not succeeded in reading the basic requirement of the PM.

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My initial brush with the bigwigs of the PMO started with an insignificant professional incident. My surveillance unit had chanced to pick up the trail of a Pakistani journalist who visited Delhi frequently. On a couple of occasions he was 'housed' at the residence of an aide to the Prime Minister, ZZZ Bakshi. Satish Sharma, a supposed Rajiv Gandhi loyalist, had planted him, a political appointee, in the PMO.

The PCIU boys probed the 'housed' suspect and trailed him on a couple of occasions to the residing places of a few senior Pakistani diplomats. Discreet enquiry revealed that a sister of Bakshi was married to the Pakistani journalist. Enquiries with the PMO and the MHA did not reveal any material declaration submitted by Bakshi to the government about the fact of his sister marrying a Pakistani national. A 'public servant' working in the PMO is required by law to submit such a declaration.

I brought the matter to the notice of the Director and requested him to brief the PM personally and to request him to reconsider the inadvisability of keeping ZZZ Bakshi in his personal office. Pathak had not given up on his old habit of sending reports to the governments under his signature even after he assumed the highest office. He had acquired that habit as a desk analyst. On this sensitive issue also he directed me to issue a UO note to the PMO and MHA, instead of briefing the PM personally. I had to give in after a brief protestation.

The ministries often develop sieve like characteristics, through which industrial houses enter the inner core of the system and burgle out those valuable documents, which promote their business interest and help them in blackmailing the politicians. This particular document about ZZZ Bakshi too was smuggled out, most probably from the MHA, and its contents were prominently published in English daily. The motive was not very far to seek. Narasimha Rao had earned the displeasure of the tycoon on several counts, including showering favour on his opponents like Nusli Wadia, a grandchild of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the father of Pakistan and also on the house of the Ruiyas.

Hell broke lose after the report was published that showered me with fire and brimstone. The Director IB shifted the blame on to me after he was confronted by the PM secretariat. I was summoned to the presence of a senior aide to the PM and was charged with 'anti-national' activities. This never-retiring bureaucrat thought that I would cave in and withdraw the report. I stood grounds and told him that his use of the word 'anti-national' was highly objectionable and I would be compelled to approach constitutional and legal remedy to protect my interest. He caved in. I explained the circumstances and asked him if he still considered it appropriate to keep the involved person in the PMO. He dismissed me with a big scowl. ZZZ Bakshi had continued in the PMO after

filing a declaration of the fact of his sister's marriage with a Pakistani media person.

I knew that I had committed the second act of 'crime' against the "PM and the nation", the first one being my hesitation to help him in the purchase of support of Ajit Singh, the perennially defecting Jat leader from western Uttar Pradesh.

I realised the danger, for the first time, of serving a spineless leader. I had faced stiffer adverse circumstances arising out of professional activities, some illegal and unconstitutional. But I had received 'protection' from the bosses. This time around I realised that Pathak did not have the moral strength to support his junior colleagues.

I soon came to realise that under Narasimha Rao the Indian Establishment was poised to hover between the undefined region between constitutionality, legality and political skulduggery. The passenger Prime Minister was in a hurry to make hay while the Sun shone. He had allowed the system to cave in to extraneous machinations.

Soon after the Bakshi affair rattled the PMO and my intelligence operative's foundation of 28 years I was confronted with another unexpected development. A senior functionary in the Union Home Ministry referred one of the politico-liaison touts to me, who swarm around the honeycombs in the ministry. He hastened to add that the Bombay based tout was 'very close' to the Union Home Minister and I should receive him cordially. I did not receive him in my office, as I was not allowed to receive any guest visitor inside the high security perimeters of the PCIU. The celebrity tout received me at the top floor exclusive restaurant of five star hotel over a cup of coffee.

The suave person was accompanied by a tall and stout gentleman, who was introduced as ZZZ Ruiya, a scion of the Ruiya group of industries. After the customary pleasantries Ruiya came straight to the subject. He alleged that I had reported to the government against his shipping unit. The allegation, he said, pertained to the mystery of a missing consignment of sugar that did not reach the Indian shores. The government had granted open general licence for importation of sugar to cope with domestic shortage. I flatly denied having sent any report and reminded him that the Intelligence Bureau was not assigned with the task of reporting on economic offences and plying of vessels on the high seas.

Ruiya did not digest the sermon. He produced photocopy of an Unofficial Report that I had sent to the secretaries in the PMO, MHA and Finance indicating reported deliberate sinking of a sugar-laden vessel by an industrial house, which required verification by the Coast Guard. They had reportedly done so as the domestic price of sugar had levelled down below prices prevailing in international markets. It was suspected that a branch of the Ruiya Empire was responsible for the economic offence. I was surprised to see the piece of paper signed by me that was smuggled out of the office of one of the three recipients.

The information had reached the IB from a source dealing with coastal intelligence and it was shared with the government by way of requesting it for further probe into the allegation.

I was assured that there was no reason to get panicky. In very certain words I was informed that both the Union Finance Minister and the Prime Minister wanted me to send a follow up report that the initial information that was catered by the IB was wrong. It was a case of misreporting. I was assured a fat amount that, the interlocutors added, could be deposited in any account of my choice or delivered in cash. The amount was too big and tempting for a person who lived almost whole of his service life in penury. I thought over the proposal and the double-edged consequences. Withdrawal of the report, which was based on field report, would tantamount to condemnation of my professional competence. My disagreement would mean infringing the third boundary of patience of the PMO and possibly that of the MHA and the Finance Ministry.

I weighed the situation and told the interlocutor that instead of offering the fat amount to me they should request the PMO and the MHA to direct the Director IB to withdraw the report. Only he was empowered to take that decision. The tout and the industrialist were very disappointed at my refusal to accept the fat amount and a promise of appointment in his company after my retirement.

A key functionary in the PMO and a former Finance Minister almost instantaneously conveyed the degree of their displeasure. I was given a tough dressing down and was branded as ‘a sensationalist’, not fit to occupy a key post in the intelligence fraternity. I was reminded that the stability of my service depended on the Prime Minister and I should be ready to pay for my stubbornness.

I did not feel like reporting the matter to the Director. But I had a duty to perform about ‘security of sensitive government documents’. I drafted a note and requested him to ask the appropriate branch to investigate into the incident of leakage of the vital communication from the IB to the government. I was never told about the result of the enquiry.

