



M.K. Kaw

AN OUTSIDER EVERYWHERE

Revelations by an Insider

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Prologue

When I wrote *Bureaucrazy: IAS Unmasked*, which was a kind of autobiography, in 1993 and when it achieved a phenomenal readership, it did occur to me that I had been unkind to my service and all my colleagues by painting a somewhat warped and twisted picture, in which the warts were most prominent.

At that time, I took two resolves:

- a) Write a book of anecdotes about stalwarts of the Service who became icons or did something memorable.
- b) Write my own autobiography.

While the first is still awaiting monumental research, the second project got a push because of the questions posed by my grandson Achintya. He has this interesting habit of asking for details that no one knows. I told him about my father and grandfather.

‘And who was Shivji’s father?’ asked the indefatigable Achintya.

‘It was Parmanand,’ I replied with a flourish.

Achintya was unfazed. ‘And who was Parmanand’s father?’ he quizzed.

‘It was a chap called Gulab Kaw,’ I said, but with a faint tremor in my voice. Achintya could sense that I had reached the end of my tether. He went for the kill.

‘And who was Gulab Kaw’s father?’ he wanted to know.

I did not know the answer, but I could sense a hundred questions lurking behind Achintya’s penetrating eyes. How did his Papoo meet his Mamma? How did I meet Mummy? Why did we run away from Kashmir? And so on and so forth!

The second reason I wrote my reminiscences was to give a feel of our times to the younger members of the IAS. I joined the Service in 1964 and spent the sixties, the seventies, the eighties and the nineties of the last century toiling for the nation. These were momentous times and circumstances changed dramatically over the decades.

I hope that I have been able to evoke the atmosphere and our response thereto. This candid narration will disabuse today’s generation from carrying the impression that their seniors had it easy and it is they who are bearing the brunt.

A word about the title. It is strange but true that all my life I have harboured the feeling that I do not belong and that I am some kind of an outsider.

Look at my education. I never went to a school. I have never sung nursery rhymes, taken part in school sports, worn a scholar’s badge or been declared the Head Boy of the school. Imagine my attempting a feeble joke with my colleagues in my last posting when I was presiding over the educational destiny of this country, ‘You will all agree that having never gone to a school myself, I am the best fitted to lay down the policy.’

When I joined the Service, there were any number of colleagues who were second or third generation bureaucrats. Some of these heaven-born bureaucrats would refer to ‘college’ and at first I wondered what they meant. Soon it dawned on me that St. Stephen’s College contributed so many candidates to the Service that they could afford to refer to their college as ‘College’ as if no other existed.

What did I have to offer in my turn? Punjab University (Camp) College, if you please, a college without a building of its own but run in the evening in buildings that belonged to schools. An evening college for poor refugee students who were working for a living. If someone asked me about the college I attended, I would mumble 'Punjab University'. The pitiful expression on my face would deter most interlocutors from further questioning.

But I need not have worried. No one really needed to know which school and college I had attended. As soon as I opened my mouth, my accent revealed my origins.

This 'outsider' feeling was most pronounced when I wrote poems in English. At first I was not sure that what I was writing was poetry. I wrote words as they came, without trying alliteration and sustained metaphor or whatever. I found that most of the other writers had a Master's degree in English Literature, even if they were writing in Hindi. They knew what they were doing.

Even today, with so many books of poetry behind me, I am still not sure whether I am a bureaucrat who dabbles in poetry and is tolerated because of his status, or I am basically a poet who happens to earn his daily bread through the IAS.

I am an outsider because I have no roots. I was born in Srinagar, Kashmir. I hold a State Subject Certificate of J&K State. I call myself a Kashmiri Pandit. But after the Seventh Exodus of 1990, there is scant possibility of our return to the valley of our ancestors. In Delhi, where we live in Pamposh Enclave, known locally as 'Kashmiri Colony', we are outsiders. And in Himachal Pradesh, which is now my parent cadre, although I am technically a Himachali because I spent 15 years in the state, they treat me for all practical purposes as non-Himachali.

Above all, having been in the IAS for 37 years, I have never felt that I am an IAS officer. People who meet me often remark that I do not speak or behave like an IAS officer does. I come across as a humble person.

They do not know the awful truth. I have so much to be humble about.

Chapter 1

My family tree

First, my name. The family name is Kaw. I am a Kashmiri Pandit. All family names amongst us Kashmiris are sarcastic appellations coined behind our back by jealous neighbours with acerbic tongues.

My father's cousin Nila Kanth Ganju, who became a judge and wrote a book on the Customary Law in Kashmir, had a story about the way these surnames were coined.

There was a Niranjana Nath, who was quite indistinguishable from other Niranjana Nathas in the vicinity. The local wags looked around and noticed a mulberry tree in his courtyard. So they coined the word Tul (mulberry) as his nickname. He got wind of it and didn't like it. He cut the tree, but this left a stump. They called him Mond (stump in Kashmiri). He dug up the roots, but this made a ditch and they called him Khoda (ditch in Kashmiri). He quickly filled up the hole, but this created a mound and the nickname changed to Teng (mound in Kashmiri). Thereafter, he lost patience and hence the name Teng stuck to the family ever since.

So, why the nickname Kaw in our case? Kaw literally means 'crow'. Our elders speculate that the original Kaw, from whom all Kaws in the world have originated, must have had crows congregating on his roof. Maybe, he was a philanthropist who liked to throw rice balls on the surrounding roofs and ledges and the crows gathered for these tidbits. Maybe, he was as black as a crow. Maybe, he behaved omnivorously like a crow. But somehow the surname stuck and we are all the beneficiaries.

In my case, the surname generated a lot of humour. I remember my childhood. Whenever I came out of the house, Som Nath who ran a draper's shop across the street would remark to all and sundry, 'Hey! The Kav bachcha (baby crow) has come. Kav bachcha! How are you today?' and would burst into peals of laughter at his own witticism.

Very often, my friends, when they wanted to mock me, would sing this popular ditty:

'Kav bat kavo

Khechre kavo

Kav ta kaavin saatiy hyeth

Gangabal shrana karith

Gurte meche tyoka karith

Walba saani nave lare

Bata kheney'

('O crow of Kashmiri Pandit lineage! O crow fond of khichri! Bring all the he-crows and she-crows, after taking a bath at Gangabal, putting a tilak of gurtu clay, come to our new house, to have your meals').

Little did I know that in the fullness of time I would marry a Gurtu girl! My wife Raj was officially a Razdan in her academic certificates, but the family itself had earned a nickname of 'Gurtu'. This was in recognition of the fact that they took rituals very seriously. On Shravana Purnimashi, they used to get some gurtu clay, yellow in colour and of high quality, from the Shankaracharya hill. It was from this holy clay that the idol of Parthivshwar Shiva in the form of lingam would be fashioned for the Shivratri festivities.

Years later, my batchmates in the IAS Academy at Mussourie liked my surname so much that they made a regular sing-song routine out of it. Whenever I entered the lecture hall, they would sing in unison, ‘Kaaaow...Kaaaoo...kaaaoo...aaaoo...aaaoo... aaaoo’ and when I left, they would shout with great relish, ‘Kaaaow...Kaaaoo...kaaaoo...jaaaoo...jaaaoo...jaaaoo’.

And my best friend Omesh Saigal made a joke at once original and pungent about me and Asha Behl. ‘You know we are from the 1964 batch, the unique batch which has a Mister Cow and a Miss Behl (Bull)’.

But the surname has not been a liability on the whole. To the good luck of all the Kaws, there was a famous Kao, an officer of the Indian Police, who was a shadowy but powerful figure during Indira Gandhi’s long tenure. The redoubtable Kao created the RAW, the so-called Research and Analysis Wing, named as such probably on the pattern of the MI 5, which called itself ‘Universal Exports’ in the James Bond novels. Everywhere I went, people mistook me either for the great man himself or at the least his son or close relative. This lent me a certain charisma and an aura of invulnerability.

Add to this the rumour someone floated that D.P. Dhar, another Indira protégé and one time Foreign Minister, was my father-in-law and I had it made. With such powerful relatives, it was but natural for people to assume that I had direct access to the prime minister’s house and that I was not to be trifled with. You can rest assured that I did not issue a clarification in the press, disclaiming these non-existent relationships!

I liked my name so much that, in my later years, when I took to satirical writing, I named my column in the Times of India as ‘Kaw Caw’. This title was renewed later for my column in Naad. Currently, I also use it for my blog. After my retirement, we shifted to the house my father had built for the family in 1976 but forgotten to name. We held a family conclave and finally plumped for ‘Kaw Aul’ or ‘The Crows’ Nest’.

So much about my family name. Now about my name proper ‘Maharaj Krishen’. I believe, in those days, names had fashions governing them. There was a time when Naths were fashionable. Thus, my father was Prem Nath and many of his contemporaries were Onkar Nath, Niranjana Nath, Hriday Nath and so on. Then came the big wave of the Lals. My uncles were named Mohan Lal, Moti Lal, Makhan Lal, Chaman Lal and so on. I was born when the public opinion had moved towards Krishen. One of my cousins is Rup Krishen, my younger brother is Predhiman Krishen and so on.

My family tree is quite brief. The earliest progenitor whom I have been able to identify is a chap called Gulab Kaw, about whom nothing is known except his name and the fact that it was he who shifted from somewhere to Mallapora. Gulab Kaw had four children, a son and three daughters.

The son, Parmanand Kaw was a petty revenue official. However hard I may wish to assume otherwise, it is unfortunately true that he was not even a patwari (village accountant). He was probably attached to a patwari, but those were other days. We are told (and this could be a hyperbole) that he had a blue horse (neela gurra in Kashmiri) and he used to go to his office on horseback. This was apparently today’s equivalent of travelling by a Mercedes.

Another index of his prosperity was that he had two wives. His first wife Sukhi was anything but what her name suggested. She was childless, so how could she be sukhi (happy)? Imagine her dismay when Parmanand returned from one of his pastoral tours with a young beauty (Parvati) from rural Manigam in tow. Apparently, Parmanand had secretly married her and brought her along as his wife. Not able to protest in any effective manner, Sukhi did something unique. Our ancestral house had an upper storey with a floor made of mud plaster. At night, while the house slept, Sukhi dug the floor and

dropped a fistful of smouldering coals through the crevice right on top of the newlyweds who were trying to consummate their marriage in the bedroom below. History does not record who got the burns and where. It only says that the bride's clothes were completely gutted.

Sukhi had no issues. She was probably left to fend for herself. When she died, her husband was away gambling with his friends and did not even attend her funeral.

Despite the initial ordeal by fire, Parvati was able to give birth to three children. She had two daughters, Janaki and Mughlani, but like all Hindu women, she longed for a male issue. She used to go every day to the Kali Temple at Khankah Mohalla and pray sincerely to the goddess to take away everything and give her a son. Soon afterwards, Parmanand was caught in some misdemeanour and removed from his post. The son was born and was named Shivji. Our family house was also totally gutted soon after his birth.

This was Shivji, my grandfather. He was an only son and was brought up with great care. My father, whom we used to call Papaji, told me that Shivji was an intelligent and hardworking lad. So well did he perform in the matriculation examination that the Maharaja of Kashmir offered to send him to British India for higher education. Had he availed himself of the offer, he would have been one of the very first doctors in the Valley and our family history might have been vastly different.

As it is, Parvati was reluctant to let her son go so far out of her sight and Shivji stayed back to complete his intermediate and take up a job as a teacher. He rose to be the Principal of Babapore Middle School.

Shivji was married to Yemberzal, daughter of Kainth Ram Baqaya, a petition writer. I remember him as a dignified grandpa with a serious mein and a grey pheran, who used to go to the local temple every morning. When I accompanied him, I saw him doff his garments and enter the cold river, mumbling a shivering shloka (hymn). Then with a dripping shranpat (a kind of underwear) and a kamandal, he would go inside the temple and pour water over the stone lingam.

Another daily chore was the buying of baked bread and milk. I accompanied him on these expeditions. The incentive was that Tarak halwai, who was a bald man of indeterminate age and kept on stirring the milk being heated in a huge kadai (pan), would smile at me. When he gave the milk, I would extend my tiny palm and say, 'Tarak Kak, malai!' He would pretend to be annoyed at this demand, but would soon take a bit of malai and put it on my palm.

Yemberzal was the pivot around whom the entire household revolved. Although she had pockmarks on her face, she exuded so much love that she appeared to be the handsomest grandma one could have.

Yemberzal or Dyed, as we respectfully called her, used to bully Shivji or Tathyaji as we called our grandpa. She was a dominating personality and poor, straightforward Tathyaji was no match for her. This tradition of overpowering females continued in my father's time and I have inherited it as well. I am not a wee bit surprised when I see Urvashi, my daughter-in-law, bullying my poor simpleton son, Anurag. God knows when this gundagardi (hooliganism) of women in our family will come to an end?

A true indication of the simplicity and straightforwardness of Tathyaji was the way his shirt sleeves were always unbuttoned. It gave him a renunciate's look. When I read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna later, I was always reminded of my grandfather and his simple ways.

My father, Prem Nath, was the eldest surviving child of his parents. Shivji and Yemberzal had ten children, of whom only five survived. Prem Nath grew up to be a very handsome young man, with fair

colour and a ruddy complexion. He looked like an Englishman. He had fine grayish-green eyes and a charming smile. He was very intelligent and passed his examinations with ease. He was a good swimmer and I remember him crossing over often to the other side of the river Jhelum and back, when the Jhelum was still a river and not the dirty nullah it has now been reduced to.

My mother was the younger of two daughters of Pandit Sat Lal Sadhu. The Sadhus had a very impressive past. My great grandfather Pandit Shivji Sadhu was renowned as the Copper King of Kashmir. He owned a huge mansion in Rainawari, had opened a school and patronized the local temple. Sat Lal grew up in the lap of luxury. He was always attired fashionably in the most expensive sherwanis and suitings. He had a personal tonga (horse-drawn carriage) at his command. He married twice into two very prosperous families. His first wife died early and he married again. He was on top of the world, when tragedy struck.

Legend has it that, after his father's death, Sat Lal had become highly arrogant. He did not care for sadhus and sanyasis and had once the temerity to strike a sadhu in the face with the horsewhip that he carried at the time. It is said that the sadhu uttered a shraap (curse) that destroyed the family.

He had been persuaded to invest heavily in speculative transactions in wheat. The traders in Lahore, who sensed a threat from this upstart from Srinagar, ganged up and manipulated the market in such a manner as to create a crash. Sat Lal was sent to civil prison. He had to declare himself bankrupt and his creditors took away all his property. The valuables and rugs that were smuggled into the houses of friends and neighbours were never seen again. The family had to move to a small house in Bana Mohalla and to make do with a shop where they sold and hired out utensils.

Meanwhile, there was personal tragedy as well. My grandmother Tulsi fell victim to tuberculosis and died at the young age of 28, leaving behind two daughters Kamla and Prabha. My mother has always accused her father of neglecting his wife and not paying her enough attention. One of her pet theories is that her mother died of heartbreak and not disease. In support of her thesis, she quotes the incident when one of her maternal uncles saw Tulsi sleeping on the cold bare floor outside the door of her bedroom, from where my grandfather had expelled her.

Sat Lal now had no property, no wife and two daughters on his hands. He decided to marry off the elder one to Amarnath Adalati. While the preparations for the wedding were on, Prabha complained that she would be lonely without her sister and asked innocently as to whom she would sleep with at night. Sat Lal was forced to look for a match for Prabha as well.

As luck would have it, the utensil shop of the Sadhus was taken on rent from my paternal grandfather. Sat Lal would often see the young and dashing Prem Nath going to college. He found out that the boy was intelligent and good at studies. Although the Kaws were not at all comparable to the Sadhus in status, the marriage was fixed and my 17-year-old father engaged to my 11½-year-old mother.

An incident that shows the romantic disposition of my father was his swimming down the river from the bank near our house to the bank near the Sadhus. He would surface under a boat or a doonga and keep a vigil on the windows and balconies of the in-laws, hoping to catch a glimpse of his intended. One day, he set out on an expedition of this type and dove below the surface in a fit of bravado. His friends kept their eyes peeled for his appearance after a decent interval. When Prem Nath did not resurface, they panicked and raised an alarm that the oldest Kaw boy had been drowned. Hundreds of people fanned out in all directions to search for the young hero. He was discovered some time later, hanging onto the pier of Fateh Kadal, hoping someone would notice him and rescue

him. Fortunately, he was discovered soon and rescued before he froze to death.

Both sisters were married in June 1937. My father confided in me that his family could not afford to stitch a new sherwani for his marriage. He had to approach a more affluent relative and borrow a sherwani for the D-Day.

Another tidbit was that although it was June, it snowed. This was taken to be an auspicious sign. Seen in today's perspective, it might just have been an early warning against global warming.

Chapter 2

Early childhood

Prem Nath being the eldest son, I was the first grandson in the family. My mother was barely sixteen and a half when I was born. She was a motherless girl of an erstwhile well-to-do family who had been married beneath her station. The Kaws were financially quite deficient and, being the first daughter-in-law, many of the physical chores had to be performed by her. She was a very thin girl and would find it hard to carry pitchers full of water from a common tap of the locality and up two flights of stairs. My maternal grandfather took note of the situation and financed a tap in our courtyard, so that his daughter would not have to fetch water from a distance.

My mother was a shy girl of tender age and kept the fact of her pregnancy a secret from her in-laws. On the day I was born, the ladies were seated in a circle, doing the kitchen chores. My grandmother's sister Gona Jigri noticed that my mother did not look too well. In order to test her hypothesis, she asked my mother to make kababs out of mincemeat. When she tried to make kababs, her fingers could not hold the meat with any strength. Gona Jigri bit her tongue and signalled a coded message to her sister. Yemberzal took her daughter-in-law to a bedroom on the first floor. They found that the water bubble had burst. Someone was rushed to the local midwife Mokhta, who came running and soon had me out safe and sound.

I remember this Mokhta. Years later, I went to my ancestral house in Srinagar for my wedding. My mother called specially for her, gave her some gifts and made me touch her feet. Mokhta was old but indulged in light persiflage with me, saying, 'Oh Maharaajaa! It is good that you have not forgotten the one who brought you into this world. For years earlier, I had brought your father also into this world!'

My uncle Mohan Lal remembers that his mother asked him to go to a nearby shop to note down the exact time of birth, so as to facilitate the making of my horoscope. We did not have a clock or a wristwatch in the house. Mohan Lal ran out and came back with the news that it was 2.30 p.m. The date was 12 November, 1941.

It is generally agreed that my birth was an important event in the family. There was no sugar in the market due to the ongoing Second World War. But the poor family served tea to everyone who came to congratulate them and honey was used instead of sugar. This was considered to be a great luxury. My aunt, Behanji says it was as if light had come into the household at my birth. I was never allowed to be placed on the ground, but was handed over from lap to lap. Being the only baby grandson for a while, I was fondled by everyone and in a joint family that meant a lot of attention.

My earliest memory is that of my parents in the bedroom. I was a precocious child and even at a tender age I was a mischievous lad. When they thought I was asleep, I actually made a pretence of it and saw what was happening with half-open lids. What I remember is my father singing romantic songs and stealing tender kisses. After a while, I would be lulled to sleep.

Thus my initiation to the world of music was at an early age. I learnt the Kashmiri song:

'Cha kamyoo soni myani bhrama dith nyoonakho,
Che kyohozi gayiya myanya duy...'

(Who is the girl who stole you from me, O beloved!

Why did you get estranged from me?)

Another memory is that of going to the Adalatis, my mausaji. My cousin Boba (now known as Dr Onkar Nath Kaul settled in Gwalior and owning the famous Kaul Hospital) was a year older. One evening, we both stood on the balcony of the top storey and pissed into the dark night. The idea was to see whose trajectory would reach farther. At this distance in time, it is difficult for me to remember whose went farther. In any case, does it matter?

I am told that I foxed everyone in my house by telling Tathyaji, who was a martinet and was feared by everyone, ‘Tathi, bo manov na.’ (Tathyaji, I will not agree). Everyone wanted to know what I would not agree to, but I did not elaborate further. Luckily, I was too young to be taken seriously or else I would have received a few whacks of the cane.

I was lucky to be the only child for more than five years. So I was nursed on mother’s milk for a fairly long time. As my grandmother had also delivered a child barely three years prior to my advent, she would pamper me by nursing me as long as she could. I had the somewhat unique privilege of being nursed by both my mother and grandmother. That probably explains my lifelong fascination for big-breasted females. As an aside, it might interest the reader to know that I stole many surreptitious glances at the urojdwai (twin breasts— Kalidasa’s expression, not mine) of my intended Raj, before I said yes to the marriage. Also, to complete Dyedi’s contribution to my future domestic felicity, she advised me to go for a woman with flesh on her, so that one felt comforted by the soft undulations, rather than have a skinny woman, where bone would clatter against bone.

Meanwhile, Papaji had moved on in life. He started with tuitions while he was still in college. After he graduated, he got a job as a Mahaldar in the Customs Department. Soon after his appointment, he was posted to Lachchmanpattan, a godforsaken place in the back of beyond. When the elders took counsel with friends, they were strongly advised not to send the young Prem Nath to that desolate place. The government considered the station so dangerous that they even sanctioned a funeral allowance to those who had the temerity to go there.

My father decided to try his luck and it is good that he did so. The few years that he spent there were so deeply etched in his memory that in his old age he would often recount his adventures to whosoever would listen.

The route to Lachchmanpattan was via Rawalpindi. The first time he joined his duties, he camped at Rawalpindi. As advised by well-wishers, he contacted the herdsmen who used to travel in caravans for safety. They were happy to meet the new Mahaldar and asked him to be ready for departure at 3 a.m. the next morning. In the dark of night, the caravan left, with Papaji being given the royal treatment. They plied him with goodies on the way and carried his baggage on their ponies. After three days of marching on foot, he reached his destination safe and sound. This was in itself a feat, as brigands and dacoits, who infested the remote area, would attack many caravans.

Having settled down in his quarters, Prem Nath found a major hurdle in his job situation. The Inspector, who was the boss of the Customs Post, was a greedy officer. There used to be a venerable tradition that the unofficial earnings were divided in a certain manner. Of a rupee, which used to be equal to 16 annas in those days, four annas went to the Inspector, two annas each to the four Mahaldars and the rest was divided among the eight peons. This Inspector, however, insisted that he would take six annas in a rupee, instead of four. As the others did not submit to this blackmail, all traffic had been diverted to an alternative route and the earnings had therefore dropped to zero.

My father took this up as a challenge to his ingenuity. Having found that the Inspector was adamant

in his resolve and unlikely to budge, he persuaded the others to accept the revised formula. After some initial hesitation, they agreed. He conveyed the good news to his boss, who sent messengers forthwith to the traders to resume their use of the Lachchmanpattan route. When the trade started, money started flowing into all their pockets.

The four years Papaji spent in Lachchmanpattan were so lucrative that he was able to send money orders to his father. He was able to repay all the family debts. He brought precious gifts for all members of the family. Even then he was left with a substantial sum, which he used as a nest egg for many years. He considered this as the golden period of his life.

There is a strange dichotomy here. Although Papaji gave glowing reports of his time in Lach Chmanpattan, he was a great votary of honesty. He told us of his acclaimed probity when he was later a Rationing Inspector in Delhi. Somehow, we children never shared his enthusiasm for Lach Chmanpattan and took it as an aberration in an otherwise perfect personality.

Chapter 3

My strange education

I had the most bizarre education. I was admitted for a few months to the local Jabri School (school meant to impart compulsory education), a name given to a new institution set up by the Maharaja to compulsorily educate his reluctant subjects. Maharaja Hari Singh was an enlightened ruler and was among the first princely states to introduce free and compulsory education at the elementary level. It was a common sight to see wailing Muslim children of sweepers, fishermen and boatmen, their ears held firmly by the overzealous minions of the Maharaja, raising bedlam as they were led to the school.

One memory I have of this unique institution is that of the PT. We had a daily regimen of ten exercises, which we performed to the beat of 'Ek do, ek do, ek ek do' (One two, one two...). The last one was the best as it involved jumping on the feet, with palms hitting our buttocks with force. All of us participated in Mashak Number Dus (Exercise Number 10) with gusto, as it raised a lot of dust.

Another thing I vividly recall is a strict teacher, who was fond of beating his erring pupils on the soft part of their buttocks, where no bones would be broken. At the worst his strokes would leave red marks that would disappear after a while. Whenever he felt inclined that way, he would bray loudly for Nabira. Nabira was a hefty muscular boy of indeterminate age who had probably spent the last five years of his scholastic life in the same class.

Nabira would promptly get up and lift the unfortunate victim on to his shoulders, at a height and in a position most suited to Masterji's designs. His reward was a total exemption from the rigours of classroom studies, which he abhorred.

This school had a wonderful way of making us remember the multiplication table. One boy would be made to stand and sing the table line by line. All of us mindlessly and melodiously sang after him, while the math's teacher dozed in his chair, waking up only if there was a break in the sing-song routine. Later, when my children went to public schools and I saw them fumble with the most elementary calculations, I most proudly sang the entire table to them, not only up to ten but up to sixteen, filling them with wonder at my fabulous memory.

I imbibed knowledge tangentially, when my uncle Chaman Lal studied at my home with my paternal grandfather Tathyaji or when my maternal uncle Ram Krishen got his coaching from my maternal grandfather Babalal. Both grandpas were martinets and their pupils were terrified of them. Both received some or the other kind of corporal punishment when they made a mistake.

I had the unique position of not being a formal pupil. I was just a bystander. So while I absorbed the lessons without being taught, I never received punishment. At times, the formal pupils would make a mistake and I gave the correct answer. That made the two teachers really mad. 'See, even a child knows the answer! You should be ashamed of yourself.'

I distinctly remember one occasion when my Mamaji was asked what 1 multiplied by 0 was equal to. To his ill luck, he said, 'One'. I quickly interjected '0'. I could see Babalal looking keenly at me, his brain grappling with an ominous possibility. Soon thereafter, Babalal called me to the shop attached to our house and gave me my first lesson in geometry. 'This is a point. This is a line. This is a straight line...' etc.

I learnt much later that Babalal had read somewhere that 99 percent of what a human being knows is learnt in the first six years of his childhood. Looking at my quick intelligence, he started toying with

the idea that I was possibly a fast learner and could be given a crash course in education. The net result was that I started studying at home and did not attend school most of the time.

Over the years, I learnt English and Mathematics from my father, Hindi from Baitathya (my eldest uncle Mohanlalji), Science from Saibaji (my second uncle Hriday Nathji), Urdu from Tathyaji and geometry from Babalal.

Meanwhile, unknown to me, momentous events were sweeping the nation. India achieved freedom. Gandhiji came to Srinagar and like thousands of others I went to Sheetalnath, which was then the hub of Kashmiri Pandit politics in the state. I went with Babalal, who was a leading light of the community.

Babalal had a bicycle and he was a familiar sight at both social and political functions. He was the editor of Nav Jeevan for many years and used to move around with famous leaders like Kashyap Bandhu and Dr Shambhu Nath Peshin. He was a great votary of reform in respect of widow remarriage, women's education, gender parity, simpler marriages and so on.

I remember that I complained to Babalal that I could not see Gandhiji. He lifted me up on his shoulder, which was how I caught my sole fleeting glimpse of this great man. After some time, Gandhi started speaking on the mike, but apart from noticing that he had a feeble voice and a peculiar stammer, I could not understand a word of what he said. I could see that older people also had this problem, but they did not seem to mind. Gandhiji was a mahatma (great soul) and for most of them the darshan (sight) itself was a great benediction.

Some months later, when news of Gandhiji's assassination broke, there was an ominous silence in the city. There was blind stupefaction on all faces. People did not eat on the day he was cremated. It was as if a close relative had passed away.

Papaji was transferred to Jammu. For the first time, he took his family along. By this time I had lost a 15-day-old brother Jang Bahadur and acquired another one. Predhiman came to us in February 1948.

In Jammu, Papaji was posted at Ambphalla customs which was close to a jail. Every hour, we heard the jail staff sound the gong which told us the time. I also remember the ferocious monkeys, who took away our clothes hung outside for drying. Sometimes, they raided the kitchen and took away chapattis or whatever they could lay their paws on.

Jammu was intolerably hot and we longed for the day when Papaji would again be posted to the Valley. But, unknown to us, fate had written a vastly different scenario for us.

At that time, I was too young to grasp the happenings around me. I have reconstructed the history of those times from the accounts narrated by others.

Towards the end of 1947, Kashmir was invaded by Pakistan in order to wrest it by force. Events moved fast and a reluctant king was persuaded to sign the Deed of Accession to India. The Indian Army landed in Srinagar and pushed back the invaders. The power passed, in real terms, from Dogra rulers to Kashmiri Muslim rulers.

The Dogra rulers had not been extra kind to the Kashmiri Pandits, nor did they discriminate against the Kashmiri Muslims. But at least, during their rule, we had not suffered religious persecution and they had appointed us mainly to clerical and lower supervisory jobs, while retaining the cream for themselves. Papaji, with his usual sense of humour, would recreate the scene of how a Dogra boy got a job. His father would pay obeisance at the Court. After a while, the Maharaja would notice him and his son. The Maharaja would ask whether the son was educated. The father would inform him that the

lad had passed the matriculation examination. 'Can he distinguish between his full signature and his initials?' The Maharajah would counter anxiously. If the answer was yes, the Maharaja appointed the boy forthwith as a Magistrate where a really educated Kashmiri Pandit would guide him where to append his full signature and where an initial would do. The bulk of the Muslims being illiterate, their share in government jobs was not proportionate to their share of population.

All this changed during the Muslim rule. The Muslims gradually ousted us from all positions and jobs and appointed their Muslim brethren instead, howsoever ill-educated and ineligible they might have been. Kashmiri Pandit boys who graduated from colleges found that all prospects of employment for them had dried up in their home state and they had no option but to migrate to various places in the Indian plains. It was thus that both my uncles Baitathya and Saibaji shifted to Delhi.

At first, Papaji did not realize that times had drastically changed. Even when his younger siblings sent him glowing accounts of Delhi, he did not budge. He was holding a government job then and he could not just chuck it and go. But the rude awakening came when he applied for the post of a Forest Ranger. The main test was a physical one. All candidates had to run up the Sankaracharya hill.

Papaji stood first in the race and naturally thought that the job was in his pocket. When he saw the list of selected candidates and found his own name missing, something broke inside his heart. He realized that the Muslims had started a deliberate policy of discrimination and Kashmir was no longer for us. That day he wrote a letter to his brothers in Delhi.

Resultantly, we returned to our ancestral home and Papaji left for Delhi.

At that time, I was eight and hardly in a position to grasp the mighty forces that were about to engulf us. I later learnt that Kashmiri Pandits had borne the brunt of Islamic fundamentalism for the last seven centuries. We had been ruled by the Sultans, the Mughals, the Afghans, the Sikhs and the Dogras. History books were replete with accounts of bloody persecutions of the Pandits. They had been killed, their women raped, jaziya imposed on them, their sacred threads removed and burnt in terms of maunds. Legend claimed that in the time of Sikander Butshikan things were so bad that only eleven families of the Pandits were left in the Valley. The rest were either killed or converted or just ran away.

These three options were not fortuitous. These were real-life alternatives offered to us by our oppressors at each exodus. The slogan was, 'Raliv, Chaliv ya Galiv.' We could either get converted to Islam, or run away from the Valley or be killed. Some tyrant with a poetic temperament had evolved these rhyming options over the centuries.

Since then, history had often repeated itself. The migration that started around 1947 was the Sixth Great Migration. But at that time we did not realize this. That is the interesting fact about the Kashmiri Pandits. They have been the leading historiographers of India, what with Kalhana and Jonaraja. But as individuals they have no sense of history. We easily forgive and forget!

Chapter 4

We become Dilliwallas

God knows what mental picture Papaji had formed of Delhi. He had never travelled beyond Jammu and had never seen a train. He somehow reached Faridkot House, which was the palace of the Maharaja of Faridkot and was led by his brothers to one of the 'rooms' at the back. This was not a room, it was a stable. It was dark and dingy and there was no electricity. Eight Kashmiri Pandit boys had taken this stable on rent, to be used as a chummary. There was a common tap and a common toilet.

Even though this first encounter with life in Delhi was not very encouraging, Papaji took it in his stride. He was just thirty and had all the resilience of youth. Very quickly he fell in line with the new routine. His brothers and other roommates showed him the ropes of how to hunt for a job.

Luckily for all of them, the Central Government offices were terribly short of manpower, as many had left the country or even this world at a time when new departments were coming up to meet the challenges facing the country. Papaji soon landed a job and was astounded to find that the Central Government was a very good paymaster. The scale of pay he had left behind was Rs 30–50 whereas the post of lower division clerk in Delhi gave him a princely starting salary of Rs 150. With his modest way of living, Papaji saved the bulk of his pay and was soon able to send money to his father back home.

With his three oldest sons working in Delhi, my grandfather had hardly any incentive to stay back in Srinagar. In 1950, he retired from service and in November 1950 we all moved to Delhi.

It was a large family and there were a number of us. My paternal grandparents Tathyaji and Ded, my parents Papaji and Mummy, my uncle Baitathya and his wife Mohan Rani, my second uncle Saibaji, my third uncle Bhaijan, my aunt Behanji, myself, my cousin Rupji, my younger brother Kakaji ... a full dozen.

The best accommodation we could afford at first was a peon's quarter in Sewanagar. It had a room and a kitchen. The room was 10'x 8' and the kitchen was 6'x 8'. That was it. The quarter was numbered D-418. I still remember it. All of us tried to fit into that accommodation. Most of us slept on the floor on a common single mattress. Gradually, we acquired charpoys and slept two to a cot in the open courtyard. There was a common bathroom and a common toilet for four quarters. Sometimes there was an emergency and the smaller kids were forced to ease themselves on an open drain.

During the day, you sat wherever you could. I had already got addicted to novels and some of my happiest memories are of the occasions when I climbed a huge mountain of piled bedding and became invisible to the rest of the family. There, invisible and inaudible, I vanished into the world of my storybooks and lived in an ambience of my own imagination. Till somebody remembered me and discovered me hidden on my perch, which was generally around mealtimes.

This habit of reading novels and other books outside the syllabus persisted in me all through my educational career. My mother, who was educated up to 5th standard was an astute woman. If I did not show particular enthusiasm for a book, it was obviously a course book. If I was glued to something, having forgotten the outside world entirely, it must be a novel. Her task throughout my educational career was to wean me away from 'novels'.

In this struggle, we evolved strategies and counter-strategies. I started reading a book inside another book. The inside book was a 'novel', while the outside one would be a course book. On

numerous occasions, my mother would raid me wherever I was hiding and pounce on the novel. The 'novel' was confiscated, but I soon devised methods of gaining access to my current 'novel' wherever she had hidden it.

In 1950 my younger sister Asha was born. I remember asking my father much later about how her birth became possible in a crowded single room apartment. By that time, I was grown up and Papaji confided in me the fact that the kitchen was used as a bedroom on alternate days by the two brothers.

An interesting story about her birth is part of our family legend. It appears that having got two sons, Papaji aspired to having a daughter. When he visited Hardwar, he went to the Mansadevi temple and expressed his wish for a female progeny. He tied a string to a tree in the temple courtyard. Later, when his wish was fulfilled, he ought to have gone back and untied a string in the same temple. But he forgot and no one really paid attention to this.

The scene shifts to 1968 and now my wife Raj is expecting a baby. Papaji, Raj and me—we all are prepared for a baby of either sex, but my mother is keen for a male child. When we find that a female baby has been born, we are all very happy. Some say that the goddess Lakshmi has herself incarnated in our family. But we can all sense the unspoken sorrow in Mummy's face. We take the first defensive step when we name her 'Iti', which means 'the end'. We are sending a message to the stars that she is the last female baby and we do not want any more.

Then someone recalls the birth of Asha and how genuinely happy we were on the day she was born and how we named her 'Asha' or the hope. And someone else thinks of the string Papaji had tied in the Mansadevi temple. And someone else recalls that since that fateful day when the 'Hope' arrived, we have had seven female babies in a row. Papaji had Asha, Baitathya had Usha and Moulou, Saibaji had Baby, Dolly, Archana, and now I had Iti.

It was not long before some oracle had pronounced the further course of action. Papaji had necessarily to go to Hardwar and untie a string, or else we would continue to have female progeny in an infinite progression. So at the earliest opportunity, Papaji removed the jinx.

Meanwhile, my uncle Chaman Lal had been admitted to a local school in Kotla Mubarakpur. This was a smallish affair, housed in a ramshackle rented house, surrounded by cattle owners rearing fat black buffaloes, a venture started by three refugee entrepreneurs. It was not a proper school, but it was better than nothing. The name of this alma mater of ours was Tagore School.

I was reminded of my alma mater in 1975, when Sat Mahajan, the Revenue Minister of Himachal Pradesh remarked with a voice dripping with sarcasm, 'What will you understand of the problems of the poor, having gone to prestigious institutions like DPS and St. Stephen's.' I laughed and said, 'Not merely DPS. I went to Tagore School, a school run by Rabindranath himself.'

At some stage, it occurred to the elders that I would be better employed if I accompanied Chaman Lal to the school. So the two of us started our preparations for the matriculation examination together. We shared our books, notebooks, pencils and erasers. As both of us were extremely naughty, the ladies were especially relieved to have us out of their hair for a few hours. In the evening, my father taught us mathematics, Baitathya took on Hindi, Saibaji tutored us in science and Tathyaji coached us in Urdu.

I often think of those days and compare myself to Jawaharlal Nehru. Both of us had private tutors, the only difference being that Motilal had to pay through his nose for the white-skinned teachers that he engaged, whereas my tutors were only repaid in love.

There was no electricity in our flat and light was created through a lantern fuelled by kerosene. We

were experts in the art of trimming the wick and cleaning the glass chimney. Often we would go out to the road and study by the light of the street lamp. I thought that we had that unique distinction till Manmohan Singh divulged that he too would sometimes study by the light of a street lamp. Which obviously proves that it is not the light of a street lamp but what you make of it that decides whether you will end up as Prime Minister or a Tom, Dick and Harry!

My father was the proud owner of a Hercules bicycle, gifted to him by my maternal grandfather at the time of his marriage. Both Chaman Lal and I learnt bicycling on this 1937 vintage cycle. I was too young for the size and had frequent falls, hurting myself in the knees and legs every second day. But I persevered and learnt the art finally.

We used to get our entertainment from the films which were shown in the travelling cinema theatres, sometimes sneaking in under the tent and sometimes paying the princely sum of 5 annas which was the cheapest class and next to the screen. We also went to the Ramlila celebrations and I distinctly remember an embarrassing occasion when everyone else in the family left the pandal and I was the lone spectator who remained. When they discovered that I was missing, search parties went out and finally found me blissfully asleep in the empty pandal.

Thus life went on and we both appeared in the matriculation examination of the Punjab University as private candidates. Chaman Lal was a veteran of many examinations and did well as expected, securing a first division. I had never before been tested, so they were keeping their fingers crossed. But I passed with unexpected ease, securing what was then called a high second class.

I have but one confession to make. When it came to science practicals, Tathyaji came along with us. I remember that we were supposed to create a right angle in a glass tube. Then the experiment had to be set up and hydrogen gas produced. Tathya discovered that the laboratory attendant was approachable and so manoeuvred the situation that the lad was able to bring the apparatus set up by another candidate and place it surreptitiously on my table. When the examiner came to check my experiment, he was happy to see that hydrogen gas was being produced and the testtube had also acquired the desired 90 degree angle. I got 35 out of 40 in the practical.

Our passing the matriculation examination was an occasion to celebrate and, if I remember correctly, ladoos were distributed among the neighbours.

My higher education

Thus my life began with a kind of miracle. I had become a matriculate at the age of ten-and-a-half. In those days we were not aware of the Guinness Book of Records, or else my name would have deserved an entry. Limca had not perhaps been invented yet!

When the euphoria settled down, the inevitable question arose: what next? At my age, I could not be admitted to any Delhi college. Even Chaman Lal, who was then almost thirteen years old, was underage, the minimum age of entry being sixteen. So we would have to go to Agra or Chandigarh, and the family could ill-afford that kind of luxury.

Fortunately for us, the government had directed the Punjab University to open a college for the thousands of refugees who had by then congregated in Delhi. There were just two snags: the college was meant only for those who were working somewhere, and it was an evening college.

Misery gives us survival skills. Soon, the elders decided that this was the only possible option for us. So my father went to a shopkeeper in Kotla market and took a certificate from the owner that Chaman Lal and I were his employees. If you go by my official record, I started life as an assistant to a paanwallah (betel shop owner), at a handsome monthly salary of Rs 25.

When we applied for admission, for a few days we were apprehensive that the college authorities would send out some inspector to verify whether we were truly employed. But we need not have worried. The college authorities had their hands full with more momentous affairs.

So very soon we were enrolled as Intermediate students in the Punjab University (Camp) College. Papaji got the brilliant idea that he could also improve his own qualifications. Till then he was a mere graduate. Now he aspired to do his Master's in History.

It was around this time that I wrote a postcard to Babalal saying that my career path was now clear. My final mission was to become an IAS officer. I would achieve this by studying the subjects of Economics and Law. My grandpa must have laughed heartily at my grandiose plans, but he preserved the postcard. He showed it to me years later. I was literally dumbfounded at the prescience depicted in that innocent letter when I was hardly eleven years old.

With three of us now studying in the same institution, Papaji hit upon a solution that would reduce our transport expenses to the minimum. What was this low-cost solution? It was simply this. While we undertook the journey from Kotla to our college by bus, the return journey was accomplished on a bicycle. Papaji would bicycle all the way from Camp College, which was located somewhere near Birla temple, easily a distance of 15 kilometres. I can imagine poor Papaji manfully cycling away, with me on the handle bar and Chaman Lal on the pillion. Small wonder that after some time he coughed blood and was diagnosed as a patient of tuberculosis.

I can still remember our classes which started at 5.30 p.m. and went on till 8.30 p.m. We had a 57-year-old student in the class and I was the youngest. They all called me the baby of the class. Most of the older students were affectionate towards me. I was somewhat of a curiosity for them.

Even at that precocious age, I showed romantic proclivities. We had a lady lecturer, who was fair and had chiselled features. I had a crush on her, as had probably the rest of the college. Believe it or not, I was jealous of the male lecturers who talked to her in a familiar, friendly way. I could have killed any of them.

We were taught Urdu by an old man, who appeared to have emerged from some old Hindi movie. He wore Pathani dress and sported a huge pagree (turban). He would come into the class and start reciting a poem, without any introduction or comments. I still recall the absolutely dry manner in which he recited the following poem:

Agar mir tu yoonhi rota rahega

To humsaaya kahe ko sota rahega?

(O Mir! If you keep on bewailing your fate like this so loudly, how will your neighbour sleep in peace?)

Behind his back, all of us used to poke fun at his simple, rustic ways. Till one day, Chaman Lal and I mentioned to a knowledgeable friend that we had a vintage teacher of Urdu and he happened to ask the name. When we disclosed that he was somebody called Tilok Chand Mehroom, he smote his brow and said, 'You bloody fools! You don't know who is teaching you. Mehroom is one of the leading poets of India. You could say he is the poet laureate. You lucky guys! Years later, you will boast to people that you have studied Urdu at the feet of Mehroom.'

That is the kind of ignoramus we were. We were taught English by D.N. Kaul. Often, he pronounced words differently from what we had been taught till then. For example, he pronounced 'blue' as 'bloo' and 'faux pas' as 'fo pa;'. At first, we thought he was trying to flaunt some kind of foreign accent to impress us, but when we consulted the Concise Oxford Dictionary (COD), we found that he was right and we were actually speaking English with a Kashmiri accent.

Even now if you meet a pucca Kashmiri fresh from the Valley he will say that he has studied 'sinus', when he means 'science', or the numeral after five is 'skiss' when he means 'six'. He will refer to milk as 'mlick' and silk as 'slick'. Those years with D.N. Kaul were really educative. At least, I learnt to use the COD, a habit I carry till this day.

In due course, we passed the Intermediate examination in the first division and joined the BA (Honours) course. By this time we had both made up our minds about the IAS being our goal and Economics to be one of our subjects. It thus became necessary to do Honours in Economics, so as to have mastery over the subject.

Papaji passed his MA in History and we started going to the college both ways by bus. By now Chaman Lal was a young man and it was expected that the two of us travelling together were safe. In the meantime, the family had shifted to M-361, Vinay Nagar, which was a definite improvement on Kotla Mubarakpur. Here our neighbours were babus (clerks) and not chaprassis (peons). And we had a single quarter with two bedrooms and an enclosed veranda. We had a toilet exclusively for us and so also a bathroom.

Winter was setting in. So far, we had been making do with sweaters, but now that I was in the BA class, my parents felt that I deserved a jacket. I distinctly remember its green colour and cross-striped design. After all, it was the first jacket of my life.

Unfortunately, on the very first evening that I wore the jacket the last bus which used to come at 9.30 p.m. did not turn up. There were a few of us at the bus stop and for some time we wondered whether the last bus would turn up at all. When nothing happened till 10.30 p.m. we decided to walk home. A group of us started off at a brisk pace, taking shortcuts wherever possible. It did not occur to anybody that we could hire a taxi.

The situation at the home front was dismal. There was a pall of gloom over the entire household. It did not occur to anyone that we might have missed the last bus. The current theory was that somebody had seen my new jacket and I must have been kidnapped for this reason. Whether Chaman Lal had also been kidnapped or been injured while trying to save me was not known. There were no cell phones in those days. We did not even boast of a landline.

A complaint was lodged in the police station. Calls were made to possible hospitals, but no accident case of a boy wearing a green check coat had been reported. The elders thus kept themselves busy in this manner till we reached, tired and bedraggled, at about 2 a.m.

In 1955, we shifted to 16 B-10, Dev Nagar. This was a private house and we had four rooms to ourselves. We stayed there till 1961. Chaman Lal and I grew to adolescence and started looking at neighbours' daughters with romantic notions.

This sometimes got us into trouble. A neighbour's daughter complained to her mother that Chaman Lal had loudly said 'kali peeli' while looking at her. When the complaint was relayed to our parents and our explanations sought, at first we were befogged at the expression used. It transpired that 'kali peeli' was a reference to taxi, which in those days used to be an Ambassador car with black and yellow colours. In other words, he had called her a taxi or a prostitute. Although Chaman Lal remonstrated that he was totally ignorant of the expression, he had to tender an unqualified apology and promise not to repeat this in future.

It was in 1955 that an Inter-University Youth Festival was held by the Ministry of Education. Chaman Lal and I had joined the Rovers' Crew and we offered shramdaan, in order to build the Open Air Theatre Rabindra Rangshala at the Talkatora Gardens. Later, we were drafted as volunteers at the Festival. It was an exhilarating one week for us. We saw youth, both male and female, from all parts of the country. We saw their performances, especially in music and dance.

Thus we finished our BA (Hons.) Both of us scored a first division.

Although I had scored as well as Chaman Lal, I could not be admitted to Delhi University because of my age. Chaman Lal was admitted to the Delhi School of Economics, while I continued in the Camp College.

Over the next two years I could see how the educational institution one attended made a tremendous difference to one's knowledge and approach. While we studied K.K. Dewett, Chaman Lal was being constantly exposed to the original books by John Maynard Keynes or Joan Robinson. They had a tutorial system and he was all the time writing his assignments, after consulting the original books. I had the advantage of his company at home and used to devour everything he read or wrote.

During this period, I became a debater and represented the college at many contests, including one at Bhivani in Haryana. I joined the Art and Culture Society. On the Annual Day, they wished to put up a play. It was a farce, 'Kamra Number Paanch'. Our Director was a chap called Rajinder Nath, who later acquired somewhat of a name in the drama circles of Delhi. They were desperately looking for a girl to play the role of Laila, but none of the girls was available. Finally, Rajinder's eyes fell on me and before long I was rehearsing my dialogues in a feminine voice.

On the D-Day, I was decked out in all the finery. They put in rubber breasts, applied lot of cream, powder and blush on, draped me in a sari and no one was any the wiser. To the extent that Professor Kaul, who was a handsome Kashmiri and liked to flirt with the pretty students, failed to recognize me and asked Rajinder, 'Where have you been hiding this fabulous female?' My only regret is that I do not possess a photograph of this event.

Then we had an interesting lecturer by the name of K.D. Bagai, who liked me immensely. After we finished our course, he called me over to his house in East Patel Nagar and suggested that I help him write a book on 'Cooperative Farming and Community Development'. This was the first book I ghost wrote and I found it an exhilarating experience. Incidentally, Professor Bagai is one of the few teachers I have remained in touch with till today. He still lives at 8-24, East Patel Nagar.

After my MA, in which I scored a first class and stood second in the Punjab University, we decided that I should take up a job. I applied for the post of Lecturer in Delhi University and was promptly called for interview. Everything went hunky dory. They offered me the job and asked me when I would be able to join. As I was approaching the door, the Chairman shouted, 'One second, Mr Kaw!' I turned back.

He said, 'There seems to be a small error in your application form. It shows your date of birth as 1941.'

'There is no error, Sir!' I replied, 'It is 1941.'

'You mean to say that you are just sixteen plus?' he exclaimed.

'That is right, Sir.'

'But how is it possible? How could you complete your MA in 16 years? Who allowed you to?' he spluttered.

'Punjab University has no age restrictions,' I clarified.

'Unfortunately, we have. Your students in the first year will be more than 17 years old. How can you maintain discipline?'

I tried to reason with him, but he would just not listen. I came back home, mightily discomfited. I narrated my tale of woe to the family. As no one could even think of sending me to a different city, I decided to do my LLB from Agra University.

The advantage here was that there was a Mahanand Mission College in Ghaziabad. It had morning classes for employed students and one could commute by train. So now I was given a bike of my own and I cycled from Dev Nagar in Karol Bagh to the Old Delhi Railway Station, took the morning train to Ghaziabad, walked from the station to the college, attended the classes and returned in reverse order as soon as the classes were over.

Some vignettes from this period. Bang opposite the Delhi main railway station was the Delhi Public Library. I promptly became a member and found it to be a treasure house of old classics. I started alphabetically and devoured each author in full. It was thus that I read the whole of Dickens and Dumas and Hardy and Wodehouse, Shakespeare and Shaw.

This was around the time I started writing bits and pieces of poetry. Most of what I wrote at this time is lost, except for one piece which was preserved for posterity due to my reciting it to Kakaji, my younger brother, who has carried bits and pieces of the poem to this day.

This particular poem tried to describe the traffic in Delhi which had started turning chaotic. The climax came when I described Natha Singh, the truck driver. It went something like this:

Natha Singh, jo truck ka driver
Nikla hai do peg charhakar
Swa pown gaz ki hai moonchh

Tis par hai turre ki poonchh
Aur yeh jo rickshaw wallah hai
Jannat ki shiksha wallah hai
Tumhe bhi sikhayega.

(Natha Singh, the truck driver
Has come out with two pegs inside him
He has a moustache almost a yard long
On his head is a turban with a huge turra
And behold this rickshaw driver
He can send you straight to heaven ...)

One day, I was at Ajmal Khan Road. Suddenly, I heard someone call my name loud and clear. It was an elongated ‘Maharaaj Krishaaa ...aaa ... nnnnn ...’ I tried to see who it was but no one was visible. Again there was a piercing call. At the third call, I caught the culprit. It was a tonga driver and he was shouting, ‘Baadaaa Statio ... io ... io ... io ... io ... nnnn ...’. Poor fellow! He was just taking passengers to Bara Hindu Rao and Railway Station.

I completed my LLB. in 1960. One minor tragedy of my result was that I got 427 marks in the Previous and 419 in the Final. Both exams were conducted by the University. There were four different papers in each. Yet the overall result was not based on the total marks secured in both the exams combined. I consequently missed my first division by one mark!

With this I came to the end of my academic career. I could have studied further, but the family finances decreed that I should now take up a job.

Chapter 6

My early career

IAS was still a far off goal. I was just 18-plus. The earliest I could appear in the written test would be when I completed 21 years. That was 1963, still three years away.

So what should I do in the meantime? I started looking at the ads and sending in applications. I remember that within a month I was bored stiff with sitting at home. In my frustration I applied to the Hindustan Times for the job of a sub-editor. There was no reply.

My first opportunity came when S.N. Dasgupta College advertised for the post of a lecturer. The aspirants were supposed to meet the principal personally. The same evening I hurried to Pusa Road and was soon talking to the principal. He looked at my qualifications and seemed to be satisfied. For the present he would try me out for MA classes. I had to take one period each evening and would receive Rs 75 as my monthly salary. Fortunately, the principal did not care to look at my date of birth.

By today's standards, it might seem to be a meagre pittance, but it was a definite improvement on my earlier paper salary of Rs 25 as helper to a panwallah at Kotla Mubarakpur (which he never paid!). It was my first real salary in a real job. So who was I to crib?

The work itself was interesting. I got the MA Final class where the enrollment was just three students, of which one was a girl. On occasion, we also got a dog in the class, but he did not take much interest in the academic work. I think I did this for a month and did receive the salary.

There was an ad for the post of a research investigator in the Ministry of Labour. It was a temporary (6-month) project on the pattern of graduate employment. I gave the interview and was immediately picked up. The salary was Rs 250 per month. The only snag was that we would be shown the door in six months.

As this was a proper job in a ministry of the Government of India, Papaji accompanied me to the office on my first day. He literally handed me over to one Vidya Sagar, who was the research officer in charge of the project. The other investigators laughed in their sleeves at this handing over ceremony (or so I thought) and I had to literally beg Papaji to make himself scarce.

On the very first day, I got a taste of how government offices function. Some other chaps had canvassed a questionnaire among the selected graduates and these filled-in questionnaires were now in our office. Our task was to give the relevant code with a red pencil. The coding system was absurdly simple. For example, sex had two possibilities: the code for male was 1, while the code for female was 2.

Vidya Sagar very nicely explained the intricacies of the task to me. I went to my allotted chair and sat down. Within a few minutes, I had met all my colleagues, who sat in the same room.

Let loose on the work with all the pent-up enthusiasm of a novice, I started wielding my red pencil with éclat. By 5 p.m. I had finished 75 questionnaires. I took these to Vidya Sagar with an apologetic air. I had done only 75 as it was my first day. The next day, I would try to do 100. Vidya Sagar looked at me quizzically, but said nothing.

The next day, I got the shock of my life when Vidya Sagar called me to his seat behind the curtain. He did not actually reprimand me, because he was too sweet a person to do that. He just gave me some brotherly advice. The question of what would be a reasonable figure for daily outturn had been a moot point between Vidya Sagar and the investigators. The investigators had taken the stand that they could not possibly do more than 25. As they had taken a united stand, this figure had been

accepted.

Vidya Sagar had told my colleagues about my first day's performance. They had all pooh-pooed the figure and said that I must have committed a number of mistakes. The brotherly advice was that I should not come into open confrontation with my colleagues. I was not a complete fool and immediately agreed to fall in line with the general consensus.

Soon thereafter, we all repaired to the canteen. I served tea and snacks to all my colleagues, as a celebration of my new job. Asotra, who was the faction leader, took out a packet of cigarettes and offered one to me.

'Sorry! I do not smoke,' I said.

'Really! What do you have against smoking?'

'There is no embargo, but I have never started.'

'Why don't you start now?' His tone held sarcasm. He seemed to be saying, 'You are a child. Your father comes to personally hand you over to your boss. You do not consult any one of us and behind our back try to score points against us by doing 75 questionnaires. And now you are saying that you are a good boy. You have never smoked.' It was a veritable charge sheet.

I said, 'The fact that I have never smoked is easily explained. No one in our family smokes. I have merely absorbed this family trait. This does not mean that I shall never smoke. Come on, give me a cigarette.'

Asotra passed on his pack. I took out a cigarette and put it in my mouth at a rakish angle. Someone applied the matchstick and I inhaled.

'I can bet you won't be able to inhale the smoke and bring out the smoke slowly through your nostrils. One can do this only after years of experience.'

I said to myself, 'What the hell!' I let the smoke trickle out of my nostrils. Slowly, like a veteran ...

Asotra and others waited for me to cough and generally make a fool of myself. I did not oblige them, but went on spouting blue smoke from my nostrils, to their utter consternation. In that moment, I took over the leadership of the gang from Asotra.

Meanwhile I had applied for a regular job in the Central Statistical Organization. A few months later, I got the appointment letter. I was now a statistical investigator, with my office in the multi-storeyed Yojana Bhavan. No longer was I on a consolidated salary. I was now in the regular scale of Rs 210–425. Surely something to celebrate!

The task here was very important. I was in charge of all the reports prepared by the National Sample Survey Organization, which were duly vetted by the prestigious Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta. Sometimes I felt that I was too much of a greenhorn to comment on the handiwork of such stalwarts. I imagined that the report was presumably seen and vetted by the Director General of National Sample Survey Organization and the scientific aspects were overseen by someone of the calibre of P.C. Mahalanobis. How could I comment on and criticize their effort? But that was my job and I tried to be as honest as I could.

Strangely enough, the puerile comments that I wrote on the file were approved right up to the Director General and were conveyed to the field agency. Contrary to my apprehension that the field organization would protest, giving cogent arguments, they meekly did what they were told. After a while I realized that just like me they were in awe of the Central Statistical Organization, which was supposed to be the cat's whiskers. They did not even suspect the existence of an ignoramus called

M.K. Kaw sitting in a room on the fourth floor.

After some time, I applied for the post of a research assistant in the newly established Institute of Applied Manpower Research. I was promptly selected. It was the next rung in the hierarchy and carried the scale of Rs 325–575.

My new office was in an annexe of the Indian Institute of Public Administration near the Income Tax office. The office was just being established and we were all groping towards finding a role for this newly established institute. The rumour was that Shri R.A. Gopaldaswamy who had just retired from the government had created this organization so that he could be its first Director and thus enjoy an extension of five years.

S.P. Agarwal was our assistant director. Other research assistants were Khan, Pandit, Awasthi, Moorthy and Mirchandani. They were all young and bright and we shared some good times together. But it did not escape our Argus eyes that we were wasting our time in meaningless piffle. Pandit left after some time and joined the National Council of Applied Economic Research. Miss Mirchandani married a Mr Mirchandani and then shifted to Hyderabad. Moorthy's father-in-law was a big shot in the banking sector and he got absorbed in the Andhra Bank and shifted likewise to Hyderabad. Khan and Awasthi continued in the institute.

This was my first foretaste of an entire organization being created just to assuage the limitless ambition of a retiring bureaucrat. But this was the first and so it hit me with special pungency.

What I remember most poignantly of this period is the theft of my brand new bicycle. I was very fond of it and used to park it along with the other vehicles of the staff. One evening I left office and found the bike missing. I rushed here, there and everywhere. I reported the theft at the local police station. The sub inspector who took up the investigation asked me if I suspected anyone in the office.

When I discussed the matter with my friends, we all had a consensus on the identity of the culprit. There was a peon, who gave us all an inferiority complex. He was tall, handsome and looked every inch a senior officer. He was always immaculately dressed. We had always wondered how he could maintain such a standard of living in his meagre salary. Now the cat was out of the bag. Obviously, it had to be him.

I told the police officer about our suspicions. Although he assured me of quick action, nothing happened. I also lost my interest after I left the office.

There is an interesting sequel to this incident. A few years later, I was posted as a magistrate in Delhi. Out of curiosity, I asked one of my SHOs to find out what had happened to this case. As expected, it had been filed. I asked the SHO whether anything could be done at that stage. He was optimistic about reopening the case and recovering the missing bike. The only snag was that I might just get the handle or the mudguard! I told the SHO to let sleeping dogs lie.

Meanwhile, our extended joint family had broken up in 1961. This happened primarily because my uncles were rising in the government hierarchy and were learning the ropes. Baitathya had stabilized in the Law Ministry as a stenographer, then risen to be personal assistant, and then a personal secretary. He was posted as aide to important people and was able to use their clout to have a flat allotted out of turn in Lodhi Colony. Soon my uncle Saibaji also got a flat. He had risen in the Department of Posts. My father had joined the Ministry of Education and he also got a flat. All brothers were now living in three separate flats in Lodhi Colony. By our standards, it was a luxurious existence.

The children had also grown up. My cousin Rup Krishen and my brother Predhiman formed the

next pair to follow in the new path charted out by us. They too studied in a private school and cleared the matriculation examination at the ages of twelve and ten. They were then sent to Srinagar for college education. My brother did his MSc, in Mahanand Mission College, Ghaziabad and stood first in the Agra University. He was then admitted to IIT Delhi and was the first PhD, to pass out from that great institution. But I am anticipating, as this takes us to 1966.

It was now 1963. I started preparing in right earnest for the IAS. My advantage was that Chaman Lal had already appeared in the exam thrice. The very first time, he got selected to the allied services and opted for what is now called the Railway Traffic Service. Thereafter he tried two more times for the Main. On both the occasions, he got high marks in the Personality Test but lost out because of a poor choice of subjects.

Guided by Chaman Lal, I took the best possible combination of subjects. For the lower I took Indian History, Economic theory and Law, and for the Main I chose Indian History and Advanced Indian Economics. For History I depended mainly on L. Mukerjee and the notes prepared by Papaji for his MA. For Economics, I had the tried and tested K.K. Dewett.

I prepared a lot for the General Knowledge paper. I opened several registers and kept copious notes on terms, personalities and so on. I read one book of secondary school level on each subject like geography, physics, chemistry and astronomy. I wrote essays on expected topics and read the Sharda Guide for General English.

Towards the end, I took two months' leave and did not leave my room, except for a smoke now and then.

Very soon the exams came and were over. I remember that in General Knowledge, we had a question on 'white dwarfs'. I would not have known what these were but for my strategy. Chaman Lal had not been able to reply to a question on 'red giants'. As everyone knows, these are stages on the life journey of a star.

There was a question to which I knew the answer because of my fascination for cartoon strips. If I am not mistaken, it asked as to which cartoon character was referred to as Mr, Walker. For the uninitiated, the answer was the Phantom for 'the Ghost who walks'.

For English essay, I had consulted a number of experts. I proceeded strictly according to the plan and took a good ten minutes before I chose the topic 'Modern Science and Ancient Indian Values'. A topic neither too hard nor too simple. Then I wrote the points I would touch upon on the inside back cover of my answer sheet and this took me another thirty minutes. I wrote the essay slowly and deliberately in my best handwriting and I wrote a measly eight pages in all.

When the results came, I found that I had made it to the Mains. Now the question was how to cross the hurdle of the personality test. I held a number of discussions with Chaman Lal, my uncles and Papaji. The gist of all these was that most questions would be based on my bio-data. As I had a most peculiar educational career, this would attract the Board's attention. The Board would notice that I was a Kashmiri Pandit and they would grill me on the Kashmir Problem. I had not opted for the IPS and they would like to know why not.

In particular, we worried about the Kashmir problem and the two nation theory. Chaman Lal had entered into an argument about the two nation theory with his Chairman Bhola Nath Jha. How could I present my views without starting a controversy within the Board?

It was decided that if questioned on the Kashmir problem, I would request the chairman to allow me to explain the problem on a large map of India which would surely be in the interview room. Once

I showed them a mastery over the details, half their bluster would be gone. With regard to our Kashmir policy, the consensus in the family was that I should not be unduly critical of Nehru. I should take a more nuanced approach. Above all, on no account should I enter into a protracted argument with either the chairman or the members on any issue whatsoever. It would be a mistake to score points over the members, in particular the chairman.

I had not opted for the IPS because I was not fond of a regimented existence. That is why I had never tried for a career in the armed forces either. I felt that I was temperamentally unsuited to the 'Yes Sir, No Sir' routine of the police hierarchy.

With regard to my strange educational career, I should not preen myself as if I was a prodigy, nor be apologetic about it. But I could say that, in retrospect, I felt I had missed my childhood!

We rehearsed the interview a hundred times, till I felt that I was word perfect. I felt that I was now fully prepared to face the expected fusillade of questions. At the same time, it was imperative that my answers be not too pat. Every expression of view should sound like an on-the-spot improvisation.

The D-day came. I went into the sacred chamber. There was a galaxy of noted personalities on the board. The interview went on predictable lines. The chairman allowed me to use the large map of India. True to our forecast, as soon as they saw that I was sure of my facts, they lost interest. One of the members tried to involve me in an argument on the Kashmir policy. I told him pleasantly that there were always multiple views possible on complicated questions like Kashmir and there were probably no easy solutions.

Some of the rapid fire questions and my replies went as follows:

Chairman: Mr Kaw, you are a Kashmiri. As such, you may not have liked the rather weak stance that India has adopted in international fora.

Me: I am a Kashmiri no doubt, but we are settled in Delhi now. There is hardly any scope for Kashmiri Hindus in Kashmir.

Chairman: What kind of scope and why?

Me: Earlier, selection for technical courses or recruitment to government service was on the basis of your merit. Now there is positive discrimination against us. We get neither seats nor jobs.

A Member: How is this possible? Do the courts not intervene?

Me: The state government does not implement the court's directive. It is a law unto itself.

Chairman: You have not given IPS as an option at all. What is your problem with that service?

Me: I would like to be in a job where I can express my views and, if necessary, differ with my boss. In a uniformed service, this is not possible.

Chairman: You were sixteen and a half when you completed your MA. How did such a strange educational career affect your psyche?

Me: Not adversely, I hope. I was precocious, no doubt. And I sometimes missed the slow pace of childhood. But, on the whole, I have enjoyed myself.

Very soon, the final result came in the newspaper. My name was in the list of candidates for the IAS (Main). I was at serial number 13 of the list of 124 candidates. Considering that I was the first IAS officer in my immediate family, there was lot of excitement. We received congratulatory phone calls and messages from all over. Babalal gave a banner headline with my photograph on the front page of Navjivan, the daily newspaper that he edited in Srinagar. Maybe its circulation was not much,

but it all added to the euphoria!

An analysis of my marks sheet showed that I had secured very high marks in General English, General Knowledge and English Essay. Among the other papers, my score was highest (152 out of 200) in Advanced Indian Economics. My total score in the written papers was 857 marks. In personality test, I had received 230 marks out of 400. Thus my overall score was 1087 marks.

I join the IA

Thus was fulfilled my life's ambition. Looking at my family background, one can readily perceive that my joining the IAS was the great divide. It transformed the Kaw family into a celebrated family, especially as my example was followed first by my cousin Rup Krishen Baqaya joining the Indian Revenue Service (he retired as Chief Commissioner of Income Tax) and later my sister Asha joining the IAS (she retired as Chief Secretary, Himachal Pradesh). My brother Predhiman would also have easily got in, but he was interested in science and he has had a most brilliant career in that field.

Looking at the whole thing in perspective, I see that the real breakthrough in our family came when my uncle Shri H.N. Kaw decided to appear in the Assistant's Grade competitive examination and later also cleared the Section Officers' examination. He introduced the concept of clearing a competitive examination to our family and went on to retire as a director in the Department of Posts, Government of India.