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The disastrous brush with the mighty industrial house was followed by another incident of dirty manipulation of the government machineries by the big moneybags. It was a talk of the town that the Reliance group of Industries had developed virulent animosity towards the scion of Bombay Dyeing group of industries. In previous chapters I have mentioned briefly as to how the rivalry between the two industrial houses had taken the shape of confrontation between Rajiv Gandhi and V. P. Singh.

Around June 1994 a trouble-shooter of the Reliance Group approached me with an unusual request. The Reliance Group was bent upon proving that Nusli Wadia possessed 3 passports, a British and a Pakistani one, in addition to the Indian passport. They wanted the Union Home Ministry to initiate a criminal case against Bombay Dyeing under Passport Act.

I was approached to certify that the photocopy of the alleged Pakistani passport was a genuine copy of a genuine Pakistani Passport. I politely pointed out that a particular branch of the Ministry of External Affairs and not the Intelligence Bureau did the job of such certification. The trouble-shooter was not convinced by my argument and asserted that as head of the Pakistan Division I could easily issue the certification.

I had neither any enmity nor friendship with Nusli Wadia. He was not aware that I existed, though I was aware of the importance of being Wadia, a grandson of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and an important friend of the ‘official anti-establishment news paper group’ headed by the veteran fighter, Ramnath Goenka. I had gathered enough insight into the ‘corporate war’ between the two groups through friends like S. Gurumurthy, K. N. Gobindachariya, Monoj Sonthalia and a couple of acquaintances in the Express Group of newspapers. In fact, the war between them had tremendously influenced the course of Indian politics and rise of the Sangh Parivar to power. I have always emotionally enjoyed and suffered my closeness to the Sangh Parivar friends. This closeness factor alone did not prevent me from issuing a false certification and fabrication of few false reports on Wadia’s alleged linkages with Pakistan and the ISI.

I did not oblige them because it was a clear case of forgery.

I think I had taken on too much on my plate. This time around an old friend in the Congress party and a close associate of the Nehru-Gandhi family intervened. His advice was clear and loud. Antagonising the Ruiyas had irked the PMO and my refusal to ‘cooperate’ with the Reliance was sure to ruin my future. Career is the bread and butter of a lowly paid civil servant. My salary earned the bread for my family and upkeep of the children. I was naturally worried, perhaps for the first time.

I had more reasons to worry on the personal front.

The relationship that I had built up or was allowed to build up, with Dhirubhai Ambani was not, as they say in Delhi, *transactional* in nature. My family and I were well received at the family home of the industrial magnet and I too paid usual respect and regards to them.

But my elder son, who passed out from the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad in 1994 with flying colours had suddenly decided to join the Reliance Group instead of opting for a US multinational. He said the radiant eyes and indomitable spirit of the elder Ambani impressed him and he thought he could make a nice career with them. We were disappointed, as, all said and done, the Reliance Group was a family owned corporate house and there was little scope to grow out of personal bondages to the family patriarch. In fact, very back in 1994 he was overqualified for the job. I suspected that he was carried off his feet by the glitters of the Ambanis and his love for a nice Gujarati girl, daughter of the Chief Justice of the Apex court of India.

For the first time I realised that I had faced a conflict of interest situation. My wife and I succeeded in persuading our son to quit the Reliance Group. He joined Proctor & Gamble and went away to Jeddah with a fatter salary and perquisites. The senior Ambani was hurt by the sudden action of my son and I felt that our relationship had started cooling off.

THIRTY-TWO

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

The world always makes the assumption that the exposure of an error is identical with discovery of the truth—that error and truth are simply opposite. They are nothing of the sort. What the world turns to, when it has been cured of one error, is usually simply another error, and maybe one worse than the first one.

H. L. Mencken

My love for unconventional tradecraft and fascination for adventure had not blinded me to the ground realities around me. Dwarfs, who did not know how to live beyond daily supper, headed the government and the Intelligence Bureau. They lived by convenience and not by conviction.

The harsh truth was driven into my conscience by a major incident.

While chasing the ISI ghost and its connectivity with the Islamist militants we chanced to stumble upon a lead that opened up a tunnel that traversed from the heartland of India to the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu. The IB had minutely logged that the ISI was operating from its embassy precincts and from safe hideouts like Hotel Karnali. The latest lead opened up a breach in the tunnel somewhere in Uttar Pradesh, which was being used as the intermediate stepping ground for promoting militancy amongst the vulnerable section of the Indian Muslims.

We had no mandate to operate inside a foreign country. The R&AW was supposed to gather intelligence and feed the home-security organisations. That never happened. My efforts to locate some agents in Nepal were turned down. However, I decided to attack the problem from a different angle.

I had recruited two Muslim youths from a prestigious Muslim University. Interaction with them for over three months lead to a reasonable conclusion that the youths were good enough material for training and infiltration in a targeted Muslim youth organisation, Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and finally locate them in Nepal to infiltrate the ISI network. The scheme to infiltrate the youths in SIMI was approved after prolonged procrastination but the later part of the scheme was killed.

I went ahead with the Nepal errand and informally visited Kathmandu to locate a safe place somewhere near Maharajganj market area. I did not charge the department for expenditures that I incurred. One of the youths was later stationed at a safe house in Kathmandu and he came out with a dazzling revelation that the ISI had dumped a huge quantity of explosives and arms under the grassy lawns of a Muslim house near Aligarh. The cache was meant for staging spectacular terrorist attacks in and around Delhi. We had the grassy lawn dug up and the deadly consignment removed under cover of darkness. The operation also gave sufficient idea about involvement of a Muslim politician with a Kathmandu based ISI operative. But unseen political directives had shackled my hands and I could not neutralise that enemy of the country. He is still around and flaunts the banner of a mainstream political party.

Some problems arose from an unexpected quarter. Another unit of the IB that looked after Punjab operations raised an objection about the PCIU dabbling in operations, which were not strictly related to counterintelligence. My arguments that counterintelligence did not mean surveillance against the

foreign diplomats and monitoring their phones did not satisfy the bosses. That the ideas of innovating agent operations and adopting other approaches were essential in pinning down the ISI operatives was not acceptable to the men who mattered. I was given a dressing down by a leading light in the Cabinet Secretariat and the affair left certain bruises in my relationship with the boss.

I was hauled over the fire and was ordered to shelve the operations forthwith. I could not do that. Some commitments were given to the youths, who were University graduates and had gathered some specialisation in computer software application. I could not simply throw them out and expose them to the virulent machinations of the SIMI activists and ISI sharpshooters. The Intelligence Bureau had not borrowed the idea either from the MI5 or the CIA of protecting its agents. Agent safety was not a part of IB's professional ethics.