My sister says that sometimes when she looks at the achievements of our family, she is amazed at our elevation from the peon's quarter in Kotla Mubarakpur to the mansion of the Chief Secretary next to the Raj Bhavan in Shimla. My brother-in-law Avatar Krishen Kaul says that ours is a rags to riches story, somewhat like that of Abraham Lincoln, who rose from a log cabin to reach the White House.

Personally, I am inclined to be modest about the achievements of our family. It is symptomatic of dozens of families which have made good in post-independence India.

Coming back to my narrative, I asked my employers to relieve me so that I could join my duties at Mussoorie. It is unbelievable but true that my Joint Director K.N. Butani (himself an IRS officer and openly and wildly jealous of my achievement) tried to persuade me that I should not join the IAS, as I would be much better off in my present career. I told him politely and firmly that my mind was made up. Finally, with great reluctance, he agreed to relieve me.

There was a list of things I would require at Mussoorie. For riding, I would need putties and breeches which I had never seen before, for the simple reason that I had never ridden a horse. Papaji and I went to Chandni Chowk and picked up the stuff from a shop dealing in military uniforms. I had to have a formal dress with both jacket and trousers being black, or white or it could be a black jacket with white trousers. I think we went for the last option. I had to have a mosquito-net, an umbrella, a tennis racquet and what not. Many of the things I was seeing for the first time in my life.

Finally, I was fully equipped and with the blessings of my grandparents, parents, uncles and neighbours, I left by train for Mussoorie. The day of my departure was 27 May, 1964, the day Jawaharlal Nehru breathed his last. I detrained at Dehra Dun and soon found myself in a taxi, shared by a couple of other probationers whom I had encountered at the station itself.

The National Academy of Administration was housed in a set of several buildings located here and there in the town. The main building used to be the Charleville Hotel. We reported to the administration and were allotted rooms in the different buildings which served as hostels. My room was in the Happy Valley and it was shared by Balu, an IFS officer and Mahinder Sabharwal, an IPS officer. We had an old butler who served as a sort of batman to all three of us. He got us bed tea in the morning, polished our shoes, gave our clothes to the dhobi, served us afternoon tea and was generally available for any chores that we might assign to him.

We had a hectic schedule. The day started with a knock on the door by our batman, followed by

bed tea. Back home, I had never been addicted to bed tea, being fonder of nimbu pani (sweet lime). But I soon caught the habit.

Immediately thereafter, we had to get ready for our riding lessons. For this we had to be fully attired in the prescribed dress—a shirt, breeches, putties, riding shoes and a pith hat. There was a riding area where the syces led by the redoubtable Nawal Singh waited for us. Nawal Singh was a terror, with his stentorian voice full of satire and ridicule.

Some of his pet comments were: ‘Sahib, Yeh ghoda hai, sofa nahin.’ (Sir, this is a horse, not a sofa set!!!) Or ‘Sahib, agar ghoda nahin sambhalta, to district kaise samhaloge?’ (Sir, if you cannot handle a horse, how will you control a district?)

The scariest part of it was when we were asked to pass under the belly of our horse. The horses were temperamental and some of them were notoriously high-strung. One expected a good kick in the ass. Somehow, with chattering teeth, we did it.

The funny part of it was that we could never coax our horses to trot or canter. But the moment Nawal Singh shouted ‘T ...rr ...rr ...rr ...o ...o ...o ...t ...’, or ‘Cante ...r ...r ...r ...r ...’ the animals broke into the desired pace without further demur. It was as if the horses were as scared of Nawal Singh as the probationers were.

I could never get over my awe of our riding instructor. But years later when I was in the Government of India, I once bumped into him in the corridor. He obviously did not remember me, but I reminded him of 1964. He was much older, had retired from service and looked very vulnerable. Then I felt pity on him and helped him in some small affair which was bothering him at the moment.

There was breakfast in the dining hall and it was here that I discovered the infinite extent of my ignorance. At home one had egg sometimes, but the variety was awfully limited to boiled egg and omelette. Now I found there was a wide variety of preparations from the simple egg: egg flip, half-boiled, three quarters boiled, full-boiled, omelette, poached, scrambled, single fry, double fry and so on.

I realized that table manners were a separate subject of study. You could not put your elbows on the table. You held the knife in your right hand and the fork in your left. As I went on to other meals both in the Academy and outside, I learnt that there was a spoon for soup and a spoon for sweet dish, that when you left your fork and knife on the plate it conveyed a message to the waiter whether you were still eating or you wished the plate to be cleared, that you took white wine with the fish and red wine with the red meat. That when you used your fingers, you waited for the finger bowl to clean your hand before you wiped it on the napkin.

In those days, there was no one to show you the ropes, because most of the guys belonged to affluent families and were to the manner born. I had to learn by imitation, looking surreptitiously at my neighbours without making my ignorance painfully obvious. With all that, my friends must have noticed various kinds of faux pas I committed before I picked on.

After breakfast we went to the classes, which went on till lunch. Most of the lectures were terribly boring and tested our patience. Barring exceptions like Lakshmidhar Mishra, who sat in the front row and took copious notes; but then Lakshmi also kept the top-knot on the skull that denotes the orthodox Brahmin and was not self-conscious about it.

I naturally drifted towards a group of north Indians that held people like Omesh Saigal, Naresh Saxena, Surinder Sharma, Shyam Suri, Ram Sahai Varma, Ram Naresh Gupta and so on. We were not rowdies, but we liked a good laugh. We were unanimous in considering the lectures to be a bore and

devised methods of keeping ourselves in good humour. We read books, exchanged chits, made cartoons, mimicked our teachers, narrated jokes, composed limericks and had generally a good time.

I am sure that our shenanigans did not go unnoticed and formed the basis for our low scores in the director's assessment. It is we who were probably responsible for the exit of our sweetly reasonable Director S.K. Datta and the induction of the fearsome Pimputkar for the next year. Believe it or not, this character would cause the gate to the classroom to be punctually shut at the exact second, with the result that habitual late latifs (late comers) like us were continuously marked absent. No wonder, the 1965 batch was scarred for life.

After lunch, we slept awhile and then went for various sports like billiards, tennis, table tennis and cricket. Being a novice to everything I tried all the games and became a dilettante in all, though master of none.

In the evenings, many of us went for a walk to the mall, flaunting the IAS badge on our blazers, which made us stick out like a sore thumb. With so many man-eaters and head-hunters around, it was no wonder that many of us started building relationships with members of the 'unfair' sex. A few of us were experienced and acted like predators, tasting new pieces of meat and then moving on to a fresh kill. But most of us were novices and were victims of artful design.

I myself escaped these femme fatales, mainly because I was painfully shy and did not know how to talk to or flirt with women. I was also perhaps a proponent of middle class morality. I moved with a group of innocents, most of whom had never embraced a woman in their life. We decided to assign each member of the group points according to his 'achievements'. We were all at score 100 and our aim was to reduce it to zero at the earliest. If you kissed a FG (family girl), your score dropped by 20 points. If you kissed a P (prostitute), although you were not supposed to, your score dropped by 10 points. If you had sex with a P, you dropped by 20 points, if an FG, you dropped by 50 points. Or that is what I remember. I may have mixed up the scores.

Towards the end, I almost got caught. A few days before our year at Mussoorie was over, we all went to an exhibition of some kind, where there were girls manning the stalls. I was immediately attracted to a girl of striking beauty, who had a ready smile and did not seem standoffish. We got talking. The girl asked for my name and address and quite unthinkingly I parted with the information. In my humility I could never guess that I had made a hit. Nor did I, in my naiveté, suspect that she, so innocent and virginal, could be a head hunter.

Imagine my surprise when I received a telegram some days later, suggesting a rendezvous in Delhi. I had probably told her that I would be going to Delhi soon and she did not lose time. I thought over the matter. Not knowing a thing about the girl, I merely looked upon this as an opportunity to reduce my score. She had suggested a film at Regal in Connaught Circus and I reached there at the appointed date and hour. Imagine my surprise when I found her chaperoned by her mother. I smelt a rat, but at such a late stage it would have been churlish to withdraw. So I saw the movie and when the lights went off, pressed her hand.

When we came outside the theatre, I was a little perturbed to see my Mausaji (maternal uncle) at some distance. He saw me, but I pretended not to have seen him. Much later, I learnt that he had described my inexplicable behaviour to my parents and alerted them to the possibility of my getting gobbled up by some out-of-community siren. More of this girl later.

During my stay at Mussoorie, I took part in the cultural activities. I have always been fond of

singing and I demonstrated my 'proficiency'. This gave me a good visibility and some popularity. I am mentioning this because we had a huge crowd of 300 people of all services during the first three months in what is known as the 'Foundational Course'. When I met my batch mates of other services in later years, most of them only remembered me because of my singing.

One habit I picked up in Mussoorie was that of drinking. No one in our family had ever imbibed liquor. Somehow, in my anxiety to belong in my newfound company, I felt that probably non-drinking would set me apart and prevent my full acceptance by the peer group. To the extent that one evening I imbibed too much (it was neat brandy) and was almost dead to the world. Next morning, I felt terrible. Red rashes appeared all over my body. I took a vow to myself never to repeat the experience again.

It was perhaps at this time that one of the dadas (experienced persons) spoke and delivered the following pearls of wisdom: 'My dear! Be a drinker, but not a drunkard. Take two small pegs of whisky at the most. Never drink alone. Never take liquor neat. Dilute it with water or soda. Sip slowly and over a prolonged period. Always eat something nutritious along with the drink.'

I drank a bit at parties, never at home, till 1967. That year I got married. One evening, Raj (my wife), Asha (my sister) and I went to a party and I took my usual quota. Unfortunately, one of the other guests imbibed too much and was declared unfit to drive. Someone had to drive him back home.

When we left the party, I was driving, Raj was sitting next to me and Asha was in the back seat. On the way both of them started weeping. They went on crying till I took a vow not to take liquor in future. And, barring a few rare occasions, I have kept the vow.

A memorable event during this year at Mussoorie was our trek to Chakrata. Ram Sahai Varma, Ram Naresh Gupta, Mohinder Sabharwal and I spent four days on this trip. The highlight of the trek was a shower we took under a natural waterfall on the way. The new element of this experience was that we were all completely in the nude and were photographed in that state of undress. I had that rare photograph till recently, when Raj, in an uncharacteristic mood of puritanism, tore that thing to bits. Probably she did not wish my grandchildren to see their dadaji (grandpa) in that state.

Another event to remember was the 'Bharat Darshan' (India tour). We went to Delhi to meet the Prime Minister, then to Hyderabad, Bangalore, Madras, Madurai, Kanyakumari, Quilon, Goa and Bombay. I seem to recall that we saw an interminable number of temples, had an encounter with some prostitutes in Hyderabad and Bangalore, and jumped into the ocean with our clothes on at Marina Beach, when we had our first darshan of the ocean. By the time we reached Quilon, we were sick and tired of having idli, sambhar and dosa and thirsted for anything from the North. Imagine our joy when we espied a Sher-e-Punjab Hotel in a Quilon street. We went in and had tandoori roti and murg mussels to our heart's content.

The year ended a little too quickly. We had a test and surprisingly I failed in Economics. My only consolation was that so had John Maynard Keynes. With a low director's assessment, it was but natural that I dropped in the overall rating. I was now 24th in the batch.

We were allotted to various states on the basis of our rank and preference. I had opted for Delhi and Himachal Pradesh, for the reason that I would remain posted either to Shimla or Delhi. Later, this cadre was transformed into the Union Territories Cadre and even later some of us were allotted to Himachal Pradesh. For the present, I was happy to be posted as Joint Magistrate, Bulandshahr in Uttar Pradesh, a district next to Delhi, for a year's practical training.

Junt Sahib in Bulandshahr

Luckily for me, Bulandshahr had an existing Junt Sahib. Mahesh Verma was a decent guy, who welcomed me to the district and made my life comfortable. The collector was a nice, handsome, promoted officer Shamshad Ahmed, who was mature and understanding and had no rough edges.

Very soon, I was installed in a sprawling house with three large rooms, a kitchen and a huge veranda and no neighbours. I had a personal servant Barkhoo, a young boy full of enthusiasm. It was this lad who solved the problem of the ubiquitous pigeons by killing them and cooking them for dinner. He is the one who introduced me to tel maalish (oil massage) and got mugdars) from somewhere to build my muscles. There were two peons dressed in livery, who served both in the kothi (residence) and the kutchheri (court).

I was notified as a Third Class Magistrate and got some cases under the minor and special laws. I acquired a bicycle and would cycle to office with grave dignity, as befitted a magistrate. I did not fully understand the logic of the protocol. One day, my bicycle was not in order and I went to office in a cycle rickshaw. The District Collector saw me on the way. Soon I was summoned into the Presence. Shamshad Ahmad informed me with a solemn air that if a bicycle was not available for some reason, I could take a lift from a colleague SDM in his jeep. Journey in a rickshaw was a strict no-no. As soon as I disembarked, both my peons would loudly announce that Junt Sahib had arrived and everybody should make way for me. They raised such a shindy that I would feel highly self-conscious.

I had a peshkar, who presented files to me. One day, when I was just a few days old in office, I saw out of the corner of my eye that the peshkar accepted a currency note and slipped it unobtrusively into his trouser pocket. I looked around. Nobody else seemed to have noticed this open and blatant act of corruption, or if they did, they were too used to it to really mind.

But I got terribly upset. I immediately adjourned the court, asked the peshkar to assign dates in the other cases listed for the day and sauntered down to the collector's office. Shamshad Ahmed was sitting, cool and calm, in his office and signalled me to a chair. I did not wait for him to exchange pleasantries, but hastened to unburden my soul with all the vehemence that I could command.

He heard me out. When I subsided, he asked me, 'Is that all? Or have you something to add?'

I was astounded. I had told the head of the district that corruption was rampant in our office and, instead of being shocked or hastening to place the peshkar under suspension, he was questioning me whether that was all.

Mildly, I replied, 'No, Sir! I have nothing to add.'

'Let me tell you, Kaw, that what you saw is the norm here and has been the norm for centuries. It is called rasoom, or the traditional offering. In every case, for every date of hearing, the court staff gets this rasoom. The peshkar gets it for giving a date convenient to the party and his lawyer. The ahalmad gets it for issuing the summons or warrants promptly. The peons get paid for shouting the name of the case out in the corridor. The lawyer pays it out of the fees he receives from his client. He has already built it in, when fixing his fees.'

I did not understand his logic. Could we justify corruption on the ground that it had been there for a long time?

I said, 'I would like to give the next date of hearing myself. That would eliminate the role of the peshkar, wouldn't it?'

'You could not write out the summons and warrants yourself. You could not yourself go out in the corridor and shout the name of the case in a loud voice. What all would you do yourself?' queried my boss.

I did not know what to say next. Shamshad Ahmed moved in for the kill. He pressed the bell. His peon appeared.

'Let us have some tea. Now tell me, are you otherwise comfortable?'

After we had the tea and I had cooled down a bit, Shamshad Ahmed advised me. 'I suggest you take the day off and relax. Let us meet in the club for tennis at four. Later, come in the evening, I will introduce you to bridge. Bridge, my boy, is an invaluable accomplishment for every aspiring bureaucrat. You must learn the game.'

Very soon, it became clear to me that it was the club and not the office that was the real place of action for the district collector. In fact, many collectors did not come to the office at all. They had a full-fledged office at their residence and met the public in their residential office. After lunch, they had prolonged siestas, depending on their age. After four, it was the tennis, badminton, billiards, bridge or paploo, followed by drinks and dinner. They would go home at eleven-thirty or later.

Soon I also got into the rhythm of district life. I took to everything else except bridge. There was an old streak of morality in me which equated playing of cards with gambling. Now that I was both a smoker and a drinker, I wanted to steer clear of the third major 'vice'.

I made friends with Bipan Chandra, who was an additional district judge. He was the only one who boasted of a personal car. It was a huge Buick and I imagined that one had to be filthily rich to afford such a big car. It was only later that I learnt that such old cars could be had for a song and as the distances in Bulandshahr were not much, petrol guzzling was not a problem.

Bipan Chandra himself was quiet, unassuming and soft-spoken, but he had a pretty wife who retained her beauty despite being middle-aged. She was somewhat portly, but very fair and talkative. We used to gossip a lot and the couple made me feel more at home than anyone else in the district. Unknown to me, the lady had other plans for me. She had a sister who she thought would be a good match for me. But she never confided in me.

We decided to go for a few days to Naraura, where there was a lake, for a holiday. It was there that I was introduced to the young lady. I dealt with her as one more member of the family, not suspecting the plans that were afoot. It was after a few days that madam asked me confidentially how I had liked the sister. I said she was a good, nice girl. No, she wanted to know how she would be as a wife!

Frankly speaking, I had never considered the girl in that light. She was dark complexioned and quite ordinary by way of features. So I told madam frankly that I would most probably have an arranged marriage with a girl of my own community. To their credit I must say that this incident did not create any bad blood between us. We continued to interact normally right till I stayed in the district and even beyond.

Years later, an officer who was working in the same office of the Central Government told me that his wife knew me. It soon transpired that it was the same girl. She had married an officer of the UP Civil Service, who later got promoted to the IAS. The couple called on us and met my wife also. From what I could gather, the girl was somewhat curious to see what kind of girl I had finally chosen

for myself.

Although I did not realize it, many people were considering me to be an eligible catch. I was invited by a friend to a wedding at his house. I went there for a few days and thoroughly enjoyed the kachauries and mithhais that were served. My friend's sister, who was a dusky female with chiselled features and languishing eyes, talked to me now and then about her preparations for the civil services examination. I spoke to her at some length, as she was quite pleasant to talk to.

When I came back to Bulandshahr, I was surprised to receive an inland letter written by the girl and addressed to my friend. I could not think of any reason why she should write a letter to her brother at my address. Suspecting a mystery, I opened the inland from the side and could see a paragraph concerning me. She had asked her brother a pointed question, 'Don't you think that your friend would make a good brother-in-law?'

I blushed deeply. It was as though the girl was present there and I had eavesdropped on an intimate confidence being exchanged between brother and sister. I closed the flap and redirected the inland to my friend at his present address.

The more I thought about the matter the more I suspected that I was meant to read the letter. So I took a few days off and paid a visit to Aligarh where she was located currently. When I reached Aligarh, I found that the famous Nauchandi Mela was on. I went to the mela ground in search of my good friend and batch mate Vivek Channa. When I asked someone where I could find Shri Channa, he pointed towards a young man who was busy giving directions.

When I asked him about Vivek, he started laughing. He introduced himself as Virendar Chanana and said that he was often mistaken for Channa. He said that Vivek was on leave for a few days. When he saw that I was a little disappointed at the news, he smiled and offered hospitality at his own house. He was so affectionate that I could not say no. Virendar has since become a lifelong friend.

As suspected, the girl in question had developed an infatuation for me. Her cousin arrived at that moment and suggested that we both travel with him to Agra. We did so. I remember seeing the Taj Mahal with her. But neither of us discussed marriage. I returned to Bulandshahr and broke all contact. It seemed to me to be unfair for me to take advantage of her infatuation, when I had no intention of marrying her.

It goes to Shamshad Ahmed's credit that he did not take my disappearance amiss. He merely asked me to keep him informed about my going out of station, as he got worried about my welfare.

I had to disappear once more when I was invited by the girl whom I had met in Mussoorie to come to Jaipur. I had never been to that city and I was curious to know who the girl was and what her intentions were. When I picked her up from where she was staying, I was deeply conscious of the curious stares of the other girls who were present.

We spent a few hours together. I learnt that she was a student of class XII in Banasthali Vidyapeeth, a chit of a girl still studying in school. I thought her too precocious and dropped her at her aunt's house. Although she sent me some letters, I was quite cool and finally severed all contact.

Years later, when I was Education Secretary in the Central Government, she sought an appointment with me, which I granted. She had also aged over the years and had married someone who ran educational institutions. She wanted some help which I readily gave.

A curious incident that took place in Bulandshahr was the Nauchandi Mela. Someone told me about a nautanki which had come to town as part of the mela. Not having seen a nautanki in my life I expressed a desire to see the same. I was advised not to go to the mela, but some alternative

arrangements would be made.

They organized a special show of the nautanki at Police Lines, ostensibly for the jawans, but some sofas were kept for the Junt Sahib and his friends. I went there. There was a girl who was dressed in Western clothes, wore a hat and generally danced item numbers in a sexually provocative manner. For those days, it was probably too modern.

Next day, when I went to the club, everyone quizzed me about the nautanki and how a special show had been organized for the Junt Sahib. Even the S.P. (known as Kaptaan Sahib), who was generally quite sedate, raised his eyebrows. Shamshad Ahmed was also perhaps scandalized, but he did not say anything.

Meanwhile, the official work went on. I became a second class magistrate, then a first class magistrate and finally a sub divisional magistrate (SDM).

I was assigned the subdivision of Anupshahr. Those days, in Uttar Pradesh, the sub divisional magistrates were not posted to their subdivisions. All of them stayed at district headquarters and went to their subdivisions to transact business.

One of the important items was revenue work. During the winter season, the SDM went on a winter inspection tour. I also followed this hallowed tradition. My staff went in advance to pitch tents and keep everything in readiness. I heard complaints and decided some of them on the spot. Some revenue entries were checked on the ground. Mutations were attested. I received the zamindars of the area. Some of them called me over for a party or a meal.

I remember a Muslim zamindar who hosted a gala mango party. Mangoes were immersed for hours in cold water and then served in buckets. They were the chausa variety, which is to be sucked. The entire party kept on sucking mango after mango till the buckets were emptied. I have never gorged myself on mangoes like I did that day.

I recall the time the Raja of Anupshahr called me over for lunch to his castle. His family had ruled the Princely State of Anupshahr for centuries and now I was the current 'ruler'. We had the finest crockery, the best cutlery and the choicest cuisine to titillate our taste buds.

He was at that time the Deputy Minister of External Affairs in Delhi and invited me to his office in South Block the next time I visited Delhi. I did go to his office. When I was announced to him by his PA he rushed out to the outer office to personally escort me inside. After we had coffee he again came out right up to the lift to bid me farewell.

It was during this period that I realized the supreme power of the patwari, who is the junior most revenue official in the hierarchy. I was told that the Raja of Anupshahr made it a point to send cash and grains to his local patwari, in accordance with the traditions in his family. He did this even after becoming a Deputy Minister in the Government of India. When I quizzed him about this, he said that this was the rasoom and he would not dream of flouting the tradition.

I discovered some interesting facts about the people of Bulandshahr. For example, it was very common for married women to develop an illicit liaison with another man and then elope with him. The husbands had developed a clever counter-strategy to get their wives back. They would approach me through a lawyer, alleging that the wife had been forcibly abducted by someone. They would request me for a bailable warrant through the police, so that the lady could be produced before me to give her statement on oath. If the lady was produced by the other party, she would invariably say that she had gone voluntarily with her paramour. But if the husband got to her she would allege forcible abduction and say that she would like to be with

her husband.

One day, I was in my underwear at my residence. My servant Barkhoo was giving me an oil massage. I was also doing various exercises with a pair of mugs, to develop my muscles. Suddenly there was a tap at the door. Wondering who could have come so early in the morning, I opened the door a crack and immediately shut it again. I was flabbergasted to see a learned advocate in full regalia standing outside. Behind him there was a lady in a black burqa in the custody of a policeman in uniform.

‘What is it, Mr Advocate?’ I asked him through the crevice in the door.

‘Sir, we are producing this lady, so that you could record her statement on oath,’ he calmly replied.

‘Why not produce her in court? You can see what state I am in.’

I forgot to mention that the lawyers in Bulandshahr had a very flowery manner of addressing the court. I was addressed variously as Banda Parwar, Garib Parwar, Banda Nawaz, Garib Nawaz, Jahan Panah, etc.

So he said, ‘Jahan Panah! Wherever you may be, in whatever state or condition, that is the court.’

Another incident that I still recall is a bus accident that took place in my subdivision. I had to rush to the site in a jeep. I was supposed to make all the arrangements and also conduct a magisterial inquiry into the causes of the accident. By the time I reached the spot, the survivors had been admitted to the hospital. So I proceeded with the inquiry.

It was plain that the accident was primarily caused because a can of petrol had been carried on the roof of the bus. Petrol had started oozing out of the can and had spread as a thin film on the ceiling. A passenger had lighted a bidi and this had led to a conflagration. The driver had applied the brakes, but the passengers could not get off the bus because there were too many of them. To top it all, a washerman had kept a huge basket of clothes right at the entrance and completely blocked the way.

The dead bodies were like burnt logs of wood. There was a foul stench all over. There was one particular log which had a peculiar shape. We realized that it was the corpse of a woman who was carrying one baby in her arms and the other in her womb. It was horrible. I could not look at food for 24 hours. I had this constant desire to throw up.

It was during my stint at Bulandshahr that I got news about the illness of my grandmother in Delhi. Yemberzal, Mughlani or Ded as we called her was a great lady who had borne her husband ten children, of whom five had survived. She was a lady habituated to hard physical work and was active till the last. But the migration from cool Srinagar to hot Delhi and the whole trauma of migration had weakened her heart and she died at a comparatively young age.

When I reached Delhi, she had already passed away and I could only pay my respects to her body. Hers was the first death of a near relative that I saw physically and it was a traumatic experience.

Soon my tenure at Bulandshahr drew to a close. I got farewell dinners from the friends I had made during that year. I was sorry to part company with Shamshad Ahmed, who had been a most kind and understanding boss. Several years later, someone told me that he had been placed under suspension. I was sorry to hear the news, but consoled myself with the thought that this was UP (Uttar Pradesh) and changes of governments often led to unjustified vendettas against officers. And sure enough, very soon the news came that he had become the agricultural production commissioner!

Chapter 9

Interlude in Himachal

My first real posting was to Himachal. Having remained SDM in Bulandshahr, I expected that we would now be posted as Additional Deputy Commissioner. Omesh Saigal, Yeshwant Rajwade, Gorakh Ram and myself had been allotted to the Delhi and Himachal cadre. All of us were directed to report to Chief Secretary, Himachal for further orders. So we all landed at Shimla.

Some bright lad had discovered that direct recruit IAS officers were being posted to districts without any practical training in development work. The solution was to post them to blocks. But as they knew nothing at all about anything, it was found necessary to first post them as understudies to block development officers (BDO) for three months, after which they could be entrusted the onerous duties of a BDO.

So we were bundled off to the districts. I got a remote location called Tissa in Chamba district. When I landed at Chamba, I called on the Deputy Commissioner. He invited me to dinner at his residence. He said that I could stay for the time being in the Circuit House and await the opening of the road link to Tissa, which had unfortunately been blocked due to a landslide. Meanwhile, I could come and visit the district office and familiarize myself with the district generally, as also the key officers with whom I would have to deal.

In the Circuit House I had occasion to meet Thakur Sen Negi, the grand old man of Kinnaur district, who had been the chief secretary earlier and was now an MA. We had long conversations, while sitting in arm chairs and listening to the roar of the river Ravi down below. I later came to know that the Negis were a prominent tribe of Kinnaur district and were a dominant presence in the civil services due to the quota fixed for Scheduled Tribes.

Chamba is a small town and you can promenade from one end to the other in about fifteen minutes. The most prominent feature of the town is the Chogan, an area where the townspeople come out for taking the air and where all major functions and events are held. There are many other things which start with the initial letters Ch, like Chamba and Chogan. You had the Charhai (uphill climbs), the Chamunda (a temple to Chamunda Devi), Chappals (footwear), Champa (a kind of flower) and the Churahins (the beautiful ladies of the Churah valley).

After a week the road opened and I was able to travel up to a point, from where the BDO's people took charge of me. Barkhoo had travelled with me from Bulandshahr and so he was looking after the baggage and everything. Soon we arrived at Tissa, from where a snow-covered peak was visible. This was a glacier.

I met Bhandari the BDO and Agricultural Inspector Sharma, Smt Sharma the Lady Social Education officer, the junior engineer and the other functionaries in the block. There was a quarter for me, where I settled down with the ease of a bachelor.

It soon became clear that the whole idea of an understudy to BDO was administratively flawed. I was supposed to be an understudy to Bhandari for three months, after which he had to either hibernate or be on posting to another block while I became the BDO for three months. Then my period of training would be over and Bhandari would return to his post.

At the same time, Bhandari and everyone else knew that I was an IAS officer and would very soon be a big officer. So they could not treat me as an understudy. Anyway, we carried on somehow.

I had my routine of an oil massage on every Sunday and my colleagues joined me for this ritual. Mrs Sharma was fond of playing cards and we used to play till late in the night. Bhandari had an official horse and I sometimes went for a ride.

I learnt the ropes by being attached to the Gram Sewak and the various officers. I did some touring and saw the villages around. My general impression was that the men folk in the villages were having

a nice time. They imbibed a lot of a local brew and took a snooze whenever they had a chance. All the hard work was done by the women. Most of them smoked.

There was enough leisure time to pick up a few local folk songs. There was one which spoke of the oppression committed by the Gurkha soldiers:

Raja, tere gorakhia ne, lutiya pahad.
Lutiya pahad, gori de mathe da suhag

(O King! Your Gurkhas have despoiled the hills; they have stolen the marital symbols of our fair women).

Another song lamented the closure of pure water from a spring at Kiyani:

O pee lena Kiyani da paani, Bhagdeiyee pee lena ho
O mar jaye DC Chambiala, jinne paani bund keeta ho

(O Bhagdeyi! Drink the refreshing water from the spring source at Kiyani. Oh, let the DC Chamba die, for he ordered the closure of the spring source).

Jug jiyo dhaara reyo gujro, dena mere gada jo basekha ho
Gard mera hola junglati ho, dine sadna taan eenda raati ho.

(O Gujjar of the hills, please pass on my message to the Guard. My guard is a Forest Guard. I call him during the day, but he comes at night).

There is a Minjar ka mela at Chamba. It is the major festival of the district and the administration makes all the arrangements. We also went to Chamba town, so as not to miss the fun and frolic. A very vivid memory is that of drinking a local brew and then dancing all night with the local couples. The dance follows the ubiquitous garland pattern, where men and women alternate and hold hands and then move in a circle, to the accompaniment of local musical instruments and drums.

I did not know at that time that our family was fated to have a lifelong connection with Chamba. My sister Asha married Dev Swarup, a young man from Chamba. More of that later.

It was during my Chamba posting that my parents decided to clinch the issue of my marriage. I received a letter from Papaji that I should meet him at Pathankot on a particular date and then we would go to Srinagar, to choose a bride for me. I took leave of absence and met Papa at Pathankot. From there we took a bus for Srinagar.

We stayed with the Sarafs. Several discussions were held about the relative merits of the various matches. It was decided that my maternal uncle Mamaji (Shri Ram Krishen Sadhu) would act as my chaperone and ensure that I had darshan of the various girls. The idea was that if I did not like a girl even in long shot, we would not seek an audience with her. But if she was all right, we would meet her and then proceed further.

Till then, I had already seen two girls in Delhi. The first had been even seen and approved by my

grandmother. She praised the girl to the skies and was especially ecstatic about her parrot nose. I believe that for my grandma's generation, a parrot nose was the ultimate in feminine beauty.

I was told to stand at a particular bus-stop. She would take the university special from there and I could also get on to the same bus. Everything was fine, till I saw the girl. She really had a parrot nose. It was more a curved beak than a nose. Although I got on to that bus, my heart was not in it and I disembarked at the very next stop.

Later when I married Raj, this girl's mother came specially to our house, primarily to see what hourie I had selected after rejecting her daughter.

The second girl was the daughter of a chief engineer from Bombay. He did not mince any words and straightaway promised a Fiat car for me. Papaji was suitably impressed and agreed to a meeting at the Hotel Imperial, New Delhi.

On the appointed day, my parents and I went by taxi to the venue. That was the only time we travelled in a taxi and the only time we saw the inside of Hotel Imperial. Very soon the suspense was over and we saw the girl. I was disappointed. She was a nice girl, polite and well behaved, but she was dark and she had nondescript features. I hid my feelings. We had tea. I was allowed to have a separate chat with the girl. Then we left, telling the other party that we would convey our reaction soon.

With these fiascos behind us, we now proceeded to see the five short-listed girls of Srinagar. On Monday, we went to Karan Nagar to see whether we would be able to catch a glimpse of one of them. No success. On Tuesday, we went to the University and failed to see the second girl. On Wednesday it rained. On Thursday, I was to see Raj.

The rendezvous was most likely to succeed. My own mamiji, the widow of my elder mamaji Makhan Lalji, would escort Raj. We would cross each other near Habba Kadal. If I liked what I saw, I would signal to mamiji and she would enter a shop dealing in woollen wear. We would follow, so that I got a closer look. If I was still positive, I would signal to mamiji and she would take the girl to her own parents' house.

Things went off as planned. Raj was dressed simply in a salwar kamiz and she looked gorgeous. In the woollen shop she asked the shopkeeper to show something in crimson or peacock blue. Soon we were entering the Chirvis' house. There were spectators and spies everywhere, from both parties. Ignoring the curious stares of such onlookers, we trooped into a room on the first floor.

Now we could talk. She had a soft, melodious voice and a smiling face. I asked questions and she answered.

‘What are you studying?’

‘I am studying for MA (Hindi). I am now in the second year.’

‘Will you take up a job after this?’

‘It depends. If the requirement is that for the sake of the family or the upkeep of children I should not take up a job, I shall not do so. But if circumstances are conducive, I may.’

‘What do you think about living in a joint family?’

‘All my life I have lived in a joint family.’

‘Have you been to Delhi? How did you like it?’

‘It is very hot.’

‘Can I look at your palm? I dabble a bit in palmistry.’

She did not object. I took her hand in my own. It was a delicate, soft hand, with a fleshy mount Venus. An obviously sensitive and delicate creature, but not averse to sex. She had a supple thumb, and would thus be moderately flexible in her approach. She had a long life and a good luck line.

Tea was served. We chatted about this and that. Other people joined the conversation. After about half an hour, mamiji signalled that it was time for us to leave. We left.

Mamaji asked me my opinion. I was bewitched. I said she was okay as far as I was concerned. Papaji, who had seen us from behind a pillar, joined us. His vote was also in favour. By the time we reached the Sarafs, there was general agreement about Raj. The die was cast.

In the evening, mamiji went to the Gurtus with an affirmative answer from our side.

None of us knew what was cooking in the Gurtu household. Much later, Raj told me that my name had first been mentioned when her maasi (mother’s sister) Sarlaji was to be married. My maternal grandfather Babalal was keen that I should marry Sarlaji. But my mother who was very strong-willed had ruled against the match because Sarla did not have any brothers. Around that time, I had visited Srinagar for Army attachment and had stayed in a houseboat for a few days. When the idea that a meeting between Sarlaji and me should take place did not mature, there was great disappointment. Soon thereafter, Sarlaji married Shri A.K. Ganju and went to the US.

Raj said that my tekni had been given by her maternal grandfather to Shri Onkar Nath Gurtu, her father. When my availability was discovered, the Gurtus decided to make another attempt.

Raj says she was prejudiced against me on several counts:

*I had rejected Sarlaji only because she had no brothers

*I had stayed at a houseboat, even though we had many relatives in the city.

*She had a notion that IAS officers were high fliers and had a superiority complex.

She had therefore refused to go for the interview, despite the persuasive attempts of all the elders in the family. Finally, her paternal grandmother had ascended to the top floor where she was preparing for her examination. She explained the situation to her and then used a clinching argument:

‘Look, my dear! You do not have to say yes to the alliance, if you don’t like the boy. But if you don’t go, these people will spread all kinds of rumours about you. They will say that there must be some defect in the girl. Maybe, she is one-eyed or lame or otherwise physically handicapped.’

Raj says that her elder sister Pyari had descended on her with various creams, powders, ornaments and dresses to ready her for the meeting. But she refused to get dolled up for the rendezvous.

Raj says that when she saw me for the first time at the wool shop, she was surprised to see that my clothes were full of wrinkles. I was not at all the kind of slick city lad she had imagined me to be.

I was also attracted to Raj because she had a natural unspoilt beauty and was not wearing makeup.

So in a way we both liked each other because we were our simple natural selves and were not trying to impress each other by any show or artificial props.

Resultantly, when her people asked her how she had liked the boy, she did not make any adverse comment. This was taken to be her consent and an affirmative answer was transmitted to us the same evening.

As papaji and I had come for a limited number of days, it was decided that the alliance would be

cemented by a Kath bath (literally, conversation). Two days later, we met at Abi Guzar, which was the official residence of my co-brother-in-law Avtar Krishen Kaul, who was in the Intelligence Bureau and was then away for training. We had relatives from both the families and certain gifts were exchanged.

Raj and I met twice during the next few days. We saw a movie together and went for a boat trip on the Dal Lake. We walked on the Residency Road. Then we sat under a huge chinar tree and I sang my first song to Raj:

Tumhe yaad hoga kabhi hum mile the
Muhabbat ki rahon mein milke chale the

(You may recall that we had met once
And walked together on the path of love).

On the day we had to leave, I found that Raj had not come to the Tourist Reception Centre to bid farewell to us. When I mentioned this, someone rushed to Abi Guzar, woke her up and rushed her to the TRC in a jeep. It was thus that I satisfied my desire to see her once more before we got separated. The marriage was likely to take place next June, which was nine months away. At that time, nine months seemed like an eternity!

Back in Chamba, I waited for three months to pass so that I could take over as BDO Tissa. I did not know that my friend Yeshwant Rajwade was using his influence with the Union Home Ministry. Meanwhile, all the four BDOs who were to be displaced were also camping at Shimla, trying to have the orders modified.

The upshot was that we suddenly received orders to report to deputy commissioner, Delhi for further posting. All of us were very happy at this turn of events and hastened to comply with the orders.

Very soon, we were reporting to Shri B.N. Tandon, Deputy Commissioner, Delhi, at Tis Hazari.

Magistrate in Delhi

The Tis Hazari court complex was at that time the headquarters of the District Administration in Delhi. The deputy commissioner was the big boss. Delhi was divided into three districts, each held by an additional district magistrate. Reporting to each ADM there were several subdivisions each held by a subdivisional magistrate.

The executive magistrates were all powerful. There was as yet no separation of the judiciary from the executive. The SDMs had jurisdiction over criminal cases too. The police was answerable to them, as the commissioner of police system had not been introduced. In the rural areas of Delhi there were revenue cases too. Arms licensing was with us.

Bishan Narain Tandon was a short statured person. He had some Napoleonic traits. He liked to believe that he was a hard taskmaster and would often drive young officers to tears. He would disappear from his office till evening when his day actually started. It was not unusual for him to schedule a meeting at 8 p.m. or when a young lady officer wanted to call on him, ask her to see him at 9.30 p.m.

The low morale of younger officers can be gauged from the fact that Yeshwant Rajwade engaged a manservant named Bishan and then threw a dinner party. It thrilled him no end to shout 'Bishan' at his servant, when Bishan Tandon was present. Later, all of us used to recall this incident with immense pleasure and burst into peals of laughter.

We were posted as SDMs. I got the Sadar Bazar subdivision, which had three police stations—Sadar Bazar, Roshanara Road and Serai Rohilla. I had a very suave and experienced Subdivisional Police Officer S.P. Batura. SHO Sadar Bazar was an enormous Bhim Singh who still sported a huge turra reminiscent of the Punjab Police. SHO Roshanara Road was D.D. Sharma, a very jovial, cultured person. Serai Rohilla was with Jaswant Singh, another turra enthusiast.

Gradually I got to know the different problems in the three areas. Sadar Bazar was a very busy market. There were wholesalers of different kinds. You found shopkeepers selling a particular range of similar goods, with their godowns in narrow crowded lanes and by lanes, which could only be serviced by labourers carrying huge bundles on their aching backs or pushing handcarts.

Ever so often, there would be a fire and there was a furore for a while and gradually it died out and things slid back into the kind of anarchy that had prevailed earlier.

Then we had communal riots, mainly between Hindus and Muslims. Anything could trigger it off. Suddenly, hoodlums from both sides appeared from nowhere, pelted one another with soda water bottles, stones and brickbats, some chaps were injured and the riot was over as quickly as it had started.

In my court I had interesting cases which showed the streets of Sadar Bazar to have tremendous potential. There were experts who could produce an exact duplicate of anything. Lawyers representing prestigious companies complained that some people were producing shoddy stuff and selling it in the market as genuine material. They would take search warrants from me and police recovered huge caches of duplicate stuff.

One of the important features of this police station was the management of religious processions taken out by the Hindus, Muslims, Jains and Sikhs on the occasion of their festivals. All the magistrates were deployed en route, in order to maintain law and order. These occasions were

colorful, noisy and crowded, also highly volatile. Anything could happen any time. One had always to be on the que vive.

Roshanara Police Station was quite different. It contained a large chunk of the Delhi University. Students were always up to some mischief or the other. Sometimes it was copying in examinations, sometimes the peddling of drugs in hostels, sometimes the teasing of girls at Holi and sometimes a general strike.

I remember that on the occasion of Holi, I was patrolling the university area. Wherever I saw boys teasing girls, I would stop the jeep and make the boys promise to behave. On one occasion, I made them adopt the pose of a murga (cock). When I think of my behaviour now, I am surprised that no mob lynched me.

During these days, I came to know the student leaders quite well. Two of them whom I encountered later in life were Harcharan Singh Josh and Ramesh Chand Verma.

An interesting incident that took place was that I received reports about the open obscenity being practiced in some of the restaurants of Roop Nagar area, next to the University. I asked Sharma to accompany me on my raids on some of these joints. Under the guise of creating privacy for families, these restaurants had cordoned off some cubicles with curtains, behind which open sexual activity was permitted. The boys found these convenient for their escapades with women of loose moral character or with fellow students. Our raids created a sensation.

A month later, there was a post script to the raids. Bishan Tandon called me to his room and silently passed on a paper to me. It was a complaint by some pseudonymous persons, alleging that I was maintaining a 'keep' (mistress) in one of the flats near the university, and when some of the neighbours had protested against my immoral behaviour, I had resorted to the raids as a reprisal.

'I did not realize that you are leading a very colourful life,' joked my boss, smiling broadly. Obviously, he did not take the complaint too seriously.

During my tenure there was a students' strike. We were told to deploy sufficient force so that there was no arson or looting. We put in our requirements for magistrates and police force. When I reached the University on D Day, it looked like a fortress. The police force was deployed at all strategic corners. I felt like a latter day British officer trying to quell riots during the Quit India movement.

A humorous fallout of the deployment was that one Krishnalekha Roy was posted as a magistrate on duty with me. She was an officer of 1965 batch, still unmarried, a dark Bengali beauty, fond of modern clothes. She had dressed that day in jeans and a top and looked quite chic. As this was her first encounter with a live situation, she was travelling in my jeep the whole day.

At lunchtime, one of the police officers, trying to be polite, congratulated me for having brought 'Madam' along. 'But, Sir, don't you think you are exposing her to unnecessary risks.' I could see that he had seen a lady magistrate for the first time. Trying to hide my smile, I hastened to explain to him that Krishnalekha was not my 'Madam.'

My third police station Serai Rohilla was notorious for illicit distillation. There was a bad character called Deva in my area. He ran a restaurant on Rohtak Road. When I reviewed the situation in that area I got the impression that Deva was quite a terror. I remember that I discussed the whole affair with the SHO. When he found that I was prepared to back him up fully, he raided the restaurant and we did succeed in controlling Deva's activities for a while.

The general impression that I got during my tenure as SDM was that the SHOs were aware of all the criminals in their area and all the crimes were flourishing with their knowledge, if not their

connivance. Of course, there were some rituals that had to be gone through. Once in a while, the police raided the bootleggers and recovered lot of material. The accused appeared in our court and were duly punished.

The same bad characters used to be rounded up on the occasion of Holi and Diwali. They were also arrested under the preventive sections of the Cr.P.C. They would meekly stand in the court with a resigned expression on their faces. This was part of their contract with the police. After all, the police also had to show some Karguzari.

Meanwhile, Bishan Tandon also carried out his rituals. One of the matters he took very seriously was the performance of all the magistrates working under his command. There was a system of adjudging our performance on the basis of units. These units were calculated mechanically on the basis of figures supplied by us to his office. Each disposal resulted in a unit. A case was supposed to be disposed off when the final verdict was pronounced.

When this ritual had been performed for 3-4 months, I noticed that the star performer, who invariably earned appreciation from Bishan, was a promoted officer named Sukhraj Bahadur, SDM (Shahdara). His disposal (which was referred to by Bishan as 'dispojal') was always the highest. The strange thing was that his court, which was physically located next to mine, always wore a deserted look after 11.30 a.m. My court was chockfull till about 8 p.m.

After a few months, I thought that I needed some education in how to earn units without tears. One day, I adjourned my cases early and sent word to Sukhraj Bahadur that I wished to call on him. He very graciously called me at once. When I reached his chamber, I found his table absolutely clean.

While we were having tea, I requested Sukhraj to initiate me into the deeper mysteries of earning units. He laughed outright.

'Yes, I can see that you must be thoroughly mystified. You are working hard the whole day and till late in the evening. But, Kaw Saab, what is the point?'

'What is the technique you follow?' I bleated.

He assumed a superior air. And said, 'I am going to tell you something you have not been taught at Mussourie. You see Kaw Sahib, why are we working? To earn outstanding entries in our annual reports, isn't it? How shall we do that? Obviously, by disposing off cases.'

There are two ways of achieving disposals. One is your way. You take every case as a challenge, with the avowed intention of awarding the maximum punishment that the law permits you to impose. Every one knows it. So every case is contested. You have to go through the entire rigmarole of recording evidence and hearing arguments and then dictating detailed judgements. Even then, you cannot convict many offenders, because you need complete proof which is generally not available.'

'Yes, yes that is what I do,' I interjected testily, 'But is that not what we are supposed to do?'

'That is what the theory of jurisprudence says. But look at the alternative scenario. Your SHO is happy if you convict the offender. His efficiency is judged by his conviction rate. The criminal is a criminal. When you have been in the game as long as I have been, you know them by their first names. So you do not really need any proof. The criminal knows that you are going to convict him. If he knows that you will award a light sentence, he is prepared to confess his crime. So as soon as he appears, you charge him. He confesses. You award the sentence. The SHO is happy. The criminal is happy. You are happy. Your boss is happy. Understand?'

Sukhraj Bahadur beamed at me, like an affectionate uncle.

I was silent, in a shell-shocked state. So he continued. 'Kaw Saab, then you have the complaint cases, where you have taken cognizance of the matter on the basis of a private complaint. In your court, the case is likely to drag on for two years and then in 99 percent cases you will have to dismiss the complaint. Why waste everyone's time? I have a simple formula. On the very first day of hearing, I call both the lawyers to my chamber. They are always ready for a compromise. I give them one date to work out the details. When the compromise is filed, I accept it and give my judgment accordingly.'

I could now see a glimmer of light. Sukhraj believed in confessions and compromises and he had a winning formula.

'One last point,' he continued. 'I do not have to write long judgements. In fact, I don't write judgements at all. I have trained my reader to put up a draft judgment, which I just sign'.

What Sukhraj taught me was invaluable. Even though I was temperamentally incapable of following his advice, it clarified to me that one should go behind statistics to assess the real performance of one's subordinates.

I was assigned the work of arms licensing. It was very interesting work, as there were hundreds of people wanting gun licenses to protect themselves and their property. There were also some who were avid hunters and needed licenses to pursue their hobby.

After a while, I discovered that our record was in a very confused state and it took the babus a hell of time to trace previous papers. This made for inefficiency and delay. People had to visit our office time and again.

I took time off and studied the record management procedure being followed in our office. It was totally chaotic. Everything was lying helter skelter on the ground and it was a miracle that any file could be traced at all.

I suggested the obvious and within a few months we had put the entire record into neat bundles, police station-wise and with a unique file number. The result was greater satisfaction with the work.

I was also very accessible to the licensees and would attend to their work at a personal level. Some of them became my regular pals.

I still remember an old man who was very friendly and would share with me the details of his personal life. At an advanced age he had married a much younger woman and much of his talk related to the effect that the frequent consumption of venison had on his performance in bed. He would sometimes bring some venison for me and that is the only time in my life that I took teetar, batar, water-birds etc., on a regular basis.

It was now April 1967. One day, at about 5.30 p.m., I was sitting in my courtroom, listening to an argument. Suddenly, my peon came near and whispered that someone had come to see me. I looked up and was surprised to see Baijan, a cousin of Raj standing in the court. I excused myself and asked Baijan to come to my chamber. He gave me the electrifying news that Raj and Kishni (Raj's cousin) had both come to Delhi for a few days.

I asked him whether I could meet them during this visit. He said that they were waiting outside and I could meet them right away. I adjourned the court at once and hurried out to where Raj and Kishni were standing outside the Tis Hazari courts. I was seeing Raj after six months and we said many things to each other with our eyes.

I took them to Connaught Place and we had coffee and conversation at Gaylord's. After an hour or so, they said they were getting late and pushed off. I told them that I would be visiting them the next

morning and would take Raj for a drive. Raj put in a caveat that I should bring along my siblings.

As the entire purpose of the drive was that I would have a few hours of uninterrupted conversation with Raj, I took special care not to bring anyone along. A car with driver was arranged for me by Sharma, the SHO of Roshanara Road.

Raj was staying at the house of her uncle in Inderpuri. The road passed near Pusa Institute and much of it was a narrow lane going in a meandering fashion through agricultural fields. My in-laws made much of me, but I was impatient to have Raj all to myself. At last we were alone.

I took her to Buddha Jayanti Gardens and we spent some time promenading through the flower beds. Raj was saying again and again that it was not proper of me not to have brought Kakaji (my brother) or Ashaji (my sister) along, as she was very keen to meet them. I thought that the lady was protesting too much. Wanting to silence her with a kiss, I pulled her near, when suddenly a mali materialized from nowhere and asked me to desist.

With this kind of scenario, I thought it best to withdraw from the Gardens and take her to a restaurant. I deposited her back at Inderpuri before lunch.

The priests had ordained that a good muhurat for our wedding would fall on 3 June, 1967. Meanwhile, Raj's cousin Kishni had also been engaged to Kulbhushan, an architect and they would also be married on the same day. However, there was something that would not allow the two grooms to interact with each other on that day.

With this tentative schedule in mind, Raj and I parted company.

I had missed meeting my co-brother-in-law Avatar Krishen Kaul when I went to Srinagar, as he was away on training. We entered into correspondence. A.K. was very proficient in English. When I told him to suggest a few classics in English to Raj, he shot back, 'It is no use. The Gurtu sisters tend to touch books with a pair of tongs.' I remember that I appreciated the turn of phrase quite a bit and this built a bridge of sorts in our relationship.

I get married

At long last, it was time to pack our baggage and move to Srinagar for my marriage. My parents had told their relatives still living there to provide local help and most things were ready. They had bought the rice, dal, rajma, other dry rations, masalas, firewood and so on. My grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, everybody had come to Srinagar for the event. Our ancestral house, which had remained vacant since our migration, was now teeming with activity.

I sent a message to Raj to try to meet me somewhere, but she sent a negative reply. We could now meet only on the day of the wedding. That showed me how conservative she was in her outlook.

The days passed with lamentable slowness. I tried to beguile myself with gossip and meaningless activity to fill in the hours of enforced idleness.

Meanwhile there was a problem that seemed to baffle my parents. The government had passed orders that one could not have more than 25 guests in a wedding feast. My parents wanted my marriage to be a memorable gala event. But how can an event in which you have only 25 guests be memorable? My grandfather Babalal was very happy. He had been pleading for a simple wedding, in accordance with the call given by certain leaders of the community, but no one had paid any attention.

In desperation, my father turned to his cousin Shri Nila Kanth Ganju, who was a judge. Ganjoo sahib assured my parents that he would be personally present outside our house while the festivities were on. We should serve our guests in batches of 25, but we could serve as many batches as we wished. He kept his word and my mother remembers this till today.

On the night before the marriage, I dreamt steamy scenes that raised my temperature. I was feverish and could not sleep well. In the morning I felt dull, listless and spent. I took a bath and put on my new clothes.

Now I had to wear a turban. It had been decided that I should not wear a prefabricated turban. It looked too cheap. In any case, my skull being huge, even the largest turban available in the market would not fit me. The only available option was for someone of the older generation to tie a turban around my head.

The choice fell on Tathya, an uncle of my mother who was known for his turban-tying skills. He spent almost an hour on me, but the end product did not satisfy anyone. As we were getting late, it was decided to carry on with whatever he had manufactured. But that turban was commented upon by everyone. I was chaffed for days on end about the shape and fit of my turban.

We left in a carcade from Mallapora and reached Badiyar very soon. At that time, there was a light shower, which is considered a benediction by Kashmiri Pandits. I descended from my car and was made to stand on a vyoog (circular pattern drawn by the womenfolk), so that I could be formally welcomed by my mother-in-law. However, I had to wait till the elder son-in-law arrived, as he had precedence over me. Kulbhushan came a bit late and so there was an embarrassing stage pause in my proceedings.

At last, he arrived and his ceremony was gone through. Then came Raj, hardly visible in her sari and hiding her face behind a veil. Thanks to the photographers, her veil was put aside and I could see her. My mother-in-law came and fed Raj and me from the same piece of barfi. Eating food together is supposed to improve affection between the couple.

Then the two processions went inside and the grooms were seated on raised platforms with a thick

cloth curtain between us, so that Kulbhushan and I could not see each other. After some time we were escorted to two different rooms and subjected to a thick pall of smoke for several hours, while the priests mumbled their mantras.

One of the ceremonies was related to holding of hands. It is called athwas and the groom and bride are supposed to try and take out the ring from the other's finger. Whoever succeeds dominates. I remember that there was a protracted struggle, then Raj gave in and let me take her ring. I should have realized then and there that she was going to dominate me by affection.

We had saptapadi, a beautiful ceremony in which we had to walk around the sacred fire seven times. We had poshpooza, in which a shawl is placed on the heads of the groom and bride and then they are worshipped with flowers as Shiva and Parvati by all those present in the room. Before we knew it, we were declared man and wife, and were asked to touch the feet of the elders and seek their blessings. We did this and then Raj was taken to the inner chambers for rest and change of clothes.

The same evening we went back home, taking Raj with us. She was welcomed as the new bride in the traditional manner. At night we were not allowed to sleep in a separate room, as there was an astrological requirement that the marriage should not be consummated that night. We had to wade through another day of waiting and boredom before we were given a room.

Next night, I found, in the words of the poet of Alif-e-Laila, that she was 'a filly unriden and a pearl unthridden' and she naturally 'cried the cry that must be cried'. But it must have been an abnormally loud cry, because my uncle Saibaji was frightened that something untoward had happened. He hammered on the door to find out why such a loud cry had emanated from our bedroom. I opened the door, just a little bit, as I had no clothes on. He asked me if everything was all right. I said that everything was all right. He withdrew. I closed the door.

'Who was it?' Raj innocently asked.

'Someone interested in your welfare. Next time you want to shout for help, put your face into a pillow and try to stifle the cry.'

An interesting sidelight of the wedding was the two telegrams received from my boss Bishan Tandon. On the day of the wedding, I got a telegram which read: 'For ever may you love and she be fair.' This I thought was absolutely literary and great, but totally uncharacteristic of Bishan and I strongly suspected that one of his aides must be responsible.

Two days later, he wired and this time there was no doubt that it was Bishan's own handiwork. He said, 'Leave cancelled. Rejoin duties at once.' For the life of me I could not fathom what crisis had befallen the nation that Bishan could not handle it without my help.

I rang up my reader. I learnt that there was a particular case under Sections 107/151, where I had closed the proceedings and discharged all the respondents. This was a routine matter, in which the Reader would put up a stereotyped order of 4 lines and I would sign the same in routine. Unfortunately, my Reader had forgotten to get my signatures on this file. One of the parties wanted to file an appeal and had applied to the copying branch for a copy of my order. The ADM concerned had got my almirah broken and traced the file. Now Bishan wanted me to rush back and sign the blasted order.

I had no intention of obeying this kind of arbitrariness. Any other officer would have called the advocate, explained what had happened and found a solution. But Bishan would not be Bishan if he did not throw his weight about.

I sent a telegram in reply, 'Severely unwell, unable to travel. Shall come as soon as permitted by doctor. Medical certificate being sent by post.' I joined duties on the scheduled date and not a day earlier.

The next few weeks are dim in my memory. I suppose I must have slept through the days and used the nights properly.

My in-laws arranged a trip to Kheer Bhawani by their own bus. The entire family and some neighbours travelled. On way to the holy shrine, all devotees are vegetarian. But the moment you start on the return journey, non-vegetarian dishes are almost compulsory. We decided to break journey at Harwan and enjoy a sumptuous non-vegetarian repast.

While waiting for the lunch to be ready, my in-laws decided to serve us tea. The other couple, Kulbhushan and Kishni were also present. Kulbhushan and I were famished and naturally expected a high tea. All we got was a packet of Salto biscuits. Despite their financial status, our in-laws were reputed to be frugal (read miserly). Salto biscuits for newlywed sons-in-law became a symbol of that frugality. Kulbhushan and I laugh uproariously even to this day when someone mentions Salto biscuits.

On 24 June our whole party left by bus for Jammu. The rest of the party went to some rest house and the newlyweds were placed in a hotel room. Unfortunately, one of my relatives decided to entertain me with chicken and beer. I returned to the hotel room and went off to sleep

When I woke up after a couple of hours, I heard the sound of water running in the bathroom. It soon transpired that Raj was feeling the heat of Jammu. The room was not air-conditioned. It was abominably hot, but I was full of beer and chicken and, in any case, heat never bothers me. So I merrily went off to sleep again and she kept on taking bath after bath.

In the morning, she confronted me. She was going back to Srinagar. She was not travelling to Delhi in this terribly hot weather. I thought this rich. Hardly had we got married than she wanted to separate. Fortunately, other members of the family pitched in and she was persuaded to continue the journey.

We took the train and reached Delhi in good shape. But there was another hurdle to be crossed. A vigilant team of the municipal authorities pounced on our baggage and threatened to impound it unless we shelled out a big sum in octroi duty. I was forced to reveal my identity and call up my colleagues in the police, before they would let us go.

At last, we reached home.

Black Day at Indraprastha

The days passed merrily. Raj reacted to the heat of Delhi with boils but she gradually got used to the climate.

The results of MA in Hindi literature came and I was pleasantly surprised to find that Raj had topped the Kashmir University. Surprised because I did not suspect her of high scholastic ability. To my relief she never raised the question of taking up a job. Nor did I broach the topic.

In 1967, my brother Dr Predhiman Krishen Kaw was selected by Princeton University and left for the USA. I remember that going abroad was, in those days, a great achievement. We all went to the airport to see him off. We garlanded him and wished him a great stay in his new environs.

By and by, we started buying small things. Soon we had a sofa, a dining table, a fridge and finally a car. Those days, one usually bought a Fiat and I did the same. It was green in colour and the number, I remember, was 6869, to denote the fact that it had been purchased in that financial year.

My grandmother's death in 1966 had had a grave impact on my grandfather. He would often talk about her and weep inconsolably. One day, he was struck by paralysis on the right side. I would often take him in the car to Safdarjung Hospital, where he was subjected to physiotherapy. Although he seemed to be improving, he had lost his desire to live and in 1968 he passed away.

The impact of my grandfather's personality on our entire family was overpowering. It is because he was a Headmaster and a Principal that we all valued education so much.

Pandit Shivji Kaw was universally venerated. I realized this when, around 1953, we attended a function of Kashmir Samiti Delhi held at Lodhi Gardens. Shri Prem Nath Dhar was the President. When all the people assembled, he requested Tathyaji to chair the proceedings. He declared that he had studied under Tathyaji and venerated him from the bottom of his heart. Thereafter, he touched Tathyaji's feet.

Tathyaji's simplicity, straightforwardness and rectitude were well known. Decades later, in the year 2008, when I was president, All India Kashmiri Samaj, an old Kashmiri Pandit paid Tathyaji the ultimate tribute. He declared, 'Since the time I heard that Maharaj Krishenji is the grandson of Pandit Shivji Kaw, I am of the firm opinion that the community is in safe hands'.

One small incident of this period is still fresh in my memory. One day, Sharma the SHO of Roshanara Road arranged passes for Raj and me for a film at Amba Theatre. He had also arranged for a car. We reached in time for the evening show. As we entered the outer courtyard of the theatre, one young man happened to see Raj. He thought of us as just another ordinary couple and passed some lecherous remark.

I was incensed. I stopped and gestured to a police constable on duty. I told him who I was and asked him to take the youth into custody. Raj remonstrated with me and advised me to ignore the whole incident. I said that normally I would have done so. But that a small time hoodlum should target the wife of the Illaqa SDM could not be tolerated.

We saw the movie and later went home. Next morning, when I started the court, a lawyer appeared before me and said that he wanted a private audience with me. I called him to the retiring room. He said that I had a personal score to settle with the youth and had misused the machinery of law. I told him that I only wanted the young man to learn a lesson and had no intention of keeping him in jail. He wanted me to release the youth on bail. I told him to come into the court and see what I had in mind.

Outside, I called the young man and asked him whether he was sorry for what he had done. He said he was. I asked him if he would stand at the back of the room in the form of a murga (cock) for an hour. He said he would. I told the Naib Court to see that my orders were obeyed and then report back after an hour. Then I ordered the proceedings against him to be dropped.

Soon, Raj was in a family way. The baby was expected in October. We all started preparing for the great event.

Meanwhile, Bishan sprung a surprise on us. I had always felt that I was not in his good books. His order recalling me from leave on my marriage still rankled. So we were thrilled when he chose me to be the ADM of the Central District.

I had now a much bigger jurisdiction, with many SDMs and magistrates reporting to me. I started making grandiose plans about the steps I would take, but fate intervened in the form of the Indraprastha incident.

Something had happened to provoke the Central Government employees to call for a general all India strike. The government did not like the idea. The year was 1968. Indira Gandhi was uneasy in the PM's chair. It was decided to crush the strike with a heavy hand.

Bishan Tandon called a meeting of all magistrates and police officers and told us that the strike should be quelled and no processions allowed at any cost.

On 19 September, a huge force was deployed. My superintendent of police was one Sardar Mohinder Singh, who had joined the force as an ordinary constable and had risen in the ranks, finally to become an SP. He was 56 years old. We decided to patrol the area of central district in a joint vehicle. For about four hours, everything was under control.

At 12.30 p.m. we got a wireless message that things were coming to a head at Indraprastha estate, especially in the Y-shaped building, where the offices of the Central Public Works department were located. Hundreds of employees had gathered there and they were threatening to take out a procession. As we approached the area, we saw a procession coming out of the building. We tear-gassed the procession and it dispersed.

There was a control room where another ADM and SP were deployed. They were in charge of the area. We both entered the control room and discussed the situation with them. The ADM was one Shri S.C. Pandey, a promotee from the State Civil Service of UP. He obviously did not think of himself as answerable to an upstart like me. The question of why they had allowed the situation to build up, therefore, remained hanging between us as an insoluble enigma. The central control room was also kept informed about the developments. At no stage did Bishan advise me or Pandey on how the situation ought to be tackled.

The miscreants who had till then been bottled up started moving to the roof of the multi-storeyed building. Meanwhile, one M.L Sondhi, a former IFS officer turned Jana Sangh MP, decided to fish in the troubled waters. He came to the Y-shaped building and started addressing a small crowd which immediately gathered outside in the courtyard. Bishan, who was watching the situation, sent another Tandon, a DIG to help us defuse the situation. This DIG decided to go across the road and hear what Sondhi was telling the crowd. Naturally, to give him a security cover, the SP and a few policemen fanned out behind him.

As they approached the crowd, the people on the roof got the notion that the police were going to arrest Sondhi. So they pelted stones at the police. Resultantly, the meeting broke up and people ran helter skelter. Sardar Mohinder Singh who was feeling chained up so far got the guts to shout 'Aaoo

...’ to his force. Before we realized it, the police force led by Mohinder Singh had entered the Y-shaped building.

I told everybody in sight to try and get the force out as soon as they could. I rushed in myself, with just a constable with me, for protection. Magistrates have no uniform. I think someone advised me to borrow a helmet and a whistle from a policeman. That saved my life.

Inside, the scene was one of carnage. The police had gone berserk and lathi-charged everyone in sight. Some of the senior officers were dragged out of their offices and beaten up. Within 10 minutes, I had gone to the top floor, contacted Mohinder Singh and persuaded him to recall his force and vacate the building. Within 30 minutes, everything had quietened down.

It took another two hours to send some of the miscreants to Tihar Jail and release the bulk. The injured were sent for treatment. In between, Sondhi tried to interfere. I told him politely to let us handle the situation.

Unfortunately for everyone, one of the employees lost his cool and jumped from the roof of the building. He died. Sondhi added fuel to the fire by alleging that the magistrate on duty had told him, ‘Go back to your blooming parliament, Mr MP!’ The CPWD officers who had been beaten up naturally narrated their tales of woe to the press. The whole thing became a national sensation.

Having missed our lunch, Mohinder Singh and I had a bite at Daryaganj Police Station, before going home at about 11 p.m. What both of us failed to do was to rush to Bishan and weep on his shoulder.

The next morning all hell broke loose. ‘Black Day at Indraprastha’ shrieked the headlines. Parliament was in a pandemonium. The opposition parties wanted the Home Minister to resign. There were meetings galore in the Home Ministry. Bishan was present at these meetings. It was decided to make the ADM and SP the scapegoats and place us under suspension. Thus Bishan was safe and the Home Minister was safe.

Fortunately for me, the Home Secretary L.P. Singh wanted to see my earlier record. He was shocked to see that I had barely four years of service, of which two had been spent in training. He saw my academic record and work record. All reports were outstanding. He put his foot down and said that transfer would be adequate punishment for me.

Suddenly, some Sikh organizations surfaced and said that Mohinder Singh had been discriminated against because he was a Sikh. The IPS lobby started a campaign that the bureaucrats had managed to save an IAS officer but sacrificed the IPS officer. One newspaper stated on its front page that my transfer to a non-executive post actually meant a higher salary for me because Secretariat jobs had a special pay of Rs 200 per month.

All the while, Bishan kept on telling me that I had done very well and I had done a great job by bringing out the police force out of the building. He assured me that he would protect me at all costs. Unknown to me he had made the Lieutenant Governor announce a fact-finding inquiry by the Deputy Commissioner. In the report, he did not place any blame on me, except to say that Mohinder Singh and I had ordered a tear gas attack on the crowd and this was rash. It was this one sentence that cooked my goose.