After a great deal of effort I could find out berths for them in a public sector undertaking for advanced training in computer software. These two youths were later located in an Arab country where they earned recognition as computer specialists.

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Even a born runner cannot continue to indefinitely make 100-meter dash. He has to slow down and submit to the inevitable process of diminishing returns. I knew the theory of diminishing gravitational force. But I was not willing to slow down. That is where the destiny worked overtime to catch up with my 'daring attitude' towards the deities called politicians and bureaucrats. I had failed to realise that the times and personalities had changed. New work ethics had replaced the earlier ones and the bosses were busier in protecting their own posteriors than supporting the juniors. Majority of them were not interested in performance. They were expectant of offerings.

Some of them dogged me with a tool that arose out of a bizarre case involving two Maldivian women, which later earned notoriety as the 'ISRO Espionage Case'.

The Central Bureau of Investigation, government of India's investigative arm in economic offences had gathered tremendous clout over years and its mandate was enlarged during the regime of Indira Gandhi. The prestigious organisation was endowed with investigation rights into political, criminal and miscellaneous offences, which the masters of the day considered worth haunting and harassing their adversaries. While the IB and the R&AW acted as indirect nutcrackers the CBI was used as the hammer hand of the government. The CBI was encouraged by the government to give wide publicity to high profile cases involving important personalities and issues. The publicity itself demonised the persons and issues under investigation. The prosecution and trial process limped painfully and conviction often eluded the investigators. The CBI is not to be blamed as an institution. Like any other tool of the government the CBI served its masters faithfully, often to the constraints of constitutional liberty and legal propriety.

The ISRO espionage case was actually killed by the Malayalam and English media of Kerala. The print media aligned to different political personalities and parties projected their own versions of the case. Such publicity was based on deliberate leakages by those police officers, who professed loyalty to some politician or the other. The CBI also gave wide publicity by releasing inspired stories to the national media either through discreet means or through its legal representative. The IB, as usual had not told its side of the story. The IB has never gone to the market with its merchandise and sob stories.

I do not carry any brief for the IB. However, the present narration being an intimate story of my passage through the intelligence fraternity, I owe it to my colleagues in the agency to say the bare

minimum to put the things in correct perspective. I owe it to my colleagues who have been erroneously penalised and victimised by the CBI 'findings.' Some of them have been charged with offences they did not commit. Departmental disciplinary proceedings are still going on. They suffered because the Intelligence Bureau had failed to protect them while they were discharging lawful duties. I owe it to them to narrate the IB's part of the counterintelligence investigation of the infamous 'ISRO Espionage Case.'

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The famous or infamous ISRO espionage case had arisen out of interception of a Maldivian national Mariyam Rasheeda. Mariyam was intercepted by Kerala police for overstaying her visa period and crime number 225/94 was registered on 20.10.94. Her questioning resulted in registration of case no: 246/94 dated 13.11.94 under section 3, 4& 5 of the Official Secrets Act and 34 India Penal Code. Interrogation of Mariyam Rasheeda and Faujiya Hassan, also a Maldivian national by Kerala police and Kerala unit of the Intelligence Bureau indicated that Mariyam was an employee of the Security and Intelligence Service of the Maldives. She had developed questionable linkages with senior scientists of the Fabrication and Technology Division, LPSC, Valiamala, Trivandrum; a prestigious and sensitive segment of the ISRO. Amongst the scientists the names of D. Sasikumaran, Nambinarayan, and Deputy Director LPSC had figured prominently. Further interrogation implicated Raman Srivastava IPS, an officer of the rank of Inspector General of police, Chandrashekhar, a Bangalore based businessman having linkages with the Indian and USSR space agencies, and a Mangalore based doctor and others.

The other intriguing aspect of the initial interrogation process involved certain suspected Colombo based agents of the Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan-especially Zuheira, Mohiyuddin an employee of Pakistan owned Habib Bank at Male, Ahmed Faud Zizawi, a Saudi international arms dealer, Mrs. N. S. Haniffa, Mrs. N. H. Gaffoor and Mohammad Halmil, all Maldivian nationals. A mysterious character called Mohammad Pasha, a suspected ISI operative also figured in the interrogation report.

Initial reaction of the Intelligence Bureau was to depute Rattan Sehgal, a personal aide to the Director IB and B. K. R. Rao of the R&AW to Male to inquire into the matter. These high profile officers confirmed the linkages of Mariyam with the intelligence and security organisation of the Maldivian government. From their report it transpired that Mariyam Rasheeda was on a mission to India to unearth suspected plot by the adversaries of President Gayoom to topple him. The liaison channel between the R&AW and the Ministry of External Affairs with the Maldivian authorities continued as usual.

The case, in fact, should have been handled by the R&AW and the IB could have rendered assistance for enquiries inside India. But the Director IB, D. C. Pathak decided otherwise. Since the case pertained to Kerala the DIB entrusted the case to R. K. Rathindran, a senior Keralite officer, as he was the territorial desk in charge.

A couple of peculiar characteristics of the case had emerged clearly from the very beginning:

- D. C. Pathak, Director IB was enthralled by the intriguing counter-espionage case and had taken charge of the situation himself and had started issuing vital reports to the government under his signature (total 10, if I remember correctly). He did not consult the concerned counter-intelligence unit, the FRRO (Foreigners Registration Officer), the general security related branch and the PCIU. The vital reports were issued on the basis of interrogation

reports, as and when these were despatched by the Trivandrum unit. These were not evaluated by Rathindran and later me, as the in charge of the Pakistan Counter Intelligence Unit in charge.

- The senior IB officers of the Kerala unit and that of the IB headquarter never personally briefed and debriefed the team of Central Interrogators. The interrogators were deputed from Delhi and they did not have any local roots. Their objectivity could not be suspected, though tradecraft demanded detailed debriefing of the interrogators and vetting of their reports through ground enquiry. The Director IB was simply after earning a few pats by reporting the day-to-day developments to the Prime Minister, Home Minister etc.
- The Malayalee and the English print media of Kerala had adopted pro-active stances in publishing the nitty-gritty of the day-to-day investigation. They obtained the materials from sources in the Kerala police.
- The political spectrum in Kerala was sharply divided. The administrative tools and the media close to K. Karunakarn, a senior Congress leader and the Chief Minister took the side of IGP Raman Srivastava and the ISRO scientists. The other segments of the administration and political hue, belonging to anti-Karunakaran camp and the Leftists demanded the scalp of the IGP and the scientists.
- Factionous fighting in the police had drawn attention of the legal luminaries from the initial stages of the case.
- The R&AW was kept out from the ground level enquiries and the leads pertaining to Maldives, Sri Lanka and Russia were not shared with them in time. For certain reason or other the R&AW also maintained cool distance from the case, most probably under instructions from the Ministry of External Affairs and the PMO. President Gayoom of the Maldives is a proven ally of India and Delhi did not like to topple his applecart.