Before we knew what had happened, Mohinder Singh had been placed under suspension. I was transferred first as Deputy Secretary, Planning, and after the publication of the press report, my designation was changed to Officer on Special Duty so that I would not draw any special pay. On top of it, we were both chargesheeted as for a major penalty and the proceedings were handed over to the

Central Vigilance Commission, so that a judicious verdict could be secured.

So here I was with four years of service, already chargesheeted, facing disciplinary proceedings which could easily end in dismissal from service, posted on a non-descript job which had no work and so to say, my career in absolute ruins.

I was shattered and devastated. My family was in a state of shock. I did not know what to do, whom to approach. I remember someone advising me to go and meet Bose Mullick, a former Deputy Commissioner of Delhi. I went to him with tension writ large on my face. Something in his demeanour calmed me down.

He offered me a cup of coffee and then said:

‘Kaw! let me tell you a few home truths: (a) Nobody thinks badly of you. Everyone knows what kind of person Bishan Tandon is. Everyone says that he has sacrificed you to save his own skin, (b) This inquiry will not do any damage to your career. It will keep you busy for a year or two and then it will fizzle out, (c) After six months everyone would have forgotten about this and you will be up to your ears in work, and (d) Take this period as an enforced holiday and do whatever you have wanted to do but could not due to paucity of time. Read books. Go for a holiday. Enjoy.’

His words calmed me as nothing else could. In retrospect, I can say that in many ways Indraprastha represented a watershed in my life. I grew up. I lost my ego. I got interested in spirituality. I wrote poetry. I started on my satirical pieces on the bureaucracy. I lost my illusions.

The inquiry wended its way in a relaxed manner. I gave my version, Mohinder Singh gave his. I requested Amar Raj Lall, brother-in-law to my friend and batch mate Omesh Saigal, to act as my lawyer. We took special pleasure in cross-examining Bishan Narain Tandon, who had so badly let us all down. The learned inquiry officer believed Mohinder Singh’s version. He held that the ADM and the SP were fully within their rights to take necessary steps to maintain law and order. So the action was justified.

Mohinder Singh was quietly reinstated. Not a dog barked.

5, Alipore Road

In my assignment as officer on special duty (Planning), I had a new boss. I was reporting directly to Sushil Varma, an officer of Madhya Pradesh cadre on deputation as Chief Secretary, Delhi. He was small, slim and dapper. He was a gentleman to a fault. He never threw his weight around. He was economical with words, both verbal and written.

Soon after I joined, he told me to look after audit paras and audit objections. This amounted to placing me on the shelf. Fortunately, we had Jai Dev Sud, an officer of the Indian Audit and Accounts Service who was also on deputation. He sat in the room next to mine. He had enough time on his hands. In him, I found a truly benevolent friend.

During our daily gossip sessions, it soon transpired that audit was not as unimportant as I thought it was. There was scope for creating a new awareness about its importance. With Sud's help, I was able to prevail upon the CAG to spare a senior officer to attend my meetings.

I drew up a calendar of daily meetings. Every day, some department or the other was scheduled. Its secretary and head of department were asked to attend. We discussed the audit observations and the departmental reply. If the CAG's representative was satisfied with the reply given, the para or objection was dropped. If not, it was decided as to what remedial action the department should take in order to satisfy the audit.

Suddenly, something happened that had never happened before. Hundreds of audit paras and objections were settled in a matter of months. History was made.

Sud was very pally with Varma. They were both learning Spanish together. Sud kept on briefing Varma about what I was up to. Soon Varma lost his prejudice against me, if he ever had any.

Initially, I had been posted as OSD (Planning). Varma added Home and then Finance to my portfolio. Later he promoted me as Secretary, Excise and Taxation. Thus, Bose Mullick's prediction came true. Within six months of Indraprastha, I was back in business.

Meanwhile, things had been happening on the family front. Raj was due for delivery in October. Nobody said anything but there was an unstated desire in everyone's mind that my first child should be a boy. This was especially my mother's desire. Papaji and I were quite bindaas about the whole thing. Anything was okay with us.

As things happened, the stork brought a baby girl. The whole family celebrated, especially as it was a normal delivery. The day she was born was a day prior to Diwali, what is often referred to as Chhoti Diwali. It was an auspicious day. Why my daughter was named Iti (the end) I have explained in an earlier chapter.

I renewed my friendship with Virendar Chanana whom I had earlier met at Aligarh. He had come to Delhi Administration on deputation as Labour Commissioner. He used to come to 5, Alipore Road often and we would take lunch together. He got passes for premiere shows of new films and we went to these together. He also got passes for using the swimming pools of several hotels. We would go to the Claridge's sometimes for a dip.

Virendar married into the Suri family, which is a prominent business family of Delhi. It was through him that I first came to know G. Sagar Suri and later the other brothers Ramesh and Lalit. His wife Toshi is a very charming lady, who has many hobbies like painting and pottery. Virendar had himself a longish stint in UNIDO and later set up a factory which is now being run by his son.

Another life-long friendship that blossomed during this period was with Sudershan Agarwal. He was a member of the Punjab Judicial Service and had come on deputation as Chairman, Industrial Tribunal. I sometimes wondered what he saw in that post. Sudershan was very active in the Rotary International and knew almost everybody who was anybody in the town. Little could I visualize his future career, which was dazzling in its unfoldment. He went to the Rajya Sabha and progressed to the post of Secretary General, which was soon equated to that of Cabinet Secretary. He was later appointed the Governor of Uttaranchal and then shifted to Sikkim.

I also came to know D.P Bajaj who was the president of the Sadar Bazar Dealers' Association, when I was SDM Sadar Bazar. He and his wife Krishna came all the way to Srinagar to attend my wedding. He was very friendly with Amar Raj Lall, who was married to Kamala, sister of my batch mate Omesh. We often had coffee together or saw a movie together.

I do not remember much of the official work I did during this period. We gave a new uniform to Delhi Police. I also recall that we were ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party and our chief executive councillor was Vijay Kumar Malhotra. He was a great Hindi enthusiast. I had no difficulty at all in shifting to Hindi as the sole medium of communication. This came in handy when I introduced Hindi in Himachal Pradesh. Much later, I worked in Hindi in Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, much to the pleasant surprise of Murli Manohar Joshi.

I do recall, however, with a smile the fact that when I took over as Secretary, Excise and Taxation, I found that one of my heads of department was a gentleman called Beni Krishen Sharma, an officer promoted from the UP PCS to the IAS and allotted to the year 1958. He was thus six years senior to me. Obviously he had a grievance that he should not have to report to a secretary junior to himself. He was especially sore that I would write his annual confidential report.

I had no intention of troubling a senior colleague. I, therefore, met Shri Varma and requested him to post me elsewhere. Varmaji did not agree, but accepted my other suggestion that he would himself act as the reporting officer and he would base his report on a confidential report submitted by me. This arrangement suited everyone and was implemented.

This was the period when I started writing regularly. I think at first my writing was an outpouring of frustration. I wrote pieces like 'The gentle art of spoonery' and 'Yesmanship' for a magazine of the Union Territories Cadre Association newsletter that I started and edited. These pungent essays went on accumulating over the years and I went on publishing them as middles. Many years later, they were anthologized as Bureaucrazy, which was published in 1993 and became a bestseller.

But it was as a poet that I really flourished. I found a poem with its economy of language and terseness much simpler to write. It took less time and was more effective in conveying what I meant. It was around this time that I met Keshav Malik, the renowned poet. He was married to a Kashmiri girl and his family, though Punjabi, had spent lot of its time in Kashmir. His sister Kapila Vatsyayan was married to Agyeya, the eminent Hindi poet.

Keshav took me under his wing. We spent some time together and he explained to me how a poem could be improved. When I showed him some of my efforts, he was good enough to publish 'Gliders' in Thought, a magazine which he was editing at that time. As it is my first published poem, I would like to quote it in full:

Oversized kites
Skimming the air

From where I recline
They vanish into the housetops opposite
As if in pursuit of crimson hunks of lung-meat
Flung aloft by devotees
On a hill-top in Khriv.

He told me of Professor P. Lal who ran the Writers' Workshop at Calcutta and was currently looking out for young poets writing poetry in English. Keshav sat patiently with me to select three of my poems which he merged into one. He edited the poems a bit and then advised me to send the poem pronto to P. Lal.

I did not think anything would come out of it, but I was amazed to get a postcard from Lal in his calligraphic hand, saying that I had been accepted in the anthology and could I send replies to the questionnaire.. That is how you see my name in an anthology published in 1969, barely a year after I started writing poetry. It was called 'Modern Indian Poetry in English: An anthology and a credo'. And part of the poem that introduced me to the world of poetry was:

Nights in a cold bed are lonely
And wish-filled.
Every other moment
Star tears trickle down
The dim face of darkness.
Fire-fly ridden
The sable semi-circular ceiling
Hangs heavily on the weary horizon.

At this time, a major decision was taken by the government about the cadre of which I was a part. When I had joined service, I had opted for what was then known as the Delhi and Himachal Pradesh cadre, which we thought would be ideal. I would either be in Delhi or in Shimla. In 1966, it was decided to enlarge the scope of this cadre and it became the Union Territories cadre, which made our services transferable to all the Union Territories, which were strewn across India.

Now again in 1970, Home Ministry decided to give a separate cadre to Himachal Pradesh which was about to become a State. I was keen to get out of the widely dispersed Union Territories cadre and get allotted to Himachal. The snag was that I had no godfather. K.N. Channa was the Chief Secretary and he was my batch mate Vivek Channa's uncle. I could have approached him through Vivek, but I was shy and did not do a thing.

Rumours were afloat that other people were highly proactive. Madhusudan Mukerjee was at that time undergoing a training programme at London. He wrote a personal letter to Dr Y.S. Parmar, who was Chief Minister at that time. The gossip was that it was a powerful letter and he was in.

One day the telephone rang. It was a chap who was my class fellow in Camp College.

'M.K. let me warn you. They are looking for you.'

I was mystified. This chap was private secretary to Amba Datt Pande, who was the joint secretary

(Union Territories) in the Ministry of Home Affairs. For us Pande was God.

‘Who is looking for me? And why? What have I done?’ I croaked.

‘Well, I am telling you this in the utmost confidence. These days they are deciding the allotment to Himachal. One of the decisions is that all officers who are domiciles of Himachal should have the first claim on the posts. Now apparently, you were not a domicile of Himachal. But yesterday the section officer dealing with the case came running into Sahib’s room. He was quite flustered. As you know, there is a book published by the Department of Personnel. It is called the ‘History of the Service’. It shows your domicile as Himachal Pradesh’.

I was stunned. I could not utter a word.

‘MK, are you there?’ asked the PS.

‘Yes, of course, I am here. I am just a little puzzled,’

‘Not a little,’ he said, ‘Everyone here is stupefied. Everyone knows that you are a Kashmiri and you have been in Delhi almost all your life. But they cannot ignore an entry in a DOPT book. Maybe, you are secretly a Himachali.’ ‘So why are they looking for me?’ I asked unnecessarily.

‘It is obvious. They want you in person so that they can ask you to give a written statement as to the truth.’

‘So what do you advise?’ I asked.

‘Well, my dear. I will deny it if you quote me anywhere, but being a friend my advice is: Just disappear for two days.’

‘Disappear?’ I shouted, ‘How can I disappear? And what happens after two days?’

‘This matter cannot pend indefinitely. They have a deadline. They have tentatively put your name as an insider. If you do not tell them anything to the contrary, they will have to issue the list tomorrow. As far as I am concerned, I will tell the boss that I tried your number but you have gone somewhere and are just not available. I suggest that you do what I suggested.’ And he called off.

On the one hand I was happy that God had helped me. On the other, I was deeply apprehensive that when I met Dr Parmar, Chief Minister of HP, he would ask me where in Himachal I hailed from. After much worrying I decided that if he did ask, I will say that I was born in Una district. Una was part of the area that had newly acceded from Punjab and Himachal politicians knew nothing about these areas.

In fact, I need not have worried. Next day, the list was notified. No one ever asked me any questions. For better or worse, I was now a member of the state cadre of Himachal Pradesh.

A stint at Shimla

Very soon the cadre change had its impact. In 1971, I was posted to Shimla. I reported to the Chief Secretary and he posted me as Director, Community Development and Panchayati Raj.

Very soon after I joined, I had my first encounter with the chief minister. He had kept a spot inspection to decide where exactly the Panchayat Bhavan at Shimla would be located. We assembled near the bus stand, which appeared to me too congested to bear the burden of one more building.

Dr Parmar was talking to the secretary, the chief engineer, the chief architect and others. They were all respectfully nodding their heads at what he was saying.

Suddenly, on impulse, I intervened, 'Sir, don't you think that this place is already too congested. Can we not have the Panchayat Bhavan somewhere else?'

There was a hushed silence. Dr Parmar looked at me, perhaps wondering who I was. In his nasal tone, he said, 'Who has to decide this, you or me?' For a second, our eyes met. I could see his green eyes aglitter. They were the eyes of a serpent looking at possible prey.

After the meeting, Shri P.K. Mattoo, who was present and was my well-wisher, advised me not to be so blunt in expressing my opinions. Later, he also enunciated the Doctrine of Lying Low, which always paid dividends in the bureaucracy. Put simply, the doctrine described the manifold advantages of not taking a stand on any issue whatsoever.

Gradually, I got used to the ways of the locals, although I never could master the art of lying low. One of the aphorisms related to punctuality. Being used to going by the clock, it was a revelation that officers moved with the sun. The aphorism was 'dhuppe aao te dhuppe jao' (Come after the sun has shown himself and go home while the sun is still shining). In the winter months this meant you came to office at 11 a.m. and started the homeward journey around 3 p.m.

I remained in my assignment for six months. I suspect that Man Mohan Sahai Srivastava (MMS), a very bright officer, asked for me by name. He was the Finance Secretary and was extremely close to the CM. As we had just been granted statehood, we had to submit our first ever memorandum to the Finance Commission. MMS needed all the help he could get. He was probably scouting around for talent and his eyes lighted on me.

I was picked up in the beginning of 1972. It was sheer delight working for MMS. He was, in its true meaning, an intellectual. He read a lot and remembered all the figures by heart. He was a very impressive speaker. He became my idol and I tried to learn as much as I could.

He worked long hours and so did I. Very soon we developed a very harmonious relationship. With our joint efforts, we were able to prepare the memorandum for the Finance Commission in time. It turned out to be a well drafted document.

Meanwhile, Raj was again in a family way. This time she decided to go to her father's house for the confinement. My son Anurag was, therefore, born in Srinagar on 24 May, 1972. Raj continued to remain there for some more time till he grew up a bit.

This was the time we had the Shimla Summit after the Bangladesh war with Pakistan. We were all posted on various duties. I got the interesting task of looking after Bhutto's daughter, the young Benazir. We had, at that time, Veena Datta, a lady officer of the Indian Foreign Service, who was on training with the State government. She helped me keep Benazir in a good mood.

One event I distinctly remember was a request made by Benazir that she wanted to see the popular film Pakeezah. I talked to the Deputy Commissioner, Shimla and we got a special show organized in the Ritz cinema. There were only three of us in the cinema hall: Benazir, Veena and myself. Benazir enjoyed the film immensely. I retained the picture of the young and innocent Benazir all through the years of her tumultuous career till she was assassinated..

It was during this absence of Raj from the scene that I grew heavy sideburns and started wearing coloured kurtas. Thus I was not only writing poetry I also started looking like a poet.

One Sunday I had gone to Wildflower Hall. I was wearing a deep saffron kurta. Suddenly, I espied my Chief Secretary Shri Kuldip Narain Channa sitting a few tables away. As our eyes met, I waved to him. It would have been impolite not to greet him. So I went across. He tried to look away. He was such a stickler for proper dress, my costume would have put him off completely.

But there was no way he could avoid me. I walked across to where he sat, suitably attired, along with some big shot from the Planning Commission. Then Channa made a famous remark that has stayed in my memory all these years. He introduced me thus:

‘Mr Kaw. Although he is a poet, yet he is a good officer.’

In July, I went to Delhi and saw my son Anurag for the first time. We motored up to Shimla soon thereafter.

In February 1973, I was posted as Deputy Commissioner of Solan district. Swatantra Kumar Alok was the first DC of this newly created district; I was the second. We had a good office bang on the highway. Our house was only a kilometer away, also on the highway.

Solan was a small town, but it had a good location. I read in ‘Shimla Past and Present’ that the town started as a tonga-stand for the mail van that used to go from Kalka to Shimla. The tired horses were changed and fresh horses yoked to the tonga. It had come a long way when I saw it for the first time.

There are many things that happen in a district assignment, but much of it is dull, routine work. I will try to capture a few highlights.

Solan town was quite dirty, like most other towns in India. We decided to arouse the conscience of the residents. A massive cleanliness campaign was launched on a particular Sunday. The town was divided into several segments and each assigned to a party of likeminded individuals, like the Brewery staff, staff of DC’s office, the local Beopar Mandal and so on. Shramdan was attempted on a massive scale. Several trucks were deployed to remove the garbage. At the end of the day, the groups paraded the town, shouting slogans exhorting the townsmen to be proud of their town and take good care of it.

One offshoot of this campaign was my visit to the kitchens of the local halwais, which were found to be lacking in basic hygienic practices. In one particular case, I got the entire stocks of the halwai thrown into the drain to teach the proprietor a lesson. This gentleman led a deputation to the chief minister, complaining against my high-handedness.

Another day to remember was Holi 1974. Both the SP and I went through the town, playing holi with the common people and mingling freely with them. This was a unique experience for both sides and helped to bring the administration closer to the masses.

We revamped the local children’s park completely and made it a place to visit for the children and their parents. Massive sculptures of various animals were erected and lot of play equipment installed.

There was a local festival in Solan. We joined the celebrations and combined it with a summer festival. We got Mohinder Kapoor and the Sabri brothers. It became a huge draw. The summer festival became an annual feature thereafter.

We started a writers' forum, so as to provide a platform for local literary talent to express itself. Many poets and litterateurs joined the forum. We used to meet periodically and recite our compositions to the others. This linked me to the intelligentsia of the town and gave a fillip to the local literary activity.

It also started the impulse in me to act as a focal point for the litterateurs and try to encourage literary and artistic activity wherever I went.

My general assistant was a remarkable character called Mohinder Lall, who was totally fearless. You could ask him for anything and he would comply without demur. One day, there was no vanaspati ghee in the town. I called Mohinder Lall.

'How come there is no ghee in the town?' I asked him.

'Sir, the manufacturers have decided to suspend supplies to our district.'

'Is it legal to do so?'

'Sir, I do not care about the legality. You tell me what you want.'

'I understand that truckloads of ghee are going to Shimla via our district. Can we not stop these trucks and create a situation?'

'It will be done, sir.'

When I came out of my office a few hours later, a strange scene met my eyes. Scores of trucks carrying ghee to Shimla had been stopped outside the DC's office. Soon Mohinder Lall came to my house to report that all these trucks had been unloaded and the supplies diverted to the local dealers.

Another incident that created a sensation was that of an industrialist who had received a quota of steel from the Industries Department. I received a complaint that there was hardly any manufacturing going on in the 'factory'. The steel was being very slightly modified and sold to dealers in Punjab at a huge premium.

I rang up Mohinder Lall. He caught two trucks the same evening. I received frantic calls from various people at state headquarters, asking me not to interfere in the internal affairs of the Industries Department. I refused to release the two trucks that we had impounded. Then, Surinder Kanwar, the Director of Industries came himself and pleaded with me. I gave him a formal report, suggesting action to be taken against the District Industries Officer and blacklisting of the industrialist. He was forced to do so, in spite of his reluctance.

I had an interesting conflict with Thakur Lekh Ram, the MLA from Nalagarh. This gentleman had promised the chief minister that he would collect Rs 10 lakhs as public subscription for the establishment of a degree college. He resorted to a subterfuge. He told the local BDO to divert a grant received by the panchayat samiti, Nalagarh from the state government and show it as public contribution. The BDO consulted me. I asked him to reject the proposal. Lekh Ram complained to the CM about this affair.

My sources told me about this complaint. I decided to meet the CM and give him my version of the story. I came to know that he would be passing my district in the evening. Those days there was a ritual that the DC and SP had to receive the CM at the point of entry and escort his entourage till the point of departure.

When Dr Parmar entered our district, his car slowed down. He greeted the SP and me. I took this opportunity to request an urgent audience with him. He asked me to get into his car and talk to him as we travelled. When I narrated the whole chain of events to him, he said, in his characteristic nasal voice, 'It is good that you briefed me. Thakur Sahib had told me an altogether different story.'

I disembarked from the car soon afterwards. Lekh Ram got a dressing down from Dr Parmar about this matter. Of course, he held this as a minus point against me and later tried his utmost to take his revenge.

Dr Parmar had a roving eye. Although he was quite old, his name was linked romantically to a number of women. One did not quite know how much of the gossip was true and how much fiction. One day, when he was visiting Solan and we had hosted a lunch in his honour, he called me aside. With a glint in his eye, he inquired about a certain female who was attending the party. I had no idea who she was, but I asked one of my minions and passed on the biodata to the CM. Fortunately, he did not pursue the matter further with me.

In 1974, I was told that I had been moved as Deputy Commissioner, Kangra.

I move to Dharamsala

There were two schools of thought about my transfer. There were those who alleged that Lekh Ram had pestered the CM to replace me. Others felt that Dr Parmar had quite a few apprehensions about Kangra district and its politicians. He wanted to install a DC who was tough and did not play into the hands of his enemies. He also wanted a person whose loyalty he could count upon.

I do not know whether I could be called a Parmar loyalist. I was an admirer, no doubt. This was because I found him quite different from the run-of-the-mill politicians. He would make long speeches but the bulk of his content was economic, not political. He spent a lot of time explaining to the masses why planting an orchard was the smart thing to do. Also why they should pay attention to the new breeds of Jersey and Holstein Friesian cows that had been imported from abroad. He spoke of three dimensional forest farming and its economic advantages.

He did not speak casually. He talked figures. He went deep into the financial aspects, how much investment was required per acre and how much the yield would be. He told them from where they could draw loans. He went into the technical details of horticultural practices and how they could maximize their yields.

And the interesting part was that people listened and followed his advice. If Himachal Pradesh is an advanced state today, a large part of the credit should go to Yeshwant Singh Parmar.

An example of his obsession with development comes to mind. He went on a foreign tour. When he returned, he called all the officers and staff in the secretariat and shared his experiences with us. Two small things that have remained in my memory were: the way the bridge toll was paid by car drivers without getting down from the vehicle and the lowly watercress which was available in its wild form everywhere in Himachal but was not put to any economic use by us.

When we arrived at Dharamsala, the headquarters of Kangra district, I was told that my predecessor had mollycoddled the local politicians to the extent that meetings of the District Grievances Committee were held at the residence of Professor Chanderverkar, the local MLA. My first act was to shift the venue to the DC's meeting hall. Obviously this was not liked by the professor. It also gave a clear signal to all that the new DC would not be a yes man.

There was a local club of which the DC was traditionally the president. The SP and the conservator of forests were of the view that someone other than the DC should be elected the president. They thought I would contest this move and they would have me defeated in the voting. I have never been

a club man. I do not drink nor do I play cards. So I did not file my nomination for the post. The Conservator was elected unopposed. This move to create a schism within the officers between the generalists and specialists was also scuttled.

I do not remember the details at this time, but I do recall having received a phone call from Shri Anang Pal, the Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister that I had set up a record of sorts. Professor Chanderverkar had met the CM and filed a list of 30 allegations against me. Considering that I had been there only for a month, this gave an average of one allegation per day. We had a good laugh together at my 'achievement'.

Within a short period I had re-established the rule of law in the district. My reputation of being a

tough officer helped. Just before I was brought on the scene, things had come to a pass that people had gheraoed the official car of a minister and set it on fire. I ensured that the miscreants were brought to book.

The local group of Kangra politicians was not very happy to have me as the DC. Unknown to me they hatched a conspiracy to ensure my exit. The Public Accounts Committee came on a tour of the district. They were lodged in the Circuit House and the Sainik Rest House. The divisional commissioner, who was also on official tour, was also lodged in the Circuit House.

Normally, the arrangements for the PAC were made by the general assistant to the DC. I was not supposed to receive the committee personally. I had come to the Circuit House to call on the divisional commissioner. As I came out, the GA met me and said that the chairman of the PAC had just arrived. Out of courtesy I went to the drawing room and greeted the chairman and other members. The chairman was Ramesh Chand Verma, whom I last knew as a student union leader in Delhi. We met each other cordially. Then I left.

Imagine my discomfiture when I received a call from the GA soon after that the PAC was not happy at the divisional commissioner having been accommodated in the Circuit House. They wanted him out. I talked to the commissioner and offered to take him as my house guest. He was a seasoned officer and said that he would shift to the other rest house and the PAC should be given priority.

With this, I thought the situation had been defused. I was not aware of the game plan. The chairman made a big issue out of this incident and sent notice of a privilege motion against me to the speaker of the assembly. It was referred to the Privileges Committee. In due course I received a notice to appear before the committee to explain my position.

When I took legal advice, I was advised that contesting the notice would be a bad strategy. The committee was the prosecutor, judge and executor all in one. If I set on a collision course with the MLAs, they would ensure that I was called to the bar of the House and awarded a punishment. My lawyer said that the best course was to tender an unqualified apology and state my side of the story.

In between, Dr Parmar paid a visit to the district. When I broached the subject, he said that I was not the real target. They were using me to attack the CM himself. There was no need for me to worry. The whole thing would sort itself out.

The committee decided to call me for oral examination. I went and reiterated my unconditional apology. The committee recommended that the apology be accepted and the matter dropped. The report was debated in the House and generated a lot of heat. Finally, however, they accepted the report.

The whole process took about one and a half years. It generated tension and stress. Later when the dust had settled down, the chairman of the PAC who had by then ceased to be a chairman, called on me at my residence. He gave me the real story behind the entire episode and accused some other Kangra politicians of hatching the plot, while using him as a cover.

Soon thereafter, the young man met with a car accident and died. We may draw whatever moral we may wish to derive from the succession of events.

The Kangra politicians did not give up their struggle. Their major goal was to have the CM removed from his post and get a Kangra politician as a replacement. One opportunity that presented itself was the visit of Sanjay Gandhi to the district. He was planning to address a public meeting at Indora. The local politicians had very cleverly excluded Dr Parmar from the function.

I received a message that the CM was keen that he should also participate in the rally and speak

from the stage. He also wanted to travel with Sanjay Gandhi to the next rally that had been fixed at Chail in district Solan, a journey of about 5 hours.

We told the organizers that the CM would be in the district on the day of the rally and it would look odd if he were not invited. They had to reluctantly accept. So Dr Parmar came and spoke his piece. It is another matter that Sanjay cut to smithereens his proposal of giving Himachal a share in the revenue generated by central sector power projects. Water, he said, was a national resource and did not belong to individual states.

Then came the crucial moment when Sanjay and Menaka prepared to leave. Parmar's opponents had planned to take them in their own car, so that Dr Saligram, the most favoured candidate of the New Areas, could travel with them and poison their ears against Dr Parmar. As the group moved towards the car, Malik, the SP and I blocked the way.

In the most sombre voice I could muster, I told Sanjay, 'Sorry, Sir, but this car has not been cleared from the security angle. We cannot take the risk of your travelling in an uncleared vehicle.' Sanjay looked quizzically at the SP who repeated what I said. As he looked undecided and before the local politicians could intervene, we steered Sanjay and Menaka to the chief minister's car. Dr Parmar swiftly boarded the car and along with the pilot and the escort the party left, leaving the Kangra politicians looking at the dust.

Dr Parmar lasted another two years after this episode. Part of the credit can be given to us. Poor Dr Saligram could never become the CM.

A unique personality who deserves a mention is Gurkha, a middle aged man of Nepali origin, who was the DC Kangra's driver. One of my predecessors, Rajwade, had told us numerous stories about this colourful character. He called him 'Gerka'. Once he had gone to Delhi in his official car. At one place, some other car overtook theirs. Rajwade's self esteem was hurt. 'Gerka!' he shouted from the back seat. 'Is gaari ko peechhe karo. Tumko medal milega.' Gurkha put on the requisite speed and soon forged ahead of the offending vehicle. On their return to headquarters, Rajwade kept his word. In a tongue-in-cheek style, an investiture ceremony was held to confer the Medal on the driver.

Out of curiosity, I once asked Gurkha to show me the medal. I found it was a silver medal. It showed a turban and an arrow overtaking the turban. I did not catch the significance of the turban till Gurkha explained that the driver he had overtaken was a Sikh.

The incident I vividly recall is of an official visit I made to Palampur, the headquarters of the Indo-German Agricultural Project. We held discussions the whole day. After dinner, I left for Dharamsala, hoping to catch a nap on the way. As I started dozing, I was surprised no end to hear Gurkha singing a Nepali song. This was so contrary to normal decorum that I woke up completely. Was Gurkha all right? Had he forgotten that I was sitting at the back?

Suddenly it hit me. Gurkha was drunk! It was midnight. The road was pitch dark. The car was swinging left and right in tune with the song. I tried to talk to Gurkha. He answered in monosyllables. His speech was guttural and thick. Then the full horror of my situation struck me. Anything could happen now. Gurkha was blind drunk. In a trice, we could go off the road and land in a deep ditch.

This was the time for some quick thinking. First, I asked Gurkha to stop the car. He continued to drive as if he had not heard me. I got panicky. What to do? How to stop him? I shouted, 'Gurkha, I want to make water. Just stop the car, will you?' He applied the brakes and stopped the car. I opened the car door and went to the side to urinate. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw what Gurkha was upto. I was flabbergasted to see that he had also opened his fly and started pissing. This a few yards away

from me was an unheard of breach of protocol.

As soon as I finished my business, I looked in Gurkha's direction. He was still going strong. Instinctively, I opened the car door and occupied the driver's seat. Before Gurkha could realize what was happening, I had driven the car out of sight. When I arrived alone at Dharamsala, I found the household in disarray. Apparently, soon after I left, the BDO of a neighbouring block found Gurkha gesticulating wildly by the roadside. Surprised to see him alone, the BDO asked him what had happened. Gurkha gave a garbled story of how I had been kidnapped by dacoits!

Soon after I arrived, the BDO was again on the line. 'Are you all right, Sir?' he wanted to know. I got his story first hand and told him what had happened. I asked him to take Gurkha along and let him sleep off the intoxication. Soon the SP was on the line. I had to convince many people that night that I was safe and sound and at home!

The IGAP was a great challenge. I took the opportunity of taking the entire team of officers dealing with agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, farm forestry, fisheries, cooperation and the irrigation wing of the Public Works Department jointly to the field. This was like taking the government to the people, assessing the implementation of government programmes at first hand and seeing how the different departments operated their schemes in complete isolation, etc. Many officers told me that this was the first time they had gone to the field together.

One of the discoveries I made was about the tea industry of Kangra district. It had been established long ago but it was in doldrums now. I gave some funds from the IGAP for research on plantation of tea. We liaised with the Tea Board Calcutta and persuaded them to strengthen their presence in their substation at Palampur. We organized the Tea Growers' Cooperative Marketing Society and persuaded the Registrar of Cooperative Societies to help the society with funds and expertise. By the time I left the district, the direction had been set and I was later glad to hear that this sick industry had been revived.

I made the subdivisional magistrates compete with one another. First, one of them collected money by donations and purchased an ambulance for his hospital. I asked the others why they could not match this feat. Soon the SDMs vied with each other and we had an ambulance in each of the four subdivisions.

One of them was a lady direct recruit, Suneeta Dhingra. Within her jurisdiction, there was a big lake called the Pong Lake, which had emerged due to the construction of the Pong Dam. She took our family and some others on a long boat ride around the lake. Apart from the enjoyment, we got the idea of setting up a water sports centre in the lake. We selected the tentative site and started off with some small activities. Later as (Secretary Sports and Finance), I built on these small beginnings and created a vibrant Water Sport Centre.

At Dharamsala, the officers had a change of heart. The conservator of forests and the SP both came to me and requested me to accept the presidentship of the Officers' Club at Dharamsala. I accepted cordially and soon started a number of improvements in the club. While supervising this work, I discovered a piece of land that was lying unused. I allotted it to an art gallery and used the official bulldozer to level the plot. We also conceived of the design of the Sansar Chand Art Gallery, where I wanted to create a complete gallery of all paintings of the Kangra School of Art. Later, as Culture Secretary I gave full support and funding to this gallery which has since come up as a full-fledged art gallery run and maintained by the Department of Culture.

Kangra district is famous for its temples. We had a good time visiting Brajeshwari at Kangra, the Shiva temple at Baijnath, the Chamunda temple on way to Palampur and the Jwalamukhi temple. When we visited the last named I could see that the flames in the temple were just because there was natural gas inside. Nothing supernatural about it. So what was great? Raj also blew one of the flames out and then relit it as one does with a gas stove. It took me years to understand that our ancients had deified every natural phenomenon, because to them Nature was but the body of God.

One important landmark of this period was the publication of my first book of English poetry. This was *An Oasis of Solitude* published by Professor P. Lal in 1973. The opening poem was 'Avaunt faith':

Cool uncertainty!
Dwell in me like a hermit
Unroll the deerskin of doubt
Feed on the begging bowl with questions brimming
Tear to shreds
The darkened veil
The lust-mad eyes of faith.
It also had 'Death' which ran thus:
Stunned, shocked we ask
Why how why why
Stare foolishly
At bare cement floor
Dirty naked walls
below the floor
Beyond the walls
Nowhere
Inwards.
Muted, muffled we squat
A geometric crowd
Round a hunched figure in crumpled white.

In 1975, Indiraji imposed the Emergency. We received orders to jail all the big guns of the to name something else on these was no part called BJP in 1977. Being a disciplined bureaucrat I obeyed orders and put all of them behind the bars. This included Shanta Kumar, who later became the chief minister and was instrumental in sending me on deputation to the Government of India.

In retrospect, I wonder why we did not react adversely to the illegal orders issued by Indira Gandhi. The moral of the story is that any government which is in power can get away with anything, even with murder, if it proceeds ahead in a colourable exercise of authority. All government servants are programmed to silently and quietly obey superior orders. There is no streak of martyrdom built into our psyche.

A curious incident that I remember is that of Hotel Sun and Snow at Dharamsala, which was owned

by a Sardarji. Even prior to the Emergency, I had objected to the name of his hotel and the manner in which he sought to give the impression that it was a hotel run by the Tourism Corporation of the State. He was adamant. The Emergency came. I gave him a final opportunity to fall in line, but he did not bother. We put him in jail and released him only when he complied with the orders.

Years later, I had a visitor from the CBI. He was looking into a complaint against me for excesses during the Emergency. The Sardarji had alleged that my sister had stayed in his hotel and he had charged her the usual rates. According to him, I resented this and locked him up. The CBI chap just wanted my version to close the chapter. That is the last I heard of this matter.

In May 1976 my parents paid us a visit. Papaji had been suffering from jaundice and had been diagnosed as a case of infective hepatitis. It was felt that he had acquired it when he took sugarcane juice from a road-side vendor. He was well for some time but suddenly started having bouts of very high fever going up to 105 degrees.

The CMO Dr Jha was a mature doctor. He treated the symptoms for a few days, but when the fever continued he confided in me that my father might be suffering from a very serious disease that could threaten his life. He suggested that we remove Papaji at once to AIIMS at Delhi. After a few days, even the movement might be impossible.

We took the advice seriously. He was taken in an ambulance to Pathankot, where we boarded a train. My uncle Chaman Lal had arranged that an ambulance would pick him up from the platform itself and rush him to AIIMS. It was not a minute too soon. The doctors conducted all the tests and told us that they suspected the worst. He had probably cancer of the gall bladder. There was no time to do a biopsy because he was drifting swiftly into hepatic coma, which is irreversible. They would have to enter surgically and hope for the best.

I asked them about the chances of survival. Five per cent if they operated and nil if they did not, they said. We asked them to go ahead.

Papaji survived the surgery. Fortunately, there was no cancer. They removed the gall bladder with all its stones. In the post-operative room he suffered a cardiac arrest. Fortunately, Ramesh, who is my brother's brother-in-law, was sitting by his bedside. He shouted to the doctors and nurses. They revived him. All his systems failed. He had black motions. He had to be put on a respirator. And when we thought everything had been brought under control, he started having high fever once again.

His treating physician tried all the antibiotics through irrigation therapy. It was a most persistent bacillus. At last he used Carbelin which was like an atom bomb. Luckily Papaji responded to this drug and we were back home soon. This case became a cause celebre and Dr B.M.L. Kapoor often presented this case in medical conferences.

While we were in the hospital, news came that I had been posted as Finance Secretary. To be elevated to this crucial post from that of DC is a rare honour. I suspected the hand of my former boss M.M.S. Srivastava and the Chief Minister Dr Parmar.

Back to Shimla

Coming back to Finance was like a homecoming. I tried my utmost to help those segments of the administration that were neglected. I also discovered that, contrary to the canards spread by our cynical seniors, much could be done by civil servants who knew their mind and acted in the public interest.

Finance secretaries have a huge advantage in this. Most politicians and bureaucrats know nothing about finance. For them figures are Greek and Latin. They have little idea of how the books balance. I believe that a good finance secretary can implement most of the orders of the chief minister and in addition do what he feels right too.

In addition to the budget, state governments receive largesse from the central government through centrally sponsored schemes and grants or loans to meet floods or droughts or some other emergent situations. If the finance secretary is shrewd, he can convert much of the state government's own expenditure and book it to the central government. You can also apportion grants to gram sewak huts or patwarkhanas, if you think they deserve monetary allocations.

One of the things that always hurt me was the distinction our system drew between Plan expenditure which was supposed to cater to development works and non-Plan expenditure which was supposed to be a waste of money. I soon found that the most critical departments like revenue and police that were the backbone of the administration in the districts were non-Plan departments. The police had at least tried to remedy the situation somewhat by having two Plan schemes of police housing and modernization of police. I tried to bring the revenue department at par with the police.

I also had the charge of the administrative reforms. Nobody seemed to know what this department was supposed to do or cared. I tried to trace the past history of the department to see what my predecessors had attempted to do and was pleasantly surprised to find that they had conducted several interesting studies. The snag was that none of these studies had been accepted by the administrative departments.

I suggested to the government that we should review these reports and ask for the comments of the administrative departments within a definite time frame. A committee under the chairmanship of the chief secretary should decide what should be accepted. The committee's recommendations should be taken to the cabinet by the Administrative Reforms Department, so that orders of the government could be obtained. Then it should be sent to the concerned department for implementation.

Under this new dispensation, I was able to have many of the reports implemented. The Public Works Department proved to be the most rigid and inflexible. Engineers build everything, can give jobs to the favourites of their political masters, place government vehicles at the disposal of the MLAs and get donations for political activities. Thus, PWD officers are generally a pampered lot and do pretty much what they please. The study had examined the question of financial norms for the creation of new circles and divisions in the department. It had suggested norms for civil, electrical and mechanical wings, both for new works and maintenance. The Engineers-in-chief had no intention of agreeing to any norms whatsoever.

The report was discussed both in the chief secretary's meeting and the cabinet. After a marathon debate, certain norms were cleared by the cabinet. I thought this was a great achievement. But my victory was short-lived.

Some time later, a proposal for the creation of 23 additional divisions in the PWD was received from the department. We examined it in the context of the norms so recently approved by the government. We came to the clear conclusion that not only was there no justification for any additional divisions, but some of the existing divisions deserved to be abolished.

Accordingly, I recorded a limpid note on the file and the chief minister as finance minister approved the same.

Now enter the joker. My batch mate was watching the show from the sidelines. Very soon thereafter, Dr Y.S. Parmar lost the confidence of Sanjay Gandhi. Sanjay was highly enamoured of Shri Ram Lall, Minister for Health, who had overachieved the sterilization targets under the Family Planning programme. Overnight, the Grand Old Man of Himachal politics bit the dust and Ram Lall was sitting gleefully in his chair.

Ram Lall used to spell his name with a single 'L'. Then a numerologist advised him to add another 'L' to the name, which he promptly did. He used to dye his hair. I am always allergic to people who try to appear different from what they really are.

My batch mate went to him and offered to clear the additional divisions in the PWD if he was appointed as the Finance Secretary. Ram Lall made a mental note of this offer.

Soon, another file wended its way to my table. Ram Lall in his capacity as power minister had entered into an agreement with the Government of Haryana for the joint exploitation of hydel resources of our state. He had not referred the case to the Finance Department for clearance. He had not obtained the cabinet's approval. Worst of all, he had fixed the amount to be paid by Haryana to HP in money terms and not in terms of percentage of total units manufactured.

I raised all these issues and returned the case to the power secretary. As expected, Ram Lall called me to his chamber. He was as sweet as honey. All that he wanted was that I should destroy my earlier note and change my stand, so as to clear the proposal. I told him point blank that I had not ever changed my note in my whole life and I was not going to start now. He was the boss and was at liberty to overrule my views if he disagreed with them.

Two days later, I was transferred as Director of Industries. It was a definite indication of the CM's displeasure. My batch mate was appointed in my place and cleared all the cases I had been sitting on.

I should have moped over this reversal in my fortunes for weeks and tried to learn a lesson for the future. My trouble was that even before I took a panga with some heavyweight politician, I knew I was heading towards trouble. My bad luck did not come as a rude shock; it was rather the fulfillment of a prophecy I had myself made.

Today, when I look at my grandson Achintya with his mischievous eyes and magical fingers, I keep on warning him not to jump from high places, not to play with sharp instruments, not to prance about on the bonnet of my son-in-law's car. I can very well see that he is fully aware of the possible consequences of his rashness. He is likely to hurt his leg or break a bone or suffer a wound. But these do not deter him, as these did not deter me.

Next day, I joined the Industries Department. The very first thing I did was call a meeting of my officers. I told them that the department did not enjoy a very savoury reputation. They were now under a strict code of conduct. Far from drinking every day at the expense of the industrialists, they will do work in the office. Even if they took a cup of tea in the company of an industrialist, I shall treat it as a gross violation of discipline.

Next day, my joint director was admitted to hospital in a serious condition. He remained in

hospital for about a month. Poor fellow! He had received a mental shock from which it took him time to recover. He used to drink everyday with one or the other industrialist and he just could not imagine a daily existence without his usual double pegs of whisky.

I looked around the states to find out how they were proceeding with industrialization. Gujarat was supposed to be a good model; there was a state Index and a district level Index. We also set up these multi-agency offices. Industrialists used to come to our office. Now, there were officers to note down their outstanding issues, get a report from the officer concerned and then keep them informed about the progress of their case.

In case somebody was not happy about the progress of their case, they could come and see me. Resultantly, the number of their pending cases came down drastically.

We had a change of government after the Emergency. The Janata Party formed the government. It was led by Shri Shanta Kumar. I got Daulat Ram Chauhan as my minister.

Shanta Kumar had written a few books and was aware of my literary pretensions. In personal relations, he was extremely courteous. I remember one evening when he had called me to discuss an important case. He started by asking me whether I had written a poem recently. I had and luckily I remembered it. He listened to it, enjoyed it and then proceeded to the matter at hand.

It was around this time that my second book of English poetry 'Look closely at Om' was published by Writers' Workshop. An extract from a poem 'Fluffy and white and magical':

But when the sun finally rose,
The warmth of loveless affection,
Like a hazy, fuzzy cloud-conquered halo of dispersed light
Could not melt the frost of cold attitudes.
And we continued to slip
And hold on to our walking sticks
And continued to look at each other
Like two strangers
Happening to share the same house.

I am reminded of a case where we were supposed to buy gram for supply to the schools to be used as the mid-day meal. It was a large order and many suppliers had quoted their rates. Our officers had analyzed the comparative position and categorized the suppliers as L-1, L-2, L-3 etc., L-1 being the person who had quoted the lowest rates and the others were costlier. Naturally, other things being equal, the party at L-1 should have bagged the contract.

My minister thought otherwise. He called me and instructed me to award the deal to L-3. I told him that this was not possible, unless we had cogent reasons to reject the samples given by L-1 and L-2 as substandard. He said that I was the expert and would surely find a way. I politely refused. He called me twice again with the same result.

When I left his chamber the third time, I could see that I was building to a confrontation with my minister. How to get out of the situation? On an impulse I decided to talk to the chief minister.

Luckily he was in his office and I was called in. I narrated the story and asked him for his advice. He hesitated. I could see that he did not wish to annoy his powerful and vocal minister, but he did not

want a scandal either.

Suddenly, I had a brain wave. Without thinking of all facets of the problem, I blurted out, ‘Sir, suppose we change the item we give in our mid-day meal scheme. After all gram is not the only thing. We produce so much apple juice in our plants and are unable to market it. Why don’t we give apple juice to our schoolchildren?’

The CM immediately accepted the suggestion and sold the idea to the cabinet in its next meeting. But Daulat Ram Chauhan was not amused.

In those days, it was fashionable for CMs to make a short visit to Bombay, considered the financial capital of India. So we arranged a visit. I had no idea that Shanta Kumar was so popular in Bombay. He was garlanded by hundreds of people. I was wondering where all these people had come from. The mystery was resolved when I was told that almost all the taxis in Bombay were either owned or driven by Himachalis. It was then that I noticed the queue of taxis that ran for miles around Bombay Central railway station.

We held good meetings, but the best was the one organized by the Indian Merchants’ Chamber, where a number of industrialists who had had problems with the Himachal government had assembled. We had to make a number of promises for the future.

It was rumoured that the new government had taken a policy decision to send all non-Himachalis on deputation to the Government of India. Hitherto, deputation was an option with the officers and not so much with the government, unless it was annoyed with a particular officer and wanted to send him into exile.

Many versions of the alleged list were in circulation. I suspected that I would figure in all of them. Primarily because I was a deputy commissioner at the time of the Emergency and had ordered the incarceration of the entire top brass of the Janata Party. Poor fellows, they were so innocent that they could not say no to a goose. But orders are orders and we were asked to comply with these without questioning.

Added to this was the pressure being exerted by the corrupt elements in the department and the industrialists, and my inclusion in the list became a dead certainty. So I was not surprised when one fine morning I learnt that I had been accepted for deputation to the Government of India.

Many farewell parties ensued. The most memorable was the one hosted by officers of the department. My Joint Director filled himself with liquor and danced riotously, with no attempt even to conceal his joy at my departure. The song was his own, ‘Kaisa raha jashan hamara ...’ (Oh how delightful was our celebration) set to a current film tune and he danced till the wee hours of the morning. I let him dance. After all, it was his day. His faith in God and His law of justice must obviously have been restored that fateful day.

As 1978 marks the end of my first stint in Himachal, I would like to recall some highlights of this period.

First, the children. Iti was born in 1968 and Anurag in 1972. By 1978 they were ten and six respectively. We all remember with a sense of nostalgia our trips to various scenic spots in and around Shimla and in Solan and Kangra districts. We went for long treks to Naldehra, Wild Flower Hall and Kufri. We loved to climb the hills, play cricket on the flat grounds, lose the balls whenever anyone scored a four or six and enjoyed our lunch after a vigorous forenoon.

We still remember the occasions when the kids saw snow for the first time in their lives. They just could not believe their eyes at the transformation that took place in the landscape.

We had a dog Mickey, whose dad was a Lhasa Apso and mum was a terrier. He was so cute and we all loved him so much. My children were so fond of him that when Mickey passed away at the age of eight, my wife rang me up. I came home, then went to my son's school, broke the news gently, then took him with me to a secluded place in the forest, where one of our peons had dug a grave for Mickey. Anurag also poured some earth into the grave.

We started the practice of celebrating the Service Week, on the UP pattern. There was a Conference of DCs and SPs addressed by the CM and the CS. There was an annual IAS vs. IPS cricket match, in which the IPS invariably beat us, except once. There was a tennis tournament and to cap it all a cultural programme on the last evening, full of song, dance and buffoonery. Iti still recalls how excited all of them used to be in the runup to the D day. How Iti participated in a fashion parade and Anurag sang his ghazals and Raj participated in qawwalis and so on. The crowning glory was a duet by Raj and me, a classical film song, 'Mohe bhool gaye saanwariyaaa, bhool gaye sanwariyaa ...' It was so much fun!

And then there were the joy rides in government cars from Shimla to Delhi and back. Anurag occupied the front seat next to the driver, looked out of the window and hummed or whistled his favourite tunes. Iti would lie down with her face hidden in her mother's bosom, because of the queasy feeling in her stomach.

But the moment we crossed Parwanoo, she was her normal self. Now she would start saying, 'Daddy, why don't we reach Delhi?' or she would clamour for a story and I would have to narrate The Count of Monte Cristo or The Three Musketeers or Alladin and the magic Lamp or whatever, till it was dusk and we reached the outskirts of Delhi. On the return journey there would be a great anticipation of when we would touch Lalru where an outlet of the Punjab Dairy Corporation was located. We would stop and have sweetened milk or ice cream. Great were the days!

There was great socializing those days. Every other day someone would throw a party. Maybe we were younger then and enjoyed these occasions with a sense of wild abandon. People would get drunk or pretend to be high and have mild flirtations with the wives of colleagues or society girls who sometimes attended our parties. No one seemed to mind. I remember composing a naughty limerick at the expense of the Chief Secretary, which led to a loud guffaw in our corner of the room. The CS Shri Uma Nath Sharma got curious and came over to investigate what the cause of all the merriment was. When I told him, he insisted that I narrate the unexpurgated version to him.

So I recited the (limerick):

Ek din Uma Nath Sharma
Ne paaya apna kuchh narma narma
Bole, ai kumbakth!
Ho jaa zara sakht,
Karna hai kuchh garma garma!

(Shri Uma Nath Sharma once
Found himself rather tepid in response
He told his organ to behave
And stiff directions he gave

As he wished to engage in an erotic dance!)

And then he guffawed the loudest. He was such a good sport!

Krishi Bhavan

My selection in Department of Rural Development was not by chance. The secretary of the department was Shri Sushil Chand Varma, who had been my boss in Delhi Administration. I had been selected for the post of Joint Commissioner (Training), where I reported to Shri Beni Krishen Sharma, who had been Commissioner of Sales Tax when I was Secretary Taxation in Delhi Administration. It is really a small world.

Rural Development had at that time become an exciting field. For the first time, a non-Congress government had come to power and naturally they wanted to make a mark. So the Integrated Rural Development Programme was launched. G.L. Bailur was the Joint Secretary (IRDP). P.G. Muralidharan was the Financial Adviser.

Sharma and I had been relegated to training, which meant the National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad. So, at first we concentrated on the institute. I must say that during the four years that I was in charge, we did our utmost to build the physical infrastructure, the staff, the role and the importance of the NIRD. We tried to make it the think tank of the ministry.

Things improved to the extent that when Sushil Chand Varma expressed a desire that he would like to write a book. I managed to have it ghost-written entirely at the NIRD. My contribution was the eye-catching title, *India's War on Poverty*, the chapterization, the allocation of chapters to different professors on the faculty and the overall editing. Varmaji wrote the preface. The book was published by the ministry but we put the secretary's name as author on the cover. I believe this book improved Varma's biodata quite noticeably. As a result, he was able to obtain an assignment with the World Bank.

But what about the IRDP, the flagship programme of the department? Did we have no role at all? Sharmaji got the brilliant idea that IRDP should not be confined to agriculture and animal husbandry alone. We persuaded Varma to create an Industries, Services and Business component of the IRDP. Sharmaji became the JS in charge of the ISB Component and so did I.

Fortunately for us, some time in 1979, Charan Singh became the Prime Minister. He decided that Rural Development should be a ministry, not merely a department. He shifted the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) from the Ministry of Industry to Ministry of Rural Development. This was also added to Sharmaji's charge and therefore to mine.

These Khadi fellows were a peculiar lot. In the Ministry of Industry, nobody bothered about them, as everyone was more interested in large, medium, small, tiny and other varieties of industries rather than village industries. When they came over to us we were very happy to have them. They found themselves to be the cynosure of attention. Naturally, we found many lacunae and tried to improve their working.

One of the biggest anomalies was the definition of 'village industries'. Commonsense tells us that village industries should at least be located in rural areas. It was not so. The Act defined the term by looking at its products such as leather goods or bamboo products. An industry need not be located in a village. We were astounded to find that bulk of the Commission's activities was benefiting the urban areas.

Resultantly, there was zero interaction between the Community Development Block and the Commission. It took us a lot of time to establish a link between the Block and the KVIC. After we left,

the Commission managed to get back to the Ministry of Industry.

Another addition took place due to a pet idea of one of the rural development ministers of state. This was a chap called Bhanu Pratap Singh. He said that a village army should be created and this would accelerate progress of the rural areas in a big way. He called it 'Grameen Vikas Vahini' and threatened to give his office as the national headquarters address of the Vahini.

Sharmaji played along, while I felt that this was the most cockeyed idea that had occurred to a minister in history. Gradually, it dawned on me that the Minister to State (MOS) might want to admit some of his kith and kin in training centres, out of turn. The matter attained clarity when a list of persons from his constituency was forwarded by his private secretary. It was as if I was expected to recruit people to an army that did not exist.

We put our heads together and soon came up with the concept of TRYSEM or Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment. We built up the idea to such a crescendo with lot of fanfare and publicity that, at one stage, it threatened to overshadow the main IRDP itself.

Just as an aside I remember that when we submitted the file on TRYSEM to the Prime Minister, Charan Singh decided to call a meeting. That was the first time I met Dr Manmohan Singh who was Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission then. He was fond of interjecting the phrase 'I think' in each sentence. Fortunately for us, he did not oppose the proposal.

The beauty of Trysem was that it fulfilled a genuine need. We often have people bemoaning the fact that there is a virulent tendency of the rural youth migrating to urban areas in search of employment, thus resulting in all the myriad problems of urban development. Separately, we have been trying to create infrastructure like Industrial Training Institutes, Rural ITIs, Girls' ITIs, Krishi Vigyan Kendras, etc., to train rural youth in trades that are required in rural areas. The trouble with such schemes is that we do not select trades for which there is emerging demand, we do not bring our list of trades up-to-date to match existing and emerging requirements. And our training is theoretical and not hands on.

TRYSEM tried to meet all these points. It had the following flexibilities:

First, survey the village and find out which trades were in short supply.

Look at the trades that would be required in the future.

Then, look at the training facilities already available. These could be under any department of government, urban or rural local body, cooperative or even the private sector.

Overwhelming emphasis on practical training.

The scheme envisaged the grant of a training stipend to the trainee, to be disbursed to the training institution.

For practical training, any existing craftsman could be used as a master trainer. He was given a stipend for each trainee he took under his wing.

Although initially we targeted the scheme for self-employment, later it was extended to cover wage employment too. Multiskilling was also encouraged.

As we went along we kept on adding features to make the scheme more and more flexible and capable of being adapted to local needs. This flexibility was its chief attraction.

In addition, there were the special features of the IRDP in that each trainee was also given entrepreneurial skills, bankable schemes were prepared and bank loan arranged.

The scheme was somewhat hated by the officers piloting the IRDP. They thought that TRYSEM

was at best an afterthought. At worst, it was an obvious integral part of the IRDP and there was no point in touting it as a separate initiative. They tried their best to have it amalgamated but did not succeed till Sharmaji and I were in the ministry. Afterwards, I was told Trysem was integrated and sunk in the wide ocean without trace.

Another scheme that I conceived of in that ministry was the Council for Advancement of Rural Technology (CART). One day, I was just idly looking at the mandate given to the ministry when I came across the entry 'rural technology' in the list of subjects allotted to us. Not knowing what this meant, someone had quietly pushed this subject on to my plate.

When I put in some research, I realized that nobody had any idea of what rural technology meant. Those days there was some talk going on of improvements that needed to be made in the bullock cart. I also read several pieces on gobar gas. Slowly, we evolved a meaning to the phrase 'rural technology.' It could be made to mean such technology as was primarily relevant for rural areas.

Unfortunately, the few initiatives that existed were ad hoc, short-lived, improperly conceived, inadequately financed and did not fit into a larger mosaic. The bullock cart was one of the all India coordinated projects of the ICAR. The gobar gas was started by whosoever liked, but some kind of activity existed at the Khadi and Village Industries Commission, where too it was at best a peripheral interest.

I had seen how rural technology had been developed in China. The lowly bicycle had been harnessed to a thousand uses. Apart from being utilized in all systems of rural transportation, it also figured in a device for drawing water from a lower level to a higher level. China had a massive biogas programme. They had no problem with using the human excreta too, while in India we consider nightsoil to be unclean. Surprisingly, Indians consider cow dung to be not only clean but even holy, and possessing medicinal properties.

I found the Chinese constructing all rural latrines at one place in the village. The excreta of farm animals was mixed with it and the whole thing generated biogas. People carried excreta in containers hung in two buckets suspended from Behangis. I did not see any caste system in operation.

From this, it was a short step to evolving the acronym CART, which expanded to 'Council for Advancement of Rural Technology'. I remember how I drafted the structure of the organization, its objectives and Memorandum of Association etc., out of whole cloth.

At first, everyone balked at the idea of setting up a new organization. If it was needed, why had it not come up in all these years since the planning process began? When I persevered, they gave in. Years later, I came to know that some bright guy had merged CART with another organization, People's Action for Development (India). The combined organization was named CAPART, which exists to this day. It boasts of a high-powered director general, in the rank of Secretary to the Government of India, and has come in handy whenever there was a fellow senior enough to be a Secretary but not fit to hold charge of a ministry.

Unfortunately, this high status for the top post has had contrary results. The incumbents have generally been people who are senior and wield a clout in order to stay on at Delhi, but are not bright enough to be secretaries to the Government of India. Some friends whom I met later in my career said that CAPART had mainly concentrated on financing of non-official initiatives in rural development, but not necessarily in rural technology.

I had lot of touring to do in this job. Very often I would go to Bombay or Hyderabad in the morning and return in the evening. It occurred to me that I was spending a lot of time in aircraft or aerodromes.

I decided to take stock of my thinking on spiritual matters and attempt an original interpretation. I started a register and wrote the book line by line, word for word, out of memory.

This monumental effort resulted in *The Science of Spirituality* which was accepted by D.K. Publications. It was published in 1983, but did not attract much notice. In 2000, I decided to bring out the book afresh under the Full Circle imprint. This time it was noticed a little more.

It was as a director in the Ministry of Rural Development that I had the good fortune of going on a study tour of China. This tour was sponsored by the UNDP. There were seventeen representatives from eleven countries and the group was led by Mr Malouf of the FAO. India was represented by a Sardarji from the Ministry of Agriculture and myself.

The tour was an exhilarating experience and took us to interior-most rural areas of China. For the first time I got introduced to the ancient Chinese civilization. Our interpreters were at pains to inform us that all the ills of the Chinese economy were due to the machinations of the 'Gang of Four'.

Right from the word go I took copious notes of everything we were shown and told and kept on filling a fat notebook with detailed notes each evening. Very soon the word spread and my notebook was borrowed by the other members of the group.

One day, Mr Malouf accosted me and offered an author's contract if I would be good enough to come to FAO headquarters at Rome to write the Report on China. It would have been churlish on my part to refuse, especially when the offer was to result in a munificent fee.

Thus it was that a few months later I was summoned to Rome. I stayed at a pensione, within walking distance of the office. I spent the day reading books on China and converting our tour notes into a book. At the end of a month I had completed the project much to the astonishment of Mr Malouf, who had budgeted a much longer time schedule for it. My draft was discussed with an expert on China and then I returned to India.

Not being used to the schedules of international bodies, I had expected the printed copy of the book to reach me within a few days. It actually took one and a half years and not even a punctuation mark had been changed. I was also surprised not to see my name as the author of the book; my contribution was not even acknowledged in the preface.

But I got to see Rome on foot and I earned about Rs 50,000 as fees and savings, and this enabled me to buy a car. This monograph, which I legitimately claim as my publication was titled, *China: The Agricultural Training System*.

During this stint from 1978 to 1982, we stayed in our own house at D-31, Pamposh Enclave, Greater Kailash-I. Our daughter Iti could only be admitted to Lady Irwin School. Our son Anurag was luckier. We went to Delhi Public School, which had just opened a branch for primary classes at East of Kailash. Mrs Kaplash greeted us warmly and wanted to interview him then and there. Soon, Anurag found himself admitted and promoted to Class 2.

In fact, it was due to Iti's studies that I requested for a premature termination of my deputation. By that time, the Janata Party had been ousted from power and it was not difficult to persuade the state government to accept me back.

Meanwhile, it occurred to us that we should have a house of our own. I had bought a piece of land in Solan. At that time, my parents had suggested that a contiguous piece be purchased for Kakaji also. And one for Ashaji also. So we had bought three pieces of land. Now we felt that houses should come up.

Luckily for us, Papaji (my father) had retired and although he had been terribly sick in 1976, he had recovered sufficiently by 1978 to volunteer for the supervision over the construction work. Appi (my mother) said she would look after him. Kanwarji (my brother-in-law) was also living in a flat next to the two plots. So our parents took a flat on rent and shifted to Solan.

It was laborious work. At that time, the road did not go to our plots. The trucks had to unload cement, saria, bricks or timber quite a distance away. A party of Kashmiri Muslim labourers under the leadership of one Ghulam Ahmed transported these items, brick by brick, stone by stone, saria by saria to the site.

So gradually the two houses took shape and one day were ready for occupation. So we had Griha Pravesh. And the houses were given on rent till the year 2008, when we decided to sell both the houses.

Having done this hard labour, my parents decided to take a break and go to USA to my younger brother. My brother Kakaji was born in Srinagar in February 1948. Kakaji had an academic career not dissimilar to my own. When I passed the matriculation examination at the age of 10 and a half, Babalal decided to continue with his educational experiment. So, Kakaji did not go to a regular school. He was coached at home and attended a private coaching centre. He passed Matriculation at 10.

He was sent to Srinagar because Kashmir University had no age limits. He studied in Amar Singh College from where he did his FSc. For the next degrees of BSc and MSc he came to Delhi, joined Mahanand Mission College, Ghaziabad and stood First in Agra University. Then he joined the IIT, Delhi and became the first PhD from that prestigious institution.

He landed a job at Princeton University, USA, spent a few years in USA, returned to India, got married to Saroj, then went back to Princeton. He was soon elevated to the post of Associate Professor and bought a house.

When my parents landed at Kakaji's house in Princeton, they brought a problem with them. In their heart of hearts, they wanted Kakaji to return to India. And from the word go they started a campaign to achieve their purpose. Saroj felt comfortable in the US and had no particular desire to return. Kakaji, if left to himself, might have preferred to stay on. But he could not resist the parental onslaught.

Very soon events took a certain shape. Indira Gandhi decided that Plasma research, which was Kakaji's field of specialization, deserved a high priority in India. Vikram Sarabhai, the famed space scientist, went to New York and offered the Directorship of the Institute of Plasma Research to Kakaji. He could select his own team. So in 1982, Kakaji returned to India, established the institute at Ahmedabad, where he lives to this day.

Having completed their mission, my parents returned to India and started living at the house in Pamposh Enclave. My nuclear family returned to Shimla.

Principal Secretary to Chief Minister

At first, the state government posted me as Secretary, Planning. But this was an interim arrangement. After a month, I was posted as Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister. Ram Lal was the chief minister. The posting mystified me as we had not parted on the best of terms when we met last. Soon I came to know that my lifelong mentor M.M. Sahai Srivastava (MMS) had again played the good fairy and recommended my name.

MMS was a great character. He was in many ways my guru. I had started my effective service under him as his Joint Secretary. Later he had Dr Parmar pick me out as Finance Secretary straight from the district. And now when he was planning to migrate to Government of India, he had chosen me as his successor.

I found Ram Lal quite changed since I had met him last. He had lost some of his cockiness. Most of the time he seemed to be worried about his opponents using black magic against him. Quite frequently he would vanish without a trace and then his close lieutenants would roll their eyes and confide in me that sahab must have again gone to ...

It was very difficult to make him concentrate on any official matter. His eyes would glaze over. I could see that he was not listening to what I was saying. At first, I tried to submit files to him and ask him what his decision was. When this did not work, I started suggesting what decision to take and dictating a short order for him to record in his own hand. After some time, I started dictating the orders in advance and take the files only for signatures. Naturally, the word spread around that I was taking all the decisions.

An interesting discovery about Ram Lal was the secret of his youthful looks. I had always thought of him as being much younger than he was officially supposed to be. One Sunday I was compelled to go to Oakover, his official residence, to discuss a case. Although he was not ready to receive me, he was good enough to come to the private drawing room to discuss the file. I was quite amused to see him with his hair and eyebrows looking half grey, and half black.

The whole tamasha went on for more than a year. Meanwhile, Ram Lal's opponents were poisoning the ears of the high command against him. One fine morning we were told that the CM had been called by the high command. The papers were full of news about his impending removal.

We arrived at Himachal Bhavan in great trepidation. Ram Lal went and met the high command. He called his press secretary and told him to brief the press that he had had a most satisfactory meeting with the high command. There was no question of his being replaced.

Next day, all hell broke loose. Matters had reached a head, but if he had kept his mouth shut the crisis might have passed over. As it is, he was seen talking out of turn. He had dared give a statement on behalf of the high command. Indiraji could take anything, but not indiscipline. In the afternoon we received official word that Ram Lal had been replaced by Virbhadra Singh, with immediate effect.

Virbhadra assumed actual charge at Himachal Bhavan, Delhi itself and I continued as his Principal Secretary for the time being. One of the first decisions he took was that Mohinder Lal should be replaced as Deputy Commissioner, Shimla and his Superintendent of Police Mehta should also be replaced. Knowing Mohinder Lal as I did, I told Virbhadra that if he wanted the two out, he should have them hand over charge the same day. Next day would be too late. He looked quizzically at me and smiled.

What I had predicted happened. He dillydallied for a day. Next morning he received a phone call from Prime Minister's House that Mohinder Lall was not to be touched for three months.

'That means you cannot get rid of him', I informed him.

'Why? I will shift him after three months,' Virbhadra Singh confidently replied.

'We shall see,' I replied enigmatically.

When we went to Shimla, Virbhadra Singh left for a week-long tour of his district. Mohinder Lall accompanied him. At the end of the tour, Virbhadra Singh called me. 'I wish,' he gushed, 'we had some more deputy commissioners like Mohinder Lall. I don't know why people have been poisoning my ears against him. Why, he is a gem of an officer.'

I smiled an inscrutable smile. Later in the day, Mohinder Lall came. He had been my GA in Solan, so we were quite informal with each other.

'What did you do this time, Mohinder Lall? Boss is so full of you.'

Mohinder Lall pasted a conspiratorial smirk on his face. 'Sir, you know how these Maharajah types wish to behave like the kings of yore. I took Rs 5 lakh of government money in my pocket. In one village an old lady fell at his feet. She was poor and had no money to perform her daughter's marriage. Raja Saheb looked towards me. I went near him and quietly put Rs 5,000 in his hand. You can give this small amount to her, I whispered. This scene was repeated several times with different persons every day. By the end of the tour, my pocket was lighter by Rs 5 lakh and everybody was happy.'