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The Director, IB summoned me after about two weeks of registration of the case in Kerala and directed me to take charge of the case. Before agreeing to formally take over an unclaimed baby I visited Trivandrum and talked to Mariyam Rasheeda and Foujiya Hassan at length in the presence of local IB officers and officers of the Kerala police, including lady officers. I also discussed the matter with the chief of the state police intelligence. My interaction with the two arrested suspects gave an impression that sustained expert interrogation of the Maldivian suspects and the suspected scientists of the ISRO and certain Bangalore based businessmen were necessary before a counter-intelligence investigation could be initiated. The Director approved this and a crack counter-intelligence interrogation team was despatched to Trivandrum.

As a precaution I had requested the TechInt division of the IB to arrange total clandestine coverage of the interrogation process by installing adequate video-audio devices. This operation was insulated from the interrogation team and Kerala police was denied all access to the TechInt team. My intention was very clear from day one. I did not want the IB to be drawn into the raging political shenanigans and media glare. Moreover, the knowledge that some one was independently monitoring and recording the interrogation process should prevent the officers from using third degree methods. Altogether 71 black and white and 1-colour videocassettes were produced by the TechInt boys, which covered the entire interrogation process of the major suspects.

However, on demand from the Director the head of the Kerala unit, Mathew John managed to transmit a daily summary of the interrogation over the telex channel.

While my worthy colleagues in the Pakistan counter-intelligence cell started processing the interrogation inputs and building up a cogent picture of the suspected espionage episode the Director IB kept on shooting special reports to the PMO, MHA, MEA and other concerned organs of the government. As I said, as a chronic analyst he was fond of communicating with the government and his efficiency, he thought, would still be evaluated on the basis of reports he personally signed. On a delicate occasion I tried to point out that the reports should be framed after proper analysis of the interrogation reports, as there were needs for careful separation of the chafe from the grain. He gave me to understand that he was keen to ensure that his reports reached the government first before the R&AW sent in their despatches. The argument was childish and the methodology adopted in exciting the politicians with unprocessed and uninvestigated materials was crude. I pointed out, which was more and less an act of defiance that such premature reporting would soar up the expectations of the politicians and the bureaucrats. We were in no position to substantiate most of the linkages revealed during interrogation. We were yet to carry out sustained ground verification of the facts and incidents disclosed by the interrogated suspects. Establishing inter-linkages of facts and personalities required methodical verification through painstaking investigation. We could not brand the case as a Pakistan sponsored espionage case without correlating the national and international linkages.

I was overruled.

Such practices were unheard of in the Intelligence Bureau.

Failing to convince the boss I requested the subsidiary units in Chennai, Trivundrum and Bangalore to start investigating the leads and confirm the salient points of connectivity that could prove the basics of the espionage case. My colleagues were not equipped to handle such massive investigation. Nonetheless, they took up the job earnestly and started sending feedbacks confirming the landmark revelations by Mariyam Rasheeda, Foujiya Hassan, Sasikumar, and Chandrashekhar etc. My request was backed by the distinct emerging contours of a counterintelligence case. Mariyam and Foujiya were petty Maldivian operators. By themselves they were not capable of handling the sensitive ISRO materials and Indian space programme. The ISRO projects are meant for genuine scientific exploration of the space. But the basic rocket technology was equally applicable to military use. Pakistan, at that point of time had started receiving M11 rockets from Chinese and North Korean sources. They were in the midst of developing indigenous rocket technology, fuel and guidance systems. It was interested to acquire knowledge about Cryogenic engine, which India was on the threshold of developing. It was but natural for Pakistan to snoop around the ISRO and ferret out Indian designs and rocket engine technology. These points were explained to the Director IB, but the IB did not make the government aware of this possible and feasible threat from Pakistan. Lack of appropriate threat assessment from Pakistan on this front and Pakistan's quest for rocket technology should have been interwoven with the interrogation and enquiry process.

I am not aware if the ISRO had explained the finer nuances of the suspected counterintelligence case to the concerned departments of the government.

Having satisfied myself about the strong possibility of uncovering a Pakistani conspiracy, played from bases in the Maldives and Sri Lanka I once again visited Trivandrum and interacted with the State intelligence chief, Sebi Mathew, the DIG in charge of investigation and officers of the Intelligence Bureau. I returned with a feeling that a coherent collage was emerging and there was a distinct counterespionage case that should be pursued jointly by the Kerala police and the IB, in collaboration with the R&AW.

The Central Interrogation Team of the IB could not interrogate Raman Srivastava. The state government hesitated to annoy Karunakaran by making him available for interrogation and for confronting him with the data revealed by other suspects. The data revealed against Raman could only either be confirmed or refuted after crosschecking of the statements made by the other suspects. It is believed that Raman Srivastava's father, a former IPS officer of Uttar Pradesh had brought pressure upon some key functionaries in the MHA and the PMO, especially on a Special Secretary and a key functionary in the PMO, both hailing from UP. Two of them spoke to me and advised to 'let Raman off the hook.' I was given to understand that Karunakaran had spoken to the PM and prevailed upon him to scuttle the investigation. He also raised the plea of destruction of the image of the ISRO and injuring the morale of the scientists.

They turned down my argument that the IB was entitled to enquire into the counterintelligence leads. IB had nothing to do for defaming the ISRO. In fact, it had no transaction with the space agency before the Mariyam scandal came to surface. The friends of Raman Srivastava failed to understand that Pakistan had abiding interest in Indian rocket technology and they were themselves engaged in developing indigenous rockets with borrowed and stolen know how. They also did not appreciate the argument that peaceful space rocketry and militarised rockets used the same technology. Pakistan had an abiding interest in Indian rocket technology especially development of cryogenic engine technology. But it was a frustrating experience to argue with the senior bureaucrats.

On the basis of these materials and also on the basis of materials culled out of the videotapes I prepared a 'working sheet' that outlined the leads that were still to be investigated and linked with the events already substantiated.

At that point of time several interrogation segments threw up the name of Prabhakar Rao, a son of the Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao for his connectivity with Bangalore based contacts of the Maldivian women. In the 'in house' working sheet I had pointed out the need for informally questioning Prabhakar Rao to clarify certain points.

I also argued with the Director that the ISRO case had taken a mammoth shape and the IB was not in any way competent to investigate the linkages in Sri Lanka, Russia and Maldives. There was no scope for handing over the case to R&AW also. The R&AW did not have expertise in handling counterintelligence matters. I, however, visited the R&AW office on a couple of occasions and briefed the R&AW officers about the progress achieved in the investigation. They, especially Arun Bhagat, the senior R&AW hand, who later managed to grab the chair of Director IB, were briefed and were handed over briefs that required investigation by them, in Sri Lanka, Russia and Maldives. The inputs received from R&AW mostly corroborated some important disclosures made by the suspects interrogated. It may, however, be remembered that the R&AW cannot issue letter rogatory to foreign police agencies and involve the Interpol. Therefore, the R&AW enquiries were superficial in nature.

A few days later a Bangalore based joint secretary of the Department of Space, who happened to be a Bengali, visited me in Delhi and expressed his appreciation of the progress of the investigation. He gave me to understand that the chief of ISRO had ordered an in house investigation to locate and identify the 'missing documents' those were purportedly smuggled out by Sasikumaran and Nambinarayan. He also conveyed the appreciation of the ISRO chief. This discussion session was recorded and conveyed to the DIB.

In the meantime summon from the personal secretary to the Prime Minister rattled me completely. He wanted to impress me with two arguments: the high fly publicity received by the case was likely to harm the intrinsic interests of India's space programme and the political opponents of the Prime Minister were likely to use the case to weaken the Congress party in Kerala. Perhaps politically his

concerns were valid. But I was neither in a position to muzzle the media nor throttle the gullets of the politicians.

Nevertheless, I understood that I was handling a hot piece of iron and it should be transferred to a different palm. The Central Bureau of Investigation was the natural choice. Only that agency could interact with the Interpol and appoint a special team to investigate the intelligence leads culled out from the interrogation reports. I persuaded the Director IB to discuss the matter with the Director CBI, Vijaya Rama Rao. But D. C. Pathak, for some reason or other, was not in talking terms with the Director CBI. I was directed to interact with him and fathom out his mind. In fact, I enjoyed close rapport with the CBI Director. He received me well but was not in favour of taking up investigation into the complicated espionage case.

I argued with Pathak once more and dragged him to the room of the Union Home Secretary (Padmanabhaiya) to request him to hand the case over to the CBI. The note prepared by me impressed the Home Secretary and he agreed to do the needful after initial dithering. Probably he was bound by the convention of taking clearance from the Home and Prime Minister. He took the correct approach. I felt a sense of relief.

But, as I said, destiny caught up with me through another immature action by D. C. Pathak, Director IB.

The Trivandrum unit chief had summarised the entire interrogation process (to date) and sent a detailed telex message (32 pages) with concluding comments that some of the revelations were yet to be confirmed and there were certain points of contradiction.

I summarised the report and brought it up for discussion with the Director. He wanted to shoot off a special report immediately. I pointed out that the report would require proper sifting before a communication of affirmative nature was sent to the highest quarters of the government. Moreover, I pointed out that legally the case was now a baby of the CBI. The IB should not get itself committed to any specifics in writing.

Pathak was reluctant to listen to reasonable argument and drafted a rather lengthy report by himself and I was asked to wait in his back office. Around 22.30 that fateful night he finalised the report and wanted to attach the '*in house working sheet*' with it.

I objected. It was a crude work sheet for internal use. It was not meant for consumption of the government and the CBI. The Director was only to see and approve the line of actions suggested in the working sheet. He again vetoed my arguments. The deadly '*working sheet*' that included the name of Prabhakar Rao was shot off along with the main report.

Another action of folly was his order to send a photocopy of the 32-paged telex from Trivandrum to the Director CBI that night itself. I pointed out that the comments of our unit in charge Mathew John verged on vacillation and it would not be prudent to expose the raw flesh of the IB at this stage. Moreover, the Home Secretary had just agreed in principle to transfer the case to the CBI. We should, I argued, wait for a formal request from the Kerala government and a proper notification by the government of India. WE could share a polished version with the CBI, especially when the political forces in Kerala and the ruling Congress party were sharply divided. For the third time, that fateful night, my Director overruled me. I managed to scribble a handwritten note on the photocopy of the telex message and forwarded the damaging material to the Director CBI at his residence. It was an immature decision and a big blunder.

Soon after the report was received in the PMO hell broke loose. The PM rushed to Kerala, openly for political work, but in fact to prevail upon the Kerala administration to go slow in the ISRO espionage case.

In the mean time, after issue of official notification, I was directed to accompany the Director CBI and his team in a special Beech Craft Air King plane to Trivandrum. I was informed at Palam that the flight would break journey at Nagpur for refuelling and picking up on board supplies. Somewhere over Bhopal the Director CBI was called into the cockpit to receive a call from Delhi. On return he announced that the flight would now halt for refuelling at Bangalore, as he was required to attend an important meeting.

It was an innocuous announcement but a sudden change in the denouement of the CBI Director had sent out a loud message that certain subtle changes had clouded Vijaya Rama Rao's mind. He went into a huddle meeting with his officers, which I watched with curiosity. Something had gone amiss.

At Bangalore Vijaya Rama Rao and his Inspector General drove away towards the town. I managed to hitch a hike from the Bangalore unit chief of the IB and had a nice vegetarian meal at Dasa Prakasham.

The CBI Director returned after about two and half hours. I gathered that he had gone to 'pay a courtesy call' on Margaret Alva, the Union Minister in charge of the Department of Personnel, that overlooked the functioning of the CBI. The courtesy call was determined high above the skies over Bhopal, as the celebrated minister had reportedly sprained her leg. I also gathered from one of the CBI officers that Vijaya Rama Rao had also attended a meeting with Kasturirangan, the ISRO chief and he had a telephonic conversation with the PM.

From the very moment Vijaya Rama Rao boarded the flight at Bangalore the entire atmosphere of bonhomie disappeared. He did not speak to me, an unusual behavioural pattern for a warm person like him.

Surprisingly a crowd of journalist accosted us at Trivandrum. I evaded them and directed them to speak to the CBI officials.