After he left, I wondered for the hundredth time what a genius Mohinder Lall was. He had not done anything irregular or illegal. The money was there, the schemes were there. All he did was to do away with the red tape. I am sure all the cases must have been legally covered under one or the other scheme of the government and all the paper work duly completed.

Although Virbhadra had assured me that I would not be shifted, I expected the axe to fall any day. When about three months had passed, late in the evening one day I received a cryptic order that I had been shifted to Personnel. B.B. Tandon had been posted in my place. I took over the new assignment the same evening. Next morning when the CM came for the cabinet meeting, he found me there already.

I would like to mention some salient features of my new posting. As secretary (Secretariat Administration), I did what I had wanted to do for a long time. I improved the toilets. Once a week I would solemnly inspect each toilet to see how many tablets of phenyl had been placed in the pot. Most of the toilets were rebuilt during that period.

In Public Relations which I held till 1990, I ensured that the CM's policies and achievements were properly projected. I curbed Virbhadra's tendency to contradict anything adverse that appeared in the press. I tried to persuade him to take the adverse comments sportingly.

A major achievement was the institution of an award for journalists. When it was announced, cynics said that it would be conferred on some chamcha of the chief minister. Left to himself, Virbhadra would have probably done it. I requested him to appoint a committee headed by Prem Bhatia, Editor-in-Chief of Tribune, a journalist of impeccable integrity. When we met in the Committee, I told Shri Bhatia that the Committee was expected to be wholly objective and we would honour their recommendation without demur.

Thus encouraged, the Committee went on to select Vipin Pubby, the special correspondent of

Indian Express and the foremost critic of the government, for the award. Virbhadra balked at first, but after he gave away the award, he found that the same Pubby now looked at him with a new sense of respect. Then he was convinced.

I was also Secretary, (Language, Art and Culture). Gradually, we were able to project Virbhadra Singh as a patron of the arts. We instituted prizes for literature. We set up writers' homes in various district headquarters. We set up the chair of Writer-in-residence and were lucky to have the eminent Hindi writer Nirmal Verma accept the honour. We made a policy for buying books published by Himachali authors. We gave grants for literary journals in Pahari, Hindi and English. We set up a youth club at Shimla. We collaborated with (Fun form) INTACH for restoration of Gaiety Theatre. We set up the Sansar Chand Art Gallery at Dharamsala.

Very soon writers and journalists started making a beeline for Shimla. Virbhadra eclipsed his friend Arjun Singh as a great patron of the arts. Interviews with the CM became commonplace.

Around this time, I got into the company of a group of writers and we gradually evolved the Gharelu Goshthi concept. At its peak, this group consisted of Keshav, Shrinivas Joshi, Tulsi Raman, Rekha, Srinivas Srikant, Surendra Nath Verma, K.C. Sharma and R.C. Sharma. The beauty of the arrangement was that each member hosted the goshthi in turn, so that there was no need for collecting funds or having an organization. The essential conditions for membership were that each member had to recite at least one literary piece in each goshthi, each member was to give his critical appreciation of an item as soon as it was presented, without fear or favour, and the literary creation could be in any language and any genre.

There was one goshthi a month. Typically, it would be a Sunday. We would assemble at 11 a.m. and have a cup of tea. At two, we would have lunch. There was a parting cup of tea at 4.30 p.m. and we would disperse at 5 p.m..

There was a flood of writing within this group. We wrote like mad and all of us published our books. During this period, I published *Kehna Aasaan Hai* (my first collection of poems in Hindi, Parag Prakashan, 1983), *Aasmaan Nahin Girte* (my novel in Hindi, Parag Prakashan, 1984), *Ikshvaku Se* (my epic poem based on the Bhagwad Gita, Disha Prakashan, 1985), *Kusha Grass* (my third book of English poems, Siddhartha Publications, 1985), and *Snowman* (a collection of Hindi short stories, Abhiyan Prakashan, 1986).

During this period I also wrote five plays in Hindi. These were *Niyam Nahin Hai*, *Dal Thandi Ho Rahi Hai*, *Prem Vibhag*, *Panditji Aa Gaye* and *Zindabad Murdabad*. These were published in Sarika. *Prem Vibhag* was performed at a theatre in Chandigarh. *Zindabad Murdabad* was adapted by Jalandhar Doordarshan as a TV play and was shown from Jalandhar as well as other kendras of Doordarshan.

We all found ready publishers because the Department of Language, Art and Culture undertook to buy Rs 3,000 worth of the books by any Himachali author. Never were Himachali writers so much in demand. It is true that along with good work, some muck also got published. And this became a point of criticism. But I refused to change the policy. The idea was that unless a lot of writing took place, quality would not emerge.

The decade of the eighties is even today remembered as the golden period of Himachali writing.

Apart from the writing, we were able to organize several all India conferences of writers in Hindi and English. This gave important writers of the Hindi heartland the opportunity to get acquainted with the newly emerging talent from Himachal. Our writers started getting noticed at the national level and

many got published in prestigious magazines and journals.

But I could not pull on with my mentor K.C. Pandeya, who was the Chief Secretary. Ever since I had come to Himachal in 1971, I had been a great favourite of Pandeyji. But around this time, he came under the malefic influence of Mohinder Lall. His strategy of winning over Pandeyji was impeccable. He gained entry to the household via the kitchen and he concentrated on Pandeyji's son Moon. Moon was a young lad and susceptible to the temptations which Mohinder Lall threw his way. Gradually, he acquired expensive tastes that his father could not afford.

I found my proposals being rejected by Pandeyji. In two or three important cases, I wrote a long note and he wrote an even longer one. As most of these concerned the position of the State Civil Service to which Mohinder Lall belonged, it was generally believed that Pandeyji was acting with active collaboration from that gentleman. We clashed in the cabinet, something unheard of in the history of Himachal, where secretaries personnel were supposed to be seen, not heard.

When this clash happened a third time, I decided that enough was enough and called on Virbhadra. I told him that I could not carry on like this and would like to be shifted to a job where I did not have to report directly to the Chief Secretary. Virbhadra found this suggestion eminently reasonable and shifted me to Education.

Education and Finance

The next six years could be divided into two parts. From 1984 to 1987, I was Secretary (Education) and from 1987 to 1990 I was Secretary (Finance).

When I took over Education, I found that Himachal was nowhere in the national reckoning. In all parameters, we ranked quite low. A veritable revolution was required.

I found that while 22 states of the country had introduced the 10+2 system of education, HP was still considering the matter. When I enquired what they were considering, I was told that money was the big constraint. This was not a lame excuse. When revolutionary changes are to be made, these do entail a lot of expenditure.

I studied the whole case and then discussed it with Education Minister Sagar Chand Nayyar and the CM. We all agreed that a changeover to the new system was inevitable. It could not be postponed indefinitely.

I suggested a way out. In all, 110 High Schools had to be upgraded to senior secondary level. If all of them were upgraded on the same day, we might not be able to find the funds. But suppose we took a decision that the changeover be done gradually over five years, 22 schools every year. Perhaps the expenditure could be managed.

Once they were convinced, it was not difficult to persuade the chief secretary and finance secretary. The cabinet also approved. The CM decided which 22 schools were to be approved. Having issued the orders, I went for an IAS training programme at Calcutta.

Two days later, the chief secretary called me up. I would have to cut short the training and return to Shimla at once. The state was on fire. People were on the streets. Every MLA and Pradhan wanted his high school to be upgraded to senior secondary level and would not take no for an answer.

I rushed back. Soon there was an emergency meeting of the cabinet and it was decided to upgrade all the 110 schools at one go. This taught me an invaluable lesson. There was no shortage of funds for things that had got to be done. Useless decisions are often taken on political considerations and they do get financed. In states like Himachal Pradesh which invariably move on a deficit budget, a little more deficit is not noticed.

The next area of improvement lay in primary education. We had 5,000 schools with a single teacher. Much of the time this teacher was on leave or on furlough. Accordingly these schools were generally closed, with consequent loss of studies for the children. The only solution was the creation of 5,000 posts of primary teachers.

Again, we were up against a financial barricade. If only we could reduce the financial implication to something reasonable. We thought of various options. Finally, it occurred to us that we could create a new category of teachers who would be given just a pittance. Suppose we offered the job to an unemployed youth in a village. If he was just 10+2, he could not dream of any job other than that of peon. Maybe such youth would be available for as low an honorarium as Rs 150 per month. We could call them volunteer teachers.

I sold the idea to Virbhadra. He was sorely tempted. To provide 5,000 jobs to unemployed youth would be a political bonanza. He persuaded everyone to this line of action. Soon we had sanction for 5,000 jobs. Now was the question of recruiting these youth. We sat down and drafted a scheme for their recruitment.

Soon the recruitment began. As usual, there was blatant favouritism in the procedure followed. The matter reached the High Court. Justice Desai was known for his calling of individual officers and humiliating them in open court. He summoned me and started on his usual tirade. After I had listened to him for fifteen minutes, I found that we were on a weak wicket and requested for a private audience in the chamber.

I told Justice Desai that based on the points raised by him, I would go back to the cabinet and propose a methodology that would ensure selection on merit, to his satisfaction. He gave me two weeks. I appeared before the cabinet and suggested a procedure that would be insulated against political pressure. We tightened the procedure and laid down that only persons who had secured 60 percent marks in their 10+2 examination would be considered. They should be residents of the same village or at the most of a village within 5 kilometres' distance. Armed with the new guidelines I reappeared before the chief justice. He was happy to see the revised procedure and okayed it. In 3 months we had got the best youth in Himachal as volunteer teachers. The era of single-teacher primary schools was over.

To our pleasant surprise, we discovered that the volunteer teachers were more punctual in attending to their duties than the regular teachers. This is because they hoped to become regular teachers in due course. Our experience was that regular teachers might absent themselves often, but the volunteer teachers were never absent. Thus the so called single-teacher schools always remained open.

While this was a good beginning, it was not enough. The education department was dominated by the headmasters' cadre. They hogged all the top posts. Resultantly all the resources of the primary schools were quietly siphoned away to the high schools.

The only solution to this age-old disease was surgery. I proposed that the Directorate of Primary Education be hived off. It should be headed by a separate Director of Primary Education, with his own Directorate, officers' cadre and budget. Once this was agreed to, we asked for a complete cadre consisting of primary teachers, head teachers, central head teachers, block primary education officers and district primary education officers.

Suddenly, people in the primary cadre found themselves promoted to higher positions. This gave a great fillip to their morale. They started performing with great efficiency.

Next, we examined the methodology for deciding the location of new primary schools. Hitherto, the matter was decided by the MLA concerned, who indulged in terrible favouritism. We mapped all the possible locations for new primary schools, based on the criterion of distance laid down in the national policy. Such mapping yielded a scientific and rational basis for identifying new locations.

When we looked at the lists supplied by the MLAs, we saw that many of them were locating the new schools either in villages which already had schools or very close to existing schools. The chief minister was able to locate at least half the new schools on rational criteria. This resulted in a boost to the percentage of children attending schools.

There was a long outstanding dispute between the headmasters and lecturers in the school cadre. The headmasters had loaded the dice against the lecturers, although the latter were more qualified. We changed the procedure, so that justice was done to the school lecturers, especially in the matter of promotion to the posts of principals. What the headmasters had managed so far was a common seniority list of headmasters and school lecturers. As school lecturers were recruited at a later date, they were en bloc junior to the headmasters. Resultantly, most of the promotions went to the

headmasters.

We changed the procedure and fixed a separate percentage quota in the principals' cadre for the school lecturers. For such posts only school lecturers were to be considered. Resultantly, the main grievance of the lecturers was redressed and there was comparative peace in the department.

The greatest problem in the department was its transfer policy. The entire department was engaged 24 hours in the task of transfers. Every day the director spent several hours with the chief minister and education minister, looking at the proposals received from MLAs, Pradhans and other influential persons. Transfers were considered the most flourishing industry of the state.

Gradually, we were able to rationalize the policy. The season for transfers was limited to two months in a year. Rest of the year, we imposed a total ban on transfers. The minimum tenures were fixed and if a person was being shifted before completing that period, he was not disturbed. Three years before retirement, teachers were allowed to opt for a station close to their home place. Couple cases were treated compassionately.

In this way, the workload of all concerned authorities was reduced. Justice and fair play was restored to the entire process of transfers.

Around this time the central government launched the Navodaya Vidyalaya scheme. Their requirement was land to be located and allotted to the schools. Meanwhile, accommodation was to be found so that the schools could start functioning at once. This matter was taken up on a war footing and the schools were started in record time.

The state was allowed to set up a regional engineering college. The land was located and allotted in Hamirpur and the building work completed very fast. Meanwhile, the college was tentatively opened in an existing institution in Hamirpur town.

We tried to build up the university, by allocation of sufficient funds and attending all the meetings of the executive council. It was discovered that the total number of days of academic study were only 80. It was suggested that the number be raised to 125. It was also felt that the college and university lecturers should mark attendance in a register.

I was astounded at the violent reaction of the academics. They were least interested in academic work and had great pretensions to intellectual superiority. Marking attendance was considered to be infra dig. With all that we were able to make a difference.

We tried to build a new department of yoga as also a department of art and music.

All the changes we brought about in the working of the Education Department gave a tremendous boost to education in Himachal. Today, the state is among the top performers in the social sector. The World Bank has lauded the performance of the state in glowing terms. The achievements in education have had a cascading effect on overall development of the state. No one now talks of Himachal as the state that supplies mundoos (child labour) to the other states.

I would like to allude here to something my children remember even now with a sense of wistfulness. Television had invaded our lives and we had started getting addicted to certain programmes. While we were in the thick of some emotional outburst, the lights would go off. Both children would shout, 'Most interesting scene!' I would be ordered to ring up the deputy commissioner and have the power restored. I would dial Mohinder Lall's number and hey presto! the power would come on. It almost bordered on the magical!

In winter, we would all sit cuddled together around the bukhari (stove) and I would help them in

their various subjects, especially mathematics. Raj would place kebabs on the hot pipes, and serve these sizzling hot.

Members of our service were, in those days, extremely keen on being sent for training or posting abroad. Raj remembers how I came from office one day bubbling with the news that I had been selected for a one year training programme at Sussex. One wail from my daughter, 'Ooh! Who will guide me in Mathematics?' and all my zeal vanished into thin air. I told the Chief Secretary that I was not available.

In 1987, the post of finance secretary fell vacant. The CM shifted me to finance. With the excellent equation I had developed with Virbhadrha, I was very effective as finance secretary. I found that by judiciously allocating funds, a finance secretary can make a great difference to the working of the government.

One major problem was that we were always in deficit and totally dependent on timely release of central grants. I had to maintain a personal rapport with the officers in the central ministry of finance, so that they would release funds even in advance to help us avoid an overdraft.

I have always had a weakness for the institution of deputy commissioner and tried my utmost to strengthen it. I had great sympathy for the patwaris who were doing very critical work and did not figure in the Plan allocations. So I took every opportunity of allotting funds to the DCs for building patwarkhanas. We got grants for flood relief, drought relief, etc. I would divert much of it into construction of patwarkhanas. Very soon we had built patwarkhanas all over the state.

One of the secretaries who got my goat was Kailash Chand Mahajan. He belonged to the powerful Mahajan family of Chamba. He had been Chairman of the Electricity Board. CM was fond of him and had made him power secretary. Kailash was a law unto himself and would do whatever he wished to. Very often only the CM and he knew what he was up to. We in the Finance Department were invariably the last to know.

I compelled Kailash to bring his cases to Finance and then fought pitched battles with him in the cabinet. I think the politicians enjoyed this spectacle, which was rather unusual for Himachal. Sometimes CM would side with me and sometimes with Kailash. It was a seesaw battle right till the end.

One bad result of Kailash's manoeuvres was that the Electricity Board would take loans from commercial and cooperative banks. Sometimes we would get part of the money due to the government from these loans. Gradually, the amount of money which flowed from the banks to the government through the Board reached an astronomical amount.

Virbhadrha had the habit of committing to expenditure that was not budgeted. These loans of the Electricity Board became a convenient method of meeting such overspending. Apart from being against all the rules of financial propriety, it was also creating a situation which would be difficult to handle at some future date.

In 1990 an election was due. I could see that Virbhadrha would be out this time. It was best therefore to escape to the central government. In February my name was mooted and in March, cabinet secretary rang up the chief secretary to enquire when I was joining.

What I learnt later was that my predecessor Hindal Tyabji had been requisitioned suddenly by the state government of Jammu and Kashmir. He was asked to report at once. Parliament was in session. N.N. Vohra who was the Secretary (Defence Production) at that time insisted that he be given a replacement at once. Cabinet Secretary told him that I was available.

Vohra did not lose any time. He rang up his good friend and batchmate M.M.S. Srivastava about me. MMS gave him a glowing report. Vohra informed Cabinet Secretary that I was acceptable. Cabinet Secretary obtained PM's approval and then rang up chief secretary HP and gave him the good news. Chief Secretary called me and asked me when I could join.

I had to present the budget. After that, I was ready to move anytime. Fifteen days later, I was in Delhi, seated in my high-security prison called the South Block.

The period 1982–90 was one in which I wielded a lot of power and authority in Himachal Pradesh. An interesting fallout of this phenomenon was that for some officers I became a cult figure. They got important postings and were attached to me. So much so that people started calling them 'Kawboys', and they did not mind the appellation. Towards the end we had a couple of 'Kawgirls' too.

Although we did not realize it at that time, 1990 marked the end of my service in Himachal Pradesh. Having come to Shimla in 1971 and continued in Himachal all through, with a break of four years (1978–82), this brought to an end my service of fifteen years to the state. Himachal gave us much. The best part was an opportunity to serve the people of this beautiful state, whom I always consider to be possessed of divine attributes.

During this period, both our children went their way for higher studies. Iti did her degree in electronic engineering from REC Kurukshetra and her MBA from Jammalal Bajaj. Anurag went to People's Friendship University, Moscow for his MBBS. Raj and I decided that she should now try for a job. She wanted a teaching job but at college level. Naturally, she was required to obtain a PhD degree. Fortunately she had written a book which was rated by the Himachal Pradesh University as equivalent to an M Phil degree. So she was directly registered as a PhD scholar. Her guide was a Kashmiri professor Dr Krishna Raina who was very constructive and quick. The thesis came up very fast and within three years Raj had bagged a doctorate.

With all that, it was not easy to enter the majestic portals of Delhi University. She had to appear in numerous interviews and be content with leave assignments, part-time jobs and ad hoc appointments. Finally, she made it to Ram Lall Anand College in the South Campus, from where she retired in 2011, on attaining the age of 65 years. Her abiding complaint is that she could not earn a pension!

We enter the Sai Family

My earliest encounter with Bhagwan Sri Sathya Sai Baba took place in 1972. I was Deputy Commissioner, Solan. Baba was to travel from Chandigarh to Shimla by road, a journey along the Kalka Shimla National Highway, which was entirely in our jurisdiction. As Punjab Police would escort him right up to Shimla, SP and I decided to be available at Solan when he passed that town.

That first meeting was somewhat of an anti-climax. Baba's cavalcade slowed down near the bus stand, where the devotees had congregated in numbers. Baba emerged from the car for a momentary glimpse and vanished back inside. Before we knew it, Baba had sped away without stepping on Solan soil or blessing the devotees who were singing bhajans with great gusto.

Later, we learnt from our batman that Baba's car had stopped near our residence. Our son Anurag was a baby in arms. Baba placed his palm on his head as a benediction and blessed him for ever. The impress of that touch can be felt to this day.

Somehow, my mind was prejudiced against Swami for the simple reason that he performed miracles. I was under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna, who felt that a true seeker should shun the miraculous powers that spontaneously arise on the spiritual path.

That is how I wrote the following poem on Swami in 1976:

Miracle, miracle, miracle!
The Sai Baba
The thin air
The ear-ring.
Hungry men can't eat
The Sai Baba
The thin air
The ear-ring.
When will this miracle happen?
The Sai Baba
The thin air
The ear of wheat!

Shiv K. Kumar, then Editor, Poetry Page, published it in the Illustrated Weekly of India.

I have described elsewhere the almost fatal illness contracted by Papaji in 1976 and the manner in which my mother invoked the blessings of Baba in order to save Papa's life. When the crisis finally blew over, it was generally believed in the family that his recovery was a Sai miracle. My mother took a vow that she would visit Puttaparthi at the earliest opportunity, so as to thank Baba in person. Like all pious intentions, this vow too remained unfulfilled till 1988.

In 1983, I wrote the book *The Science of Spirituality*. In the last chapter I expressed the hope that one day very soon spirituality would become a part of the educational curriculum.

Soon thereafter, Professor Shyam Sunder, President, Sri Sathya Sai Sewa Organization visited me in my office and told me about Sai Baba's programme of Education in Human Values in the schools. He gave me some literature on the subject. I was fascinated to see that Baba was advocating the same

course of action, except that instead of the term 'spirituality' he used the phrase 'human values'.

I was able to persuade Virbhadra Singh, CM and Sagar Chand Nayyar, Education Minister, about the desirability of the EHV programme. We held a workshop and on the fifth day, the CM announced the introduction of EHV in all primary schools of Himachal Pradesh.

Next year Shyam Sunder literally dragged me to an all India conference of educationists at Puttaparthi chaired by K.C. Pant, then education minister in the central government. And on 2 June, 1984 I was given an interview by Swami. He exuded lot of love and touched me on various parts of the face, what Shyam Sunder later said was the rearrangement of my mental furniture. Very soon, my nature started changing. In 1986 I gave up the pernicious habit of smoking that had stayed with me for 26 years. I have never felt the urge even once.

In 1988, the family was sufficiently motivated to make a trip to Puttaparthi. Baba started our interview with the satirical cum humorous remark, 'Bahut din se ichcha thi ki baba ke paas jayenge. Aakhir aa hi gaye.' He described our children accurately. Iti had tremendous powers of concentration, like a horse yoked to a tonga. Gugoo (pet name for Anurag) did not pay attention to studies. When Raj sprang to her son's defence, 'He cannot remember,' Baba retorted sharply, 'Who says he has a poor memory? He remembers film songs all right.'

He intervened decisively in Gugoo's life when he sent a military general as a house guest to us in Shimla. He was a sceptic but was astounded on his return to Delhi when he discovered a pile of vibhuti in a secret safe to which only he held a key. He got Gugoo a medical seat for MBBS at the People's Friendship University Moscow. When he returned, another miracle took place giving him admission first to MS and later to M Ch in Cardio-thoracic surgery. He arrived in Delhi on a Friday and put in a casual application for a job in All India Institute of Medical Sciences. On Monday, he got the appointment letter as if they were waiting for him. Baba has always looked after Gugoo in a rather special way.

Iti was good at studies. She did her B Tech. in Electronic Engineering from Regional Engineering College, Kurukshetra and later did her MBA from Jammalal Bajaj College, Bombay. She got a job with TCS where she continues to this day. In her case, Baba counselled her on her habit of losing temper. He also gave a broad hint about her marriage when he said, 'She is like Sita. He will be like Ram.' Apart from his many qualities of head and heart, Rahul is also Ram in yet another way. This I discovered by accident when I was trying to see what acronym his name yielded. I was dumbfounded to notice that his name Rahul Mattoo made the acronym RAM.

Baba always gave sound practical advice to all of us. Papaji had pain in his knees. Baba asked Mummy to give him less food. When she remonstrated that he felt hungry if less food was given, Baba shot back, 'I did not say keep his stomach empty. Give him one kilo of cucumber. Give him two kilos of cucumber.'

He showered gifts like rings, pendants, necklaces, japamala, shivlingas, ear-rings, statues, vibhuti containers, bracelets, watches and so on to different members of the family. One hilarious sequence concerned my mother. Initially, she was the only one who got nothing. She had a terrible sense of deprivation and prayed to Baba for 'a scrap of tin' just to make her happy.

Next time around, Baba created a watch quite unlike any watch we had seen. It did not carry a name or the manufacturer's address. It worked perfectly for one year. Then it stopped. One day we all went to a watch repair shop in Middle Bazar, Shimla. The Sikh mechanic opened the watch from the back and peered long at the innards with his magnifying eyepiece. Then he gave a sigh.

‘Was it really working at any stage? It is a strange watch. There is no machinery at the back.’

I did not tell him that it had been manufactured as a ‘scrap of tin’ by the divine. I just took the watch back. Next time, Mummy placed the watch at Swami’s feet. He materialized a Seiko watch instead.

I do not want to dilate too much on our relationship with Swami, as it must be the subject of another book.

South Block

I found the Ministry of Defence to be a peculiar place. It was not possible to have a normal conversation with anyone. All of us were dealing with classified information that could be shared only on a 'need to know' basis. You could not indulge in light gossip.

At first, I did not have an independent vehicle, as the ministry had a limited number of cars operated by the army. Three joint secretaries shared one vehicle. This was quite inconvenient, but gradually the PSUs devised a solution. They provided independent transport to the respective officers.

I had a very interesting charge. I had all the shipyards catering to the navy and the coast guard. These were the Mazagon Dock at Bombay, the Goa Shipyard at Goa and the Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers at Calcutta. They had very bright CMDs—Rear Admiral Madan Puri, Commodore Venkatesh and Rear Admiral Dharam Vir Taneja.

The shipyards were constructing ships for the navy and coast guard. The boats were of various kinds, P-15, Corvettes, submarines, offshore patrol vessels and so on. Most of the work was done on cost plus basis. Time and cost overruns were very common. The customers wanted the latest technology and weaponry, and it was the normal practice to keep on revising the specifications and requirements till the vessels were delivered.

Very soon, the concerns of the various actors in the drama came to light. The customers wanted to keep the design fluid, with the liberty of changing the specs till the last minute. They did not plan their budget in advance, with the result that no one knew in advance as to how much money was available for each vessel. At the same time, they wanted the shipyards to give them what they wanted without any time and cost overruns.

The shipyards would have liked it if the drawings were frozen at the time of giving the order. They would ideally want to know their order-book position well in advance, as well as the availability of funds for each project.

The defence finance oversaw the whole thing and approved the budget and the pace of financing. They wanted fixed price contracts with provision for liquidated damages in case of time and cost overruns.

I saw very quickly that all of them had a point and it would be my task to bring them as close to each other as possible. We started a system of close consultation, with the result that during my three-year stint the budget provided by the customers reached the highest level, we were able to move towards the concept of fixed cost contracts and the customers were encouraged to freeze the specs at an early stage.

I persuaded the CMDs to have a meeting of the Board of Directors of each company in every quarter, and I made it a point to attend each meeting. We also created a forum in which the three CMDs and myself met each other once a month to discuss all pending issues.

An important factor in the whole exercise was the role of the agencies located in the erstwhile USSR, which had since broken into several fragments. Many of their factories were closed down or in disarray. Some of the enterprises had stopped production or they refused to supply on rupee basis.

We had a forum called the Joint Indo-Soviet Working Group or JISWOG, which met twice a year, once in India and once in the erstwhile Soviet Union. The officer in charge of this group was

Commodore George, a very urbane officer. These six-monthly exercises were fruitful and we were able to sort out many outstanding issues to our satisfaction. In some cases, we were able to offer dollar prices, which were quite competitive, as the dollar was a very precious currency in those days.

We had occasion to see various places in USSR and Ukraine. I was able to meet my son Anurag, who was studying for a medical degree at the People's Friendship University, Moscow. He had picked up Russian and I remember that we used his services as an interpreter in one of the meetings held at Moscow.

Anurag had a bitter experience with a student who pretended to be out of money. Anurag took pity on him and let him stay with them in their hostel room, although this was against the rules. This boy ran away one day, taking away most of their savings, by breaking into their trunks. The fellow returned to India and I was able to trace him out, but I was advised not to proceed against him as he was thought to be a smuggler of drugs.

Apart from the shipyards, I also looked after the Bharat Earthmovers Ltd., or BEML as it was called. It had a wonderful CMD called Ajwani. The company was doing exceedingly well and it was a pleasure to deal with the directors who behaved very professionally. Part of the company's supplies was to the defence services.

I found it a challenge to market the company's products to its various customers. The railways were hesitant to order railway coaches from them and were merrily establishing fresh capacity in the railways. I had to threaten them that we would take the matter to the cabinet.

The Air Force was reluctant to patronize our crash fire tenders for considerations that were not wholly above board. They had to be threatened with vigilance.

With great difficulty part of the work relating to manufacture of Arjuna tanks was ordered to be offloaded to the BEML.

During this period, we had a great time as the secretary was Raghunathan of Maharashtra cadre (1959 batch). He was a delegating type who depended on his officers and trusted them fully. He never breathed down our necks, but always supported us in any exigency. When we were in Russia, he let us hold our meetings with our counterparts, while he went round clicking photographs.

We had for some time a minister of state who did not follow a sensible policy on allocation of contracts to private parties. Most ministers let the matter be decided on merits and put pressure only when the file came to them for approval. This way, every matter was decided on merits and the ministers took a share of the winners' profits. Every one was happy.

This gentleman committed the blunder of taking his share from whosoever approached him. He would then try to pressurize us into granting the contract to the specified party. In a regime where the bids always went to the lowest tenderer, it was almost impossible not to award the contract to L-1.

In one particular case, he raised a big shindy on the file. Minister Sharad Pawar asked for a report. I explained the position and my stand was strongly defended by Raghunathan. The chhota minister not only differed from both of us but made some uncomplimentary observations about me.

Pawar was good enough to mark the file to his private secretary, who discussed the case with me. Between Pawar and Raghunathan, the file was buried fathoms deep. Two months later, the chhota minister was sent out of the government.

During this period I felt the absence of the Gharelu Goshti concept in Delhi. I tried to persuade

writers like Ganga Prasad Vimal, Raji Seth, Kedar Nath Singh, Baldev Vanshi, Jagan and Kripa Shankar Singh and so on to start something like this. But I found the atmosphere in Delhi to be quite different. Each writer was part of a faction and their loyalties were well defined.

Failing to strike a chord on the Hindi front, I went in for a fresh anthology of my English poems. This was published in 1991 by Konark Publishers under the title The Sandalwood Door. This book was in a way a collection of my best poems till that date.

Just to convey a little bit of the flavour, I reproduce the title poem:

It is raining
Outside.
Inside I dream
Cross-legged
Of that eternal moment.
The sandalwood door opens
And out of the dim
Morning
Darkness
Emerges
The body of fire.
Eyes remote, unseeing,
Right hand raised
In questioning curve
Upwards,
Lips flickering
For a moment
With diamond smile.
The dam bursts;
The lump travels beyond the throat
And erupts.
A steady pour it is,
Inside.

In 1993, I was promoted as Additional Secretary and posted to Ministry of Finance.

North Block

I spent a year or so as Additional Secretary in the Department of Revenue. My experience taught me that this post in the government is a superfluous post, and one that is not really required.

In the department, the real power was vested in the Chairmen of the Central Board of Direct Taxes and the Central Board of Excise and Customs. These are the senior most posts in the two wings of the Indian Revenue Service. Their standing grievance is that they are not full-fledged secretaries to the government in their respective departments and they have to report to the revenue secretary, who is an IAS officer.

The revenue secretary has at least the satisfaction of having the last word on every subject before a case is submitted to the finance minister. The additional secretary is neither here nor there.

There were attempts I made to poke my nose into the affairs of the two Boards, but neither the chairmen nor the secretary would bite. I hinted that the Boards would be better off if they were located outside the North Block. The location of the Board offices inside the heart of the government is a great ego-booster for the members of the Revenue Services. There were no takers for the proposal.

The additional secretary had no say in the postings and transfers of officers of the IRS. When I tried to create a role for myself, it was resented both by the chairmen as well as by the secretary. Sivaraman, the Revenue Secretary, should normally have jumped at the prospect of advice from a senior IAS officer independent of the cabals and conspiracies of the two departments. But the chairmen were touchy on the subject of status. They would have strongly protested against the procedure that provided for routing transfer proposals to the secretary through the additional secretary.

It was obvious from the outset that even the appointment of the two chairmen themselves was too complex a matter to be entrusted to the additional secretary alone. Approval had actually to be given by the reigning corporate honcho, be it Dhirubhai Ambani or whoever. It was the secretary who obtained the verbal approvals from everyone, including the minister and the prime minister. The note submitted by the additional secretary was then merely a formality.

I spent some time in conducting an enquiry into the affairs of the Customs and Gold Appellate Tribunal (CEGAT) that had been ordered by the Supreme Court on the petition filed by one Shri Jain, who was the editor of a popular journal. Shri Jain met me soon after I took over. He had a genuine grievance. He had filed a detailed charge sheet against the chairman, but the fellow had political clout, so nothing had moved in the department. He then went to the Supreme Court who had passed a speaking order, clearly directing the constitution of a committee to probe into the allegations and report back to the court. Despite these orders, the ministry had taken no action. He wanted to know what my plans were. He would have to move the court for contempt if too much delay took place.

I had no interest in the matter. It was not even clear whether the chairman's clout, if any, was with the previous government or the present one. In any case, there was no harm in testing the waters. I put up the case to the minister for permission to call for a representative of the Ministry of Law. The proposal was approved. I notified the committee and started holding meetings. The chairman was called upon to send his replies to the various allegations. After some prodding he sent a wishy-washy reply denying the charges. We started hearing the witnesses for Shri Jain and asked the chairman to

cross examine them. The chairman did not cooperate.

We obtained various documents, attendance registers, case files of individual cases, etc. As the chairman did not adduce any evidence and Shri Jain was able to prove most of the allegations from the record itself, we gave a last opportunity to the chairman to defend himself and then wrote our report.