Next day I sat over a meeting with the CBI team in the office of Mathew John and two of us together handed over the following case materials to the CBI team:

- Copies of all interrogation reports.
- Three Videotapes of interrogation (rest of the tapes were secured in Delhi).
- Copies of telex messages originated by Mathew John.
- Copies of written reports sent by Mathew to IB
- A summary of the case as perceived by the IB.
- Summary of preliminary investigation done by the IB
- Oral briefing by Mathew and his deputy Srikumar.

I must admit that Mathew had done a thorough job and he had maintained a dispassionate distance from the ongoing interrogation and investigation. Like a true professional he refused to accept what was pedalled as solid intelligence input and he was the first to scrutinise the incongruities in the statements made by the interrogatees. At no point of time he sided with the local politicians and police officers.

I appreciated his taciturn attitude and tried to withdraw the IB from the potent and complicated case. The Director IB insisted that we should continue to linger on with the CBI team. That was not a correct decision. The IB, I felt, should have given any assistance required by the CBI, instead of running a parallel counterintelligence investigation.

After the crucial meeting at Mathew John's office the CBI team went on its own way and avoided the IB officials including me. I managed to hang on to a trip, as instructed by the DIB, to the LPSC centre but was kept out from the key discussions with the ISRO officials. I was not even invited to

attend meetings with the police officers. Vijaya Rama Rao separately called on Karunakaran and other politicians from which I was kept out.

In fact, to avoid humiliation I returned to Delhi in an Indian Air Lines flight.

As I understood the CBI went on breakneck speed to investigate the case in India and abroad. Its findings exonerated the ISRO scientists and the even the Maldivian nationals.

At paragraph 113, page 94 of its report the CBI concluded that Mariyam Rasheeda was in no way related to ISRO plot. Similarly Faujiya Hassan was exonerated too. The report was critical of Inspector Vijayan of Kerala police for prevarication and malfeasance. The report overruled the possibility of Colombo based Zuheira being an ISI agent. Similarly Chandrashekhar of Bangalore and Raman Srivastava, the IG police were cleared of all charges. The CBI had concluded that “... *the accused persons including Rasheeda, Nambi Narayan and Chandrashekhar were harassed and physically abused...There is reason to believe that the interrogators forced the accused persons to make statements on suggested lines....To sum up, in view of the evidence on record, oral as well as documentary, as discussed above the allegations of espionage are not proved and have been found to be false....*”

Before this report was filed with the government on 16.4.96 the matter of CBI's alleged partisan investigation had come up in Kerala High Court. In Niyama Vedi Vs Raman Srivastava (1995 (1) KLT206) case the IB was called upon to produce documents as material pieces of evidence. The IB was reluctant to produce its papers and the videotapes. The developments were pregnant with dangers for the working methodology of the IB. There was also the danger of IB officers being exposed. These nameless and faceless officers normally avoided public glare.

On the other hand the MHA mounted pressure on the IB to represent its case and to retain the Additional Attorney General and CBI's advocate in the case.

I opposed the idea. While the investigation and court proceedings were on, the CBI, as a part of its trademark speciality, had launched a massive media campaign through newspapers and periodicals about the incongruous ISRO espionage case, which was allegedly concocted by zealous IB and Kerala police officers.

Exceeding all norms of government the Additional Attorney General also contributed a detailed piece for the now defunct Sunday magazine of Calcutta. The write up ridiculed the IB and Kerala police. How could he cross the limits of professional decency?

I was appalled by the propaganda barrage mounted by the CBI. I argued with the Director IB that we should appoint a different advocate to protect the department's interest. Pathak overruled me as he was under pressure to offer a united face in the ISRO case. He was pulverised by political pressure and had decided to sacrifice his junior colleagues.

It was argued by the Special Secretary Home that two organs of the government could not afford to disagree on the vital national issue. I argued that the cases made out by the IB and the CBI was different. As far as the IB was concerned it was a genuine counterintelligence case. Findings by the IB were contrary to the hasty conclusions drawn by the CBI. It would be better if the IB went unrepresentative as the case was formally handed over to the CBI. But the government insisted that IB should produce ‘*agreeable and unified evidence*’ to the Kerala High Court.

The PMO and the MHA had informally made it clear that the ISRO case should be given a nice burial. The Director IB was incapable of facing the challenges and protecting his officers. He ordered me to produce the evidences to the Kerala High Court and accept CBI's advocate as IB's counsel. In deputed a senior officer (V. K. Joshi) to Ernakulam with three videotapes and copies of the essential documents instead of undertaking the visit myself. I had witnessed the hostile attitude of the CBI and

did not like to ruffle the feathers by presenting my personal views in the case.

The court had screened the tapes to its satisfaction and observed... *“Reports sent by the IB to the government, which were produced before us, were perused...The report would show that Mariam (sic) Rasheeda and Fousiya (sic) Hassan had reportedly mentioned the name of Raman Srivastava, IG...The reports of IB, which has its own investigating machinery, had in unmistakable terms found the involvement of Raman Srivastava, IG of police, Kerala in the ambit of the case...The Director of CBI while filing his affidavit dated 7.1.95 is seen to have ignored the above aspects of the case. We direct him to re-examine the issue...”*

The High Court also exonerated the Kerala police and the IB from the CBI charges of torturing the arrested/detained suspects. The Court observed that.... *“The three videocassettes produced before the court by the Intelligence Bureau were viewed by us by playing it in a VCP, belonging to this court. From that, it is crystal clear that the three accused gave answer to the questions without any fear of torture....”* The High Court, in fact, passed a serious stricture on the CBI.

At this stage I requested the DIB to produce all the 70 odd videotapes that contained recording of the whole interrogation proceeding. That would contradict the hasty findings of the CBI and satisfy the High Court. Pathak could not gather courage to confront the government with the clinching evidences. My pleadings that this vital omission might cause irreparable damage to the organisation could not instil an iota of courage in him. He appeared to be worried about his own future. His idea of surviving the crisis by playing to the tune of the court was a horrendous act of betrayal of the agency. He should have known that a machete wielding politician and a abattoir butcher were had common genome factors. Pathak did not know how to die the glorious death of a field General.

The Director IB was not in talking terms with the Director CBI and he even avoided meeting the Special Secretary and Secretary of the Home Ministry. I was forced to keep the frayed dialogue line open. The CBI Director, at personal level, continued to be courteous but the Additional Attorney General tried to browbeat me when I was directed to see him at his Old Fort Road residence. My deputy Dilip Trivedi, a bright and daring officer from Uttar Pradesh, accompanied me. The counsel demanded to know as to why the IB did not pay his fees. I told him to raise a demand and the IB would sure reimburse his honorarium.

He suddenly started calling names and flaunted his status of a Minister of State in the government. I lost cool. I told him slowly but bluntly that he was dealing with two senior officers of Indian Police Service and he should maintain decorum in official discussions. He did not tone down the bully vocabulary. I stood up by saying that I had no intention of tolerating his indecent behaviour and left in protest.

I was shocked by the development. It appeared the counsel had fully sided with the CBI and was not willing to hear what the IB had to say. Colleagues warned me that the AAG might exploit his proximity to the Prime Minister and Chandra Swami, a selfstyled *Tantrik*, to fix me up. I was worried, but I had never accepted bullshit through out my life and I was not ready to lower my head to a two-penny advocate.

I requested the Director IB again to produce all the 70 videotapes before the court to prove beyond doubt that the IB officers did not torture the persons interrogated. I demand systematic interrogation of Nambinarayan, Raman Srivastava and Sudhir Kumar Sharma, another suspect in the counterintelligence case.

The chief did not agree on the plea that secret video-operations by the IB should not be exposed to public glare. We had shared 3 videotapes, which had convinced the High Court. What was the harm in sharing the rest of the tapes? After all these tapes could have been treated as secret materials and

viewed by the High Court in camera. There was no law in the country that prohibited IB to produce evidences before a court of law in national interest. It only required government permission. How could the government refuse permission when it had already allowed production of 3 tapes? The dictum of departmental security could not stand in the way of concluding a palpably clear counterintelligence case. However, Pathak's reluctance to face the truth had caused irreparable damage to the agency and individual officers.

As the relationship between the IB and the CBI started deteriorating very fast I decided to sound the PM through a Congress friend that he should separate the political considerations from the essence of the espionage case. There was need for augmenting the security measures around the ISRO establishments all over the country as we were in receipt of some reports that Pakistan was on the verge of testing Ghouri missiles, which had heavily borrowed upon Indian missile technology, in addition to importing know how from North Korea. A senior officer of the PMO discounted the possibility of Pakistan using Indian technology. I wanted to have an exclusive meeting with the ISRO chief. That did not fructify. All the doors were suddenly closed on my face.

As the ISRO event kept on rocking the country I was sounded out by a political friend who enjoyed proximity to the PM that I should support the views of the CBI and say that the IB and Kerala police officers had wilfully maltreated the Maldivian nationals and the Indian scientists. He promised me a plum post-retirement appointment. The pressure from within the organisation and from friends of the Prime Minister had perplexed me. The ISRO case was not a minor operational commitment. It had all the ingredients of a solid counterintelligence case, which could prove that sensitive organisations like the ISRO had also been targeted and penetrated by the ISI. The political masters and the key bureaucrats were not ready to buy the thesis.

Nevertheless I rejected the gracious post-retirement appointment.

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On the 30th January 1995 night I received call from the Director IB, D. C. Pathak. He described me as an '*anti-national person, who had deliberately tried to frame the son of the PM in the ISRO espionage case*'. I tried to argue that it was he, who had overruled me and enclosed the in-house working sheet with his report, which had mentioned the need for interrogation of the son of the PM. The confused person blabbered out something, which was unintelligible.

Next morning, the day of my removal from service, I was informed by a colleague that the Director IB had sent another report on January 30th night contradicting what all he had so far conveyed to the government in his earlier reports. His latest report, he claimed, was based on 'independent verification' conducted by him.

Pathak simply capitulated. He betrayed the trust of the entire organisation and especially the trust of colleagues like Mathew John, Srikumar, S. Jayaprakash and Bishambhar, all belonging to the Kerala unit of the IB. Several officers of the Central Interrogation Team also received stinkers from the CBI in the form of charge sheet. We were utterly disillusioned by the cowardice of our General and his inability to protect the organisation. I rued the day I had recommended him to the Cabinet Secretary.

I was forced to retire from the Indian Police Service on January 31st.

From that night itself the IB placed surveillance on me and my telephone calls. My wife was pestered by 'friends' in the IB to persuade me to remain silent. On February 2nd a speeding van tried to hit against my car. That night itself I received calls threatening me with dire consequences if I did

not maintain silence on ISRO case. On top of it a sincere friend in the IB visited me and advised to leave the house temporarily as the government was planning a raid on grounds that I had secreted valuable government document at my home without proper authority.

On advice of my personal friends my wife and I went to hiding in Delhi at a friend's home and returned to our government quarter after five days. By that time I had consulted my children in Jeddah and Ahmedabad and decided to declutch from the entire event. I did not want to jeopardise the security of my family. The government, I knew well, was capable of inflicting any injury on them and me, if I tried to expose the machinations of the mighty person at 7 Race Course Road.

This decision was hastened more by a sudden detection of breast cancer of my wife. We suppressed the disturbing information from our children and continued with preventive treatment. The painful development forced me disengage from ISRO espionage case and suing the government for taking biased political decision against me.

Sunanda, my wife, finally succumbed to cancer in September 2001.

My political friend in the ruling party, R. K. Dhawan and industrialist Dhirubhai Ambani offered me lucrative jobs. Still suffering from the shocks of ignominious removal and detection of cancer of my wife, I resolved not to serve any boss in any system-government or private. I decided to take up again my pen, turn a freelance journalist and an author.

I had earned freedom and wanted to live and die a free man.

EPILOGUE

Intelligence is a tool of statecraft. It helps the state to maintain peace at home and make war and peace abroad. The intelligence community has served the bygone warriors, kings and monarchs. They are now servants of the people; at least they are presumed to be the servants of the representatives of the people in an elected constitutional democracy.

The trade has its own glamour and charisma, which is, in fact, derived glamour from the State Establishment. Like dark and dwarf stars the intelligence community cannot advertise its presence and emit its own glow. It emits the glow of the people it serves. If an agency like the CIA is termed 'rogue', it reflects the 'roguish' character of the ruler of the day.

The days of kings and queens have changed in many countries real and free elected democracy and constitutional liberty have substituted the draconian rules of dictators and controlled democracies. The intelligence fraternity is supposed to serve the System and the people who support the System, through expression of free will.