My boss M.R. Sivaraman was a dynamic officer with a reputation for integrity. He was fond of flying aeroplanes and had indulged in that hobby in his last posting as the Director General of Civil Aviation. I had no doubt that he would make use of our report at the first available opportunity. As my tenure was over, the matter was not decided during my time. Later, I learnt that he had suggested the easing out of the chairman, but the latter was able to get the proposal stalled. However, when the chairman tried to get a second tenure, Sivaraman sprang into action and stood his ground. So we had the satisfaction that our labours had not been in vain.

Plus, it became clear that CEGAT might be a Tribunal but it was not above the law. It was answerable to the ministry.

I came to know that our statute book had an Act called the SAFEMFOPA, which expands to Smugglers and Foreign Exchange Manipulators Forfeiture of Property Act. (What a tongue-twister!) There were six senior officers of the revenue service on deputation to us as the competent authorities. If they worked properly and exercised their full powers, all the dons in the country would be behind the bars and all their property forfeited to the government.

It was as if my predecessors were not even aware of the existence of these officers and the extent of their authority. I started with a first ever conference of all officers concerned. We itemized the points for decision and action. At least some movement had become discernible by the time I left. I filled up all the vacancies, gave a sense of importance and direction to the officers and prepared a blueprint for action for my successor.

One day I got a fat file on my desk. When I read the long and tedious notes on the file, I found that the subject was Value Added Tax. VAT had already been introduced in 80 countries of the world. We were still debating the desirability and feasibility of a shift to VAT.

I summarized the issues and put up a note for perusal of the finance minister, requesting him to convene a conference of chief ministers and Finance Ministers of all the states, in order to build a national consensus and introduce VAT as soon as possible. I set the ball rolling and was happy when the matter attained a certain momentum.

On another day, I was sitting in my office when the current chairman CBDT entered my room. He was in a state of high excitement. He had just been nominated for a Best Bureaucrat Award by a prestigious agency. I looked at the letter informing him of the award and found a very interesting fact. He had not been nominated, just short-listed. Enclosed was a list of possible donors who could sponsor the event. If he could obtain a donation of at least Rs 25 lakhs from at least six of these persons, that could facilitate his final selection.

Some months later, the award was actually conferred on him. This obviously meant that he must have fulfilled their condition.

For quite some time, I had been toying with the idea of bringing out a book on the bureaucracy. I had all those essays and middles published over the years, but did not understand the knack of putting them together as part of an organic whole.

There were many false starts. I started a book called The Gentle Art of Spoonery and another titled

An Enquiry into the Science of Sycophantology, but nothing seemed to click.

One day, during my tenure in the Department of Defence Production, I raised this issue in the lunchroom. R. Ramanathan was our internal financial adviser. Shekhar Dutt sat next-door to me. Suddenly, someone said, 'Bureaucrazy'. It was an immediate hit. I then started thinking of an eye-catching subtitle. It could be IAS criticized, IAS lampooned, IAS dissected ... I consulted the thesaurus and collected so many synonyms. Finally, we latched on to Bureaucrazy: IAS Unmasked.

I now created a chapter outline and tried to fit in what I had already written or published into each chapter. Then there emerged clear gaps which needed fresh writing, some fillers, so I did that.

I gave the manuscript to K.P.R. Nair, the owner of Konark Publishers. I wanted the book to be illustrated by R.K. Laxman or Ranganath. Nair said that Laxman would charge too much. He contacted Ranganath, but he also acted coy. After a bit of a running around, I got weary and decided to make the cartoons myself. Once I got the basic bureaucrat right, the rest was easy.

The book got published in 1993 and was an immediate bestseller. It was widely reviewed and lavishly praised. Khushwant Singh wrote in *This Above All*:

'A vastly amusing expose of the Indian Administrative Service...This is by far the most readable book on administration because Kaw wields a light pen, has a malicious sense of humour and an excellent command over the English Language.'

Shobha De (*The Week*) called me 'suave, well read, urbane, brilliant.'

Shiv K. Kumar said in *The Hindustan Times*, 'Kaw's pen is dipped in lethal irony...The book exudes humour on every page. Never a dull moment.'

Later, Khushwant called it one of the ten best books he had read during 1993.

As far as I am concerned, this is my most successful book. It has been read by a lot of my colleagues in the various services. Almost everyone has enjoyed it. Many have asked me to do a *Bureaucrazy 2*.

One day, when I had gone to the Parliament to watch the proceedings, I was led into a corner by Montek Singh Ahluwalia. He said that the central government employees' federations were getting restive on the question of pay revision. Government as a model employer was committed to provision of a living wage.

Government was planning to set up the Fifth Central Pay Commission and the finance minister had personally picked up my name as the officer eminently suited to the difficult task of maintaining a harmony as between seemingly contradictory objectives.

Even as a career opportunity, a Pay Commission posting would be a great boost. After I demitted office, I was most likely to be appointed as secretary, Expenditure. Look at who my predecessors were: L.P. Singh, and S.N. Ray.

I fell into the trap. The next thing I knew was that I had been notified as Member-Secretary of the Fifth Central Pay Commission. Had I known the full facts, I might not have jumped into the fray with such alacrity. I would have come to know that Sivaraman was planning to move to the World Bank and I could have taken over as revenue secretary. Where I could have gone from there, only God can tell!

But then I could not have given such a bonanza to government employees and pensioners.

I fix everyone's pay

The chairman of the Pay Commission was Justice Ratnavel Pandian, a retired judge of the Supreme Court of India. He was a simple man and often as transparent as glass. He wished in his heart of hearts that government should use his services right till his death. Left to himself, he would have dragged on the work of the Commission for a minimum of five years. I had no intention of spending all my life in this assignment. I had kept three years as the outer limit for the submission of the report.

We were notified in April 1994. The third member was Professor Suresh Tendulkar, noted economist. He was then the Director of the Delhi School of Economics. A person of very frugal tastes, he lived a Spartan life. He refused a staff car and would commute to his office by bus. From the very start, it was obvious that he would act as the brake while Pandian's foot would be on the accelerator.

There were rumors that more members would be notified in due course. I felt that the complications of arriving at a consensus would be proportionate to the square of the number of members. I got it conveyed to the finance minister that enough was enough. Fortunately, he desisted.

A minor controversy was generated by one Vishwa Bandhu Gupta, an officer of the IRS. His point was that the IAS had already dominated the civil services in the country. Appointing an IAS officer as member secretary would perpetuate the present situation. He threatened to go to court. I do not know whether he did or not, but if he did, his petition was probably dismissed in limine, as I never received a notice from any court.

Initially we were housed in a few rooms in Vigyan Bhavan Annexe. I persuaded C. Ramachandran, Secretary, Expenditure to let us move into decent accommodation. Fortunately, there was a multistoried complex coming up behind the Hyatt Regency hotel in Bhikaji Cama Place. We got two floors done up according to our requirements and engaged a private decorator Malik to furnish the office.

We had no clue as to what the Fourth Commission had done by way of staffing. We decided to improvise as we went along, taking it that we would work on computers all along. I decided to have two joint secretaries, one from the IAS and one from the Audit and Accounts Service. Luckily, I got decent officers to man the posts, Rakesh from Manipur cadre and Sunder Rajan from Audit. They were of great help. Sunder Rajan posed certain problems and suggested a modest increase everywhere. As behoves an auditor, he tried to be economical and circumspect. As I am by nature liberal, we tended to clash over proposals for increase.

I decided to take deputy secretaries or directors from the relevant services to deal with the major departments of railways, posts and telegraphs, income tax and forests. We had an officer from the Indian Economic Service and several from the Central Secretariat Service. We also took clerks, assistants and section officers from diverse departments. At maximum count, we had around 125 persons, compared to more than 224 for the Fourth Commission.

In parenthesis, let me say that the Sixth Pay Commission outdid us completely in numbers. Out of curiosity, I visited their office one day. I found Sushma Nath presiding over a team of a dozen officers. That was it!

One important decision I took was to take my private secretary V.K. Tondon in the Department of Revenue to the Pay Commission. Tondon turned out to be the perfect PS one always dreams of and

never finds. He was outstanding for the office and he was superb for the home. I did something unique. Tondon went with me wherever I went, till I finally retired from HRD in 2001.

It was during my stint in the Pay Commission that we married off our daughter Iti. Being the smiling chatterbox that she is, she had admirers right from her school days. I remember that she received her first proposal of marriage from a colleague's son when she was in the tenth standard.

We had this clear idea in our mind that she should marry a boy of our own community. Fortunately, we got a proposal from the Mattoos, a noted family of Kashmir. The boy had already seen the girl from a distance and had given his consent. There was the usual meeting between the boy and the girl. To our dismay, after they had met once, Iti asked for a second meeting. Fortunately, the next day she said 'yes'. It transpired that Rahul did not talk much on the first day as he wanted to let her speak (smart guy!). We performed the engagement ceremony within a day. The marriage itself was held a few months later in February 1995. Tondon was a tower of strength during the entire wedding.

As far as the Pay Commission report, we decided to first prepare a format for the report. Then we started writing the report straight on the computer in different segments. First, the demand made by the association of employees or department of government. Next, the history of the case, including the comments made by previous pay commissions. Next, the comments of the administrative ministry. Then, the views of the Ministry of Finance. Lastly, our views. Then, one column for decision of the commission.

We prepared a list of all the associations and wrote to them. We also issued a public notice calling for memoranda. Soon the work was in full swing. Some of the departments wanted us to see their working at close quarters. We went on tour to look at these departments personally.

It was in one of such tours that I almost lost my life. The army had repeatedly requested us to witness their field activities. As part of this exercise, we were taken to Jodhpur. At 1 a.m., we were woken up and led to a tank regiment. They were in attack formation and we would actually witness how an attack was mounted in the desert.

There was an armed personnel carrier, on the top of which two chairs were fixed. I was made to sit in the right chair. There was a major sitting to the right of my chair. In the left chair was installed Lieutenant General V.P. Malik, who was later elevated to Chief's rank. Thus I was protected on both sides. More importantly, I was awake.

At 5 a.m. the attack was halted. We all got down and had tea. When we climbed the APC, it so happened that General Malik took the right chair and I was made to sit in the left chair. There was no one sitting on my left. The next thing that I knew was that I was flying through the air and landed with a thud on the desert sand. What probably happened was that I dozed off and the tanks accelerated for the attack. We possibly hit a ditch and I was physically lifted in the air. Fortunately, the sand was soft and I did not break my neck. Also, the drivers were alert and no one actually ran me over.

General Malik was very solicitous about my welfare and sent me back to my tent and later had me airlifted to Delhi for treatment. I got physiotherapy for a year, but although this accident took place in late 1996, I still have a stiff neck.

The Central Reserve Police took us to Ayodhya to show us the demolished mosque and the temple to Ram Lalla. We also went to Mathura to see the birthplace of Lord Krishna and Kashi Vishwanath temple where a mosque has been constructed on top of the temple. We were taken to Vaishno Devi temple near Jammu.

Joginder Singh, DG ITDP wanted to take us by helicopter to Kedarnath and Badrinath temples, but

the trip had to be cancelled owing to the smoke emitted by forest fires in the area.

We prepared a list of people whom we wanted to hear in person. We invited them for oral evidence. Some of the VIPs invited us to their offices. We paid them a visit.

Our commission had been given a wide mandate. We were supposed to advise the government on administrative reforms and reduction of numbers. We took these terms of reference very seriously and commissioned a large number of studies by expert bodies, both in the public and private sectors. There were at least 20 such studies and we had 20 copies of each report placed in key places in the central and state government, so that they would be available to researchers and our successors.

On an overall basis, we found the government to be hugely overstaffed and felt that a 3 percent annual reduction in numbers would be desirable. This would mean a 30 percent reduction over a 10-year period.

Within the central secretariat, we felt that the cadre of peons could be replaced by a messenger service. The clerks and assistants could be replaced by a compact cadre of executive assistants, who would report to desk officers.

We advised that no file should need consideration at more than three levels. The third level should take the final decision.

We felt that every function currently discharged by the government needed to be reconsidered. It could be passed on to the private sector. It could be contracted out. It could be given to an agency.

We recommended that the government should perform only sovereign functions as far as possible.

With regard to pay scales, we felt that the present amounts should be multiplied by a factor of roughly 3.2. The minimum salary was based on a study made by the National Productivity Council. For the first time, we introduced the concept of maximum salary and commissioned a study by Indian Institute of Public Administration to arrive at a ball park figure. The concept of maximum salary was a new one. The normal reaction is, 'What upper limit? The sky is the limit.' We had to clarify how many pegs of which brand of whisky could be construed as a legitimate aspiration at different levels of the hierarchy.

We noted that the ideology of socialistic pattern of society had reduced the ratio of maximum salary to minimum salary from 100:1 in 1947 to 10.67: 1 in 1986. We felt that we had had enough of socialism and should treat the level of 10.67 achieved in 1986 as the final point, below which the ratio should not be allowed to drop.

We suggested Rs 2250 as the minimum salary and Rs 26,000 as the maximum. The chairman moderated this to give a somewhat higher minimum to the lowest paid employees.

We liberalized the pension regime a lot. I was impressed by two stories. My uncle Chaman Lal told me that one day a very senior railway officer who had retired as general manager, Railways long back came to his office. He was wearing a bush-shirt that was torn. The retired general manager told him the pathetic story of how low his pension was. Several generals of the army met us and complained that their pensions were way below what retiring majors were drawing these days.

Luckily for us, H.D. Shourie of Common Cause had obtained a lovely judgment from the Supreme Court. I was in favour of a complete one-rank-one-pension scheme, but there were apprehensions about the financial liability.

At last, we hammered out the compromise formula that all old pensioners would be fixed in the revised scales of pay as if at the minimum of the revised scale and they would be entitled to 50

percent of this amount.

With regard to Dearness Allowance, we felt that it affected all levels equally. We did not, therefore, see any justification for the differential neutralization of cost of living. The formula for 100 percent neutralization of cost of living across the board would ensure that there was no hidden strategy for socialization of salaries and pensions.

We also suggested a formula that once Additional DA reached a level of 50 percent, the same would be converted into Dearness Pay and be part of 'pay' for all practical purposes. This simple recommendation actually made further Pay Commissions redundant, because there would be automatic increases in salary through this formula.

We liberalized the family pension regime considerably.

Besides, we recommended a six day week and a declaration of gazetted holidays only on three days, namely, Independence Day, Republic Day and Gandhiji's birthday. We suggested that no public holiday should be declared on the death of a person who was not the current president or prime minister.

We increased the maternity leave from 135 days to 180 days. We suggested a paternity leave of 15 days to enable the husbands to help their wives tide over the most critical period of a pregnancy. We suggested that female employees should be allowed to work on flexi time on proportional salaries during the first ten years of marriage.

We suggested that the age of superannuation be raised to 60 years.

In order to ensure that the loyalty of senior officers was not bought by the political masters, we suggested the exclusion of the provision for grant of extension in service from the Service Rules. There should be minimum tenures for stay of officers in critical posts. We suggested a quinquennial review of the integrity of officers and their compulsory retirement from service if it was consistently doubtful.

We decided to go to a few countries of the world, in order to study at first hand the best systems of administration. The countries we visited were the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Malaysia.

We suggested the wearing of name plates by all employees from a peon to cabinet secretary. We recommended a performance related increment, on the pattern of performance related pay introduced by several countries. However, we felt that the time was not yet ripe for grant of performance related pay.

We took some important steps to clarify issues relating to the higher services. We made it clear that the IAS and the Indian Foreign Service were the top two services in the country and their superiority should always be protected. We equated the IPS and the Indian Forest Service. We ensured that there is at least one post of secretary's rank in the cadre of every Class I service. We suggested the creation of posts at higher level in services where the promotion avenues were deemed to be inadequate.

In this context, we found it amusing that Montek Singh Ahluwalia, who was the Secretary, Economic Affairs and as such the Head of the Indian Economic service suggested to us in a formal presentation he made before the Commission that the Indian Economic Service should be abolished, and that all economists should be recruited by lateral induction from the open market. He himself was a lateral inductee.

We found that there were cadres in the government where people were inducted at a certain level and retired at the same level after putting in 40 years of service. We laid down a formula that if a

person was not promoted to the next higher level within a certain period of time, he should at least get a financial upgrade as personal to him. This was called the Assured Career Progression scheme.

By late 1996, we were ready with the Report, but Justice Pandian was not ready to lay down office. Seeing his reluctance, the staff side led by stalwarts like Purohit held demonstrations outside the Commission's office. The first time it happened, Pandian called me. 'Mr, Kaw, who are these people and what do they want?'

I told him.

'But what is the slogan they are shouting?'

'They are shouting Justice Pandian Hai, Hai.' I explained

'What does it mean?' he wanted to know.

I said, 'They want awful things to happen to you.'

Justice Pandian was astonished. 'But they are all our friends. And we are giving them a liberal report.'

I pointed out that they wanted the report immediately.

For a few days, Justice Pandian held out. But the demonstrations became a daily affair. He asked his personal staff to translate the slogans. They told him the literal equivalents of Hindi words.

'Mr. Kaw, they want me to die?' He could not believe his ears. Finally, he gave in.

We made preparations for submission of the Report to the finance minister. Suddenly, two days before the D-Day, Suresh Tendulkar, who had gone along with us throughout, sprang a surprise. He said that the Report was too liberal and would impose an intolerable burden on the exchequer. We both pleaded with him not to raise such basic issues at such a late stage, after we had unanimously approved the recommendations. He was adamant.

I told Justice Pandian that we should not worry unduly about Suresh's volte face. I asked Tendulkar to give us a formal note of dissent. Once that was in, I drafted a reply from Justice Pandian and myself, rebutting his observations.

We submitted our Report to the finance minister in February 1997. The Report was generally welcomed, except that some people criticized us for being too liberal and imposing a heavy burden on the central and state budgets.

The staff side thought that we were too modest and successfully pressurized the government to improve upon the goodies and sleep on the proposals for reforms.

During my stint as Member Secretary of the Pay Commission, I found time to bring together a collection of my Hindi poems. The book Charhte Paani Se Bakhabar was published by Kitabghar in 1996. I extract one of my favourite poems:

Hukumran

Aaj shayad

Aa rahen hain hukumran

Sadak shak ban gayi hai

Ab

Bas aane ko hain hukumran

Sadak ki gayi hai sooni

Lo
Aa gaye hain hukumran
Sdak tharthara rahi hai
Abhi
Chale gaye hain hukumran
Sadak ho chali hai zinda!
(The Rulers
Today perchance
The rulers are coming
The streets are full of suspicion
Now
The rulers are about to come
The streets are rendered desolate
Lo
Here come the rulers
The streets shake with fear
Just now
The rulers have gone
The streets have come alive!)

In 1997, the Hindi translation of *Bureaucrazy* was published. The translation was done by Keshav as a labour of love. The book was titled *Afsarshahi Benaqab*.

Avtar Singh Engill, a friend who writes both in Hindi and Punjabi, translated 'Bureaucrazy' into Punjabi on his own and got it serialized in the Punjabi Tribune. I requested him to find a publisher, which he did and the book *Afsarshahi Benaqab* also got published in Punjabi.

Some time later, I received a request from Madras. Someone wanted to translate the book into Tamil and asked for permission. I sent him a letter of permission. That was the end of the matter. I have no idea whether he published the Tamil version or not.

Soon thereafter, I called on the cabinet secretary and asked him for a posting. He asked me to wait for three months. Towards the end of April, my orders were issued. I had been posted to Civil Aviation.

Flying high

When I took over as Secretary, Civil Aviation, I.K. Gujral was the prime minister and Chand Mahal Ibrahim was the minister for Civil Aviation. Ibrahim was the right hand man of Deve Gowda who was Gujral's predecessor. When Deve Gowda handed over power to Gujral, he had one condition. He should retain Ibrahim in the cabinet and he should continue as minister for Civil Aviation.

Gujral had known me since 1968 when he was the Minister for Urban Development in Indiraji's Cabinet and I had to move to a larger flat. Aditya Nath Jha was the Lt. Governor of Delhi. He had written a d.o. letter to Gujral and I had met Gujral with the request.

Gujral knew of my reputation. When I called on him after taking over as Civil Aviation Secretary, he was frank and forthright.

'Mr, Kaw, I depend on you for one thing. You have to ensure that there is no scandal in the Ministry of Civil Aviation.'

He did not elaborate, nor did I ask for the details. But we both knew what he meant.

Soon after I joined I had to take a stand on a very tricky issue. My predecessor Yogesh Chandra had blessed a proposal of the Air India Board to allow free travel to all directors of Air India with family for their whole life. There was some criticism of the move before I joined. The resolution of the Board had already been approved by my predecessor.

I summoned the file and recorded an adverse note and resubmitted the case to the minister. He was good enough to agree, but I am sure I made several powerful enemies with this one decision.

The first thing I noticed was that the country did not have a Civil Aviation Policy. I spent the first two months grappling with day-to-day issues, but part of my mind was always on the evolution of a policy. Two months into the job, I called a meeting of all the senior officers in the ministry and our public sector undertakings.

'Why do we not have a civil aviation policy?' I asked them pointblank.

There was a pregnant silence. I had probably asked a childish question and they did not know how to say something without sounding rude.

The truth came out in bits and pieces. Probably, no one had tried hard enough or long enough. I wanted to know whether they had worked out a policy for their respective sectors. There were elements of policy spread all over the department, but these had not been strung together into a policy document. I gave them two weeks' time to come up with those elements of policy which already stood cleared and elements which according to them deserved inclusion in the policy document.

When we met after a while, I found that not much progress had been made. There is an inherent mental block which prevents us from thinking over new initiatives. I could see that there would be no policy even in my time, if I let them off the hook.

Suddenly, I found myself saying, 'Gentlemen, I am going to try an experiment with you. We shall continue to sit here in this committee room till we have hammered out a draft policy. It may take one day, two days, three days or even more. Food will be served here. You can call for officers and papers from your offices, but no one can leave the room till we have achieved our objective. At the end of our labours, we shall conclude in the manner in which the Pope is elected by the Collegium of

Cardinals, with a puff of smoke.’

At first, they thought it was a joke. But when they found that I was serious, they started exerting. I do not remember how long it took. Probably within 36 hours we had a draft policy document. I asked the draft to be circulated as a confidential document, stating clearly that it had not been approved and it was just a paper for discussion.

But as is customary in government, there are too many stakeholders with different interests. Someone leaked out the document and the next thing we knew was that it was in the press.

Now there was one particularly sensitive paragraph in the draft. When privatization of airlines was permitted, several airlines were established. Only Jet Airways survived. Jet had come up with 40 percent equity contribution by two airlines from the Gulf. The Tatas had mooted a proposal for a private airline with 40 percent equity contribution from Singapore Airlines. As this would have been a formidable competitor, Jet tried hard to upset the rule regarding foreign equity contribution.

One of the last decisions taken by the outgoing Deve Gowda Government had been to disallow such contribution in new proposals. This would block the Tata proposal effectively. Jet was given a time of six months to buy back the equity from its foreign contributors.

Now one of the paragraphs in the new draft policy related to the allowing of 40 percent equity contribution by foreign airlines even in new proposals. This was seen by Jet as a victory for the Tatas. If approved as policy, it would enable favorable consideration of the Tata proposal.

Ibrahim was not happy. He called me and wanted to know why such a para had been proposed when it went against the present policy approved only three months back. I told him that this was just a suggestion made by someone. It was not part of the draft, as no draft had been made.

He was not convinced. Probably, Jet people had told him that I was trying to show undue favor to the Tatas.

After a few days, we held another meeting and produced the tentative draft of a civil aviation policy, which did not have the offensive paragraph. The minister did not clear the file, despite several attempts on my part. The history of civil aviation in this country would have taken a different trajectory, if Tata Singapore Airlines had been allowed to float an airline.

After a while, it occurred to me that the policy on airports was less controversial and it could probably be separated out. We did that. This document was cleared at all the levels, including the cabinet. I had the satisfaction of having the policy printed and circulated before I demitted office.

But the Civil Aviation Policy did not see the light of the day, either in my time or later. The country does not have a civil aviation policy even today. It is the considered view of many experts in civil aviation that FDI investment will not be allowed in India till this is permitted by the powerful owners of Jet Airways.

The Tatas still did not benefit from the policy framework on airports now enunciated. They wanted to set up an international airport at Bangalore. They had a foreign collaborator with all the expertise connected with setting up of world-class airports. Normally the proposal should have been through.

I submitted the case to the minister. He did not okay the proposal.

One fine morning, Ratan Tata came to my office with prior appointment.

He was frank and blunt. ‘What are our chances?’ he asked.

I said that it was difficult to guess.

He said that he had been approached, but it was not the policy for Tatas.

I said that the best strategy would be to wait and watch.

The Tatas finally got tired of waiting and withdrew their proposal. Recently, Ratan Tata explained that one person had stood between the Tatas and the fulfillment of their aspirations in the civil aviation sector. But he did not elaborate.

I have the satisfaction that the airport policy has yielded enormous dividends, with so many world class airports coming up in Bangalore, Cochin, Hyderabad, Delhi and Mumbai.

An important point that I tried to resolve was that of allocation of air space. I found that in most countries of the world, it was the prerogative of the civilian authorities to allocate air space as between different users. Not so in India. Because of some historical factors, this prerogative was with the Indian Air Force. The result was that the best air space was reserved by them for themselves. Thus they got the space above the air force stations wherever these were located. The civil aviation got the left-overs and they had to somehow carve out airline routes through this maze. So we had zigzag routes and did not enjoy the benefits of straight routes, which would be cheapest to operate. There were various events of the Air Force and they blithely barred civilian aircraft from using important airspace during such maneuvers.

The Defence Secretary was a friend and I took up the matter with him. He called a meeting and we placed the issues on the table. It was decided that the question of handing over all the air space in the country would be taken up by us in the council of ministers and we shall obtain the comments of the Air Force on our proposal. Meanwhile, the experts would sit together and try to straighten some of the critical routes, through mutual give and take.

One day, the horrific news hit the nation that an IAF fighter plane had narrowly missed a civilian aircraft. When we ascertained how this could have happened, it came to light that in one of the liaison meetings, the civilian side had proposed a straightening. They got the impression that the IAF had agreed to the change, and notified the same. When the IAF found this out, it decided to frighten the civilians out of their wits by a near-miss, so that they would think twice before messing up with the Air Force.

We reported the matter to the higher authorities. The PM decided that Jayanthi Natarajan, who had been recently appointed as Minister of State in the Ministry of Civil aviation would summon the Air Vice Chief Tipnis to her office and give him a tongue-lashing. She did this, with a salutary impact. But the issue of control of air space by the IAF still subsists.

That reminds me. Jayanthi had been appointed by Gujral to clip Ibrahim's wings, but as things developed Jayanthi was not particularly enamored of me. She was keen that her guru should have free access to all the VIP lounges in the airports of the country. The matter came up in routine. She did not speak to me, nor did anyone in the ministry put me wise as to the identity of this Swami. Someone had opposed the proposal on file and I signed it in routine. So did the minister.

Apparently, my guru Bhagwan Sri Sathya Sai Baba had been admitted to this privilege, not in my time and not to my knowledge. It was conveyed to Jayanthi that my guru had been allowed such access, but the case of her guru had been rejected.

As ill luck would have it, there was a case pertaining to setting up of a cargo terminal at Puttaparthi Airport. This had been pending for some time. Someone from the Ashram spoke to me. I called for the papers and then held a meeting to discuss the details. Everyone agreed that setting up a cargo terminal

at Puttaparthi was an excellent idea. It was approved by me on file and the approval was conveyed.

Someone informed Jayanthi about this case. She saw this as a great opportunity to humiliate both my guru and me. She called for the file and recorded a note that secretary had decided the matter at his own level, while it should have been placed before the minister for a decision. She sought minister's approval to the abrogation of the letter of approval. Ibrahim was happy to oblige her.

Jayanthi not only had this abrogation notified, but also spilled the beans to a couple of her cronies in the press. So we never had an axis against the minister the way Gujral had visualized it.

A major event during my time was the strike by the Air Traffic Controllers. They paralyzed the working of the airlines completely. We tried to negotiate the terms with them, but did not make much of a progress. We tried the Essential Services Maintenance Act and going to the High courts and liaising with the Air Force to borrow their ATCs. It was no go.

One day we were all struggling with the union leaders when the RAX rang. It was the cabinet secretary. He was very serious in tone and demeanour.

'Kaw, listen carefully. I am giving you a personal message from the PM. He wants that the strike should be called off immediately. The situation is rather serious. He suggests that if necessary you may concede all their demands. But at any cost the strike has to be called off within the next fifteen minutes.'

I was puzzled. You do not concede all the demands just like that. These become precedents for the future. One has to weigh the pros and cons. And if they taste blood once, the unions would ride rough shod over us all the time.

'But, sir ...' I tried to argue.

'Kaw, you think I have not argued with him already. He believes that if the strike continues one more day, this government may have to exit. So, no arguments. Let us do it.'

I was in a daze. I called my officers. Without disclosing to them all the details of my conversation with the Cabsec, I gave them the mandate to concede all the demands, without further discussion. They tried to reason with me, but I said that orders were orders.

We called the leaders of the strike and broke the news. I did not know what to expect, but I was not prepared for what actually happened. The top chap just fell down unconscious. Medical aid had to be summoned, but within half an hour, the strike had been called off.

That evening we were all guests at the residence of the British High Commissioner. When the evening news came on, the details of what had happened during the day started appearing in the bulletin. Air services had started hobbling back to normalcy.

The High Commissioner took me aside. 'It is good you sorted that one out. There were ugly rumours ...' he did not elaborate but his eyes conveyed a lot.

I believe that Ibrahim was not happy with the turn of events. He would have liked the strike to continue indefinitely, so that the PM was embarrassed.

After the dust settled down, we sat down to draft a ten point secret plan to deal with ATC strikes of the future. This involved a training programme for ATCs of the Air Force, so that they could take over civilian services in an emergency. Writ petitions were kept in readiness, so that simultaneous orders could be obtained from the High Courts of Delhi, Madras, Calcutta and Bombay, declaring the strikes illegal. Government would use their emergency powers to dismiss the leaders from service without enquiry and so on.

I am glad that this ten-point plan was put in execution the next time the ATCs went on strike. I believe they got it in the neck, the top leadership was dismissed and the Air Force took over. The strike was a dismal failure.

Many airlines which had started operations in high euphoria had come acropper. NEPC and Modiluft were two classic instances. I tried to revive some of the dead and dying airlines.

The old man who owned the NEPC Airlines was a Goenka. He told me a hair-raising story about how he had been systematically hounded out of the airline business by Jet Airways. According to him, there were very powerful people behind this airline. When pressed, he mentioned the names of Dawood Ibrahim, Sharad Pawar and Subrata Roy (of Sahara Airlines). He claimed that he saw Dawood coming in an Emirates' flight and leaving in an Emirate car which picked him up from the tarmac itself. He was wearing a pilot's dress. He claimed that Dawood had been having easy entry into and exit from the country. How Dawood's men came and parked themselves in his house and how he shut up shop in the final analysis was a sensational story.

I did not know what to believe in this story. I took a formal letter from him and forwarded it to the people concerned. Years later, nothing had been done. I do remember having read in a newspaper that one Bengali gentleman, possibly named Ghosh, who was a deputy director in the IB, had sent an adverse report against Jet directly to the Home Secretary, on the ground that the director IB was not forwarding his reports to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Some Bengalis have this unfortunate tendency of exhibiting extreme symptoms of the martyr complex. I waited with bated breath to see what the Home Secretary would do to this whistle blower. After two weeks, an unrelated small news informed the readers that the tenure of Shri Ghosh, Deputy Director, IB had been cut short and he had been reverted back to the State cadre. Thank God it was only a reversion!

Modi and Lufthansa had floated a joint venture and had found the going very difficult. There was a legal point involved and I thought we could obtain expert advice from the Ministry of Law. The matter reached the minister's ears. He was very sore at having been bypassed. He wrote to the prime minster, suggesting a CBI probe against me. He leaked his letter to the press, so as to embarrass both Gujral and myself.

Cabinet secretary asked me to see him. When I met him, he told me about the allegation. We had a good laugh together. Cabsec asked me to send a brief report on the case, which I did. That was the last I heard of the matter.

An interesting episode relates to a disagreement I had with K.R. Narayanan, the then President of India. Narayanan wanted two commanders to be put on duty in each aircraft in which he was to travel on a multi-country tour. The general policy was to have one commander only per aircraft. When the request came from the Presidential Secretariat, we took this stand and expressed our inability to concur in the proposal. Our calculations showed that acceptance of the proposal would lead to a wholesale cancellation of Air India's scheduled flights and the total loss to the airline would be in the neighborhood of 19–20 crore of rupees.

But Narayanan was made of sterner stuff. One Sunday, Gopal Gandhi rang me up and requested me to come to Rashtrapati Bhawan. I said I had no official driver and would have to drive my own car to Rashtrapati Bhawan. He said I could give him the number and he would see that I reached close to the venue of the meeting without let or hindrance.

Gopal greeted me on arrival. I found the cabinet secretary also present. Soon we were summoned into the august presence. Narayanan tried his best to argue the case, but both the Cabsec and I stood

firm. There was an impasse and we came away.

Two days later, Cabinet secretary told me that Gujral had knuckled down to the pressure. Once the PM agreed, we had no option but to agree.

Just as an aside, please enjoy the Cabinet Secretary's memory of the same incident:

As Cabinet secretary, in the midst of my busy