Has this goal been achieved in the real democracies? The candid answer is: yes and no. Yes, to some extent, in case of countries like the USA, UK and France, where the constitutional controls and accountability systems catch up with erring leaders like Nixon, Bush and Blair. The Iraq war fiasco has started catching up with Bush, whose election to the highest post has been subjected to scrutiny. Mounting evidence that his government had fudged the intelligence reports has already cornered Blair. However, the Establishment in the free democracies still tries to misuse the intelligence community.

The pseudo democratic countries and the countries shackled to tin pot dictators, religious and ideological theocrats, and military junta cannot help but suffer the excesses of their intelligence establishments, which are extension of the power hubs.

Unfortunately for India, a supposed free democratic country, the intelligence and investigation community have not been freed from the shackles of State Establishment. They are not accountable to the elected parliament and legislatures. The government can afford to breach the privacy of the citizens and unleash the agencies to penalise people who oppose the Establishment.

As an intelligence operator I had violated the constitutional norms on several occasions. I was a lonely traveller as far as my political proclivities were concerned. The quarrelling squirrels of conscience tormented me. I accept the responsibility of my political linkages, which did not arise out of pure professional requirement.

That politics has percolated down to each and every segment of the nation has been proved beyond doubt, from day one, after substitution of the imperial regime by the elected democracy. But several landmark political decisions, be it the Punjab imbroglio or the Kashmir fiasco, were dictated by petty political interests of the politicians.

The generated fault lines like the Bodo, Gorkha, UNLF, ULFA and TNLF have amply proved that the Indian political class do not understand the differences between minor political manipulation and major social, political, ethnic, and economic crevices they create for hanging on to the rotten twig, called power. They still try to divide the people with a view to rule. They are still busy at fragmenting the people on caste, creed and class lines with the sole purpose of generating favourable

vote banks. This cannot be permitted by a strong constitutional democracy with adequate liberty, freedom and accountability built in.

The ISRO counterespionage case has amply proved that the political masters are not concerned with national security. Only a few years later this point was hammered in again by the Kargil invasion by Pakistan. The government of the day denied the nation an opportunity to dissect the functioning mechanism of its Intelligence Establishment. The R&AW, IB and the Directorate of Military Intelligence were let off the hook without proper accounting of the causes of a Grand National Failure. It was no less a System Failure than the colossal failure in 1962, when the Chinese had caught the Indian Establishment catnapping under the Panchsheel umbrella.

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Intelligence is basically dependent on human resources. Intelligence is generated by trained professionals and the machines and gadgets contrived and deployed by them. The loveliest and purest diamond becomes the pride of a beauty queen's crown only when it is chiselled and polished by the master craftsman. Similarly, a raw piece of information is churned into intelligence by the trained and seasoned intelligence operator's, before the same is used by the policy makers.

The Indian Intelligence Bureau (IB), of which I was an integral part for 29 years, is usually manned by professionals. In spite of deficiency in training, human resources management and development and provisioning of logistics, the cutting edge level of the IB operators has proved their worth by dedicatedly serving the Bureau, Government and the people. At least 50% of the human resources are dedicated to their profession. I had the unique opportunity to work with some of the best intelligence operators at the cutting edge level. Like all other government departments rest of the 50% human resources are utilised in questionable manner.

In India an intelligence operator is considered as an officer. He is not an agent in the sense the CIA uses the word. He is equated with his rank-counterparts in the state and central police forces. He is often treated as a clerk. This is a big fallacy. The government of India should look into this malady and may like to confer upon the intelligence operators certain non-police characteristics and frame special service rules for them, as is prevalent in case of personnel of the Armed Forces. There is need for a change in structural as well as functional philosophy. It is hoped that the modern leadership of the IB will start thinking beyond the concepts framed by the Empire and perpetuated by the mandarins in the post-independent governments.

I have never acted in any fashion to embarrass the intelligence Bureau and the excellent corps of officers and men it has produced over decades. I have mentioned a few names of IB officers only to make the story cogent and relevant and to bring clarity to the canvas. I have not made any conscious effort to hurt any individual and disclosed the vital areas of functioning of the IB, which very competently guards the security of the country-as far as pure security and intelligence matters are concerned. It is a different matter that the agencies like the IB are suborned to the political interests of the party in power and the Prime Ministers and Home Ministers. In spite of political abuse and misuse the IB has been admirably discharging its security and intelligence related charters of work. It can do better if it is freed from the clutches of the politicians.

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Other points that require clarification and clear understanding are the issues of CORRUPTION and

CRIMINALISATION OF POLITICS/PUBLIC LIFE. Time and again hue and cry have been raised that Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi were corrupt. Scams and scandals are tossed up on frying pans as if rest of the national chefs are as clean as the white dhotis they wear. I am not an investigator and cannot produce evidences of personal corruption against any politician-be it Indira, Rajiv, Rao, Laloo Jadav and other ayarams-gayarams, and their bureaucratic collaborators.

According to my personal knowledge Indira Gandhi was not personally corrupt. I have seen Rajiv Gandhi from a close quarter. I strongly believe that he was not personally corrupt. His problem was that he was not the man of destiny to pilot a complex country like India. He believed in cheap gimmicks and he believed in bad advices offered by his 'friends' 'coterie members' and even his 'intelligence chief.' An intelligence chief cannot afford to be emotionally and ideologically identified with his main consumer. That situation generates severe intelligence fault lines. Rajiv Gandhi was trapped with such fault lines a number of times. I agree with an eminent journalist that while Sanjay's backseat driving was a 'reign of terror', Rajiv's cockpit piloting was a 'reign of error.'

For rest of the politicians I have no comment to offer, except P.V. Narasimha Rao. It is unfortunate that India was saddled with a man who was transformed from a teacher to *toshakhana* (treasure chest) manager.

I breathe with the hope that Indian people will soon rediscover the meanings of '*satyameva jayate*', national honesty and character. Sooner they do is better. Otherwise corruption, which oxidises the moral moorings of the nation, will sooner than later corrode away the national anchor-the Constitution-and throw the country back to the mercies of the looters and grabbers. The criminals have started making inroads into the mainstreams of national life. They sell and purchase at gunpoint. They also succumb easily to more powerful guns-the guns of the enemy of the nation.

Shall we trust them any longer?

I shall be happy if Open Secrets raise a national debate on the vital issue of making the intelligence and investigative agencies accountable to the elected Parliament under appropriate Act. After 57 years of independence a time has come to liberate the Intelligence and Investigation Establishments from the stranglehold of petty and visionless politicians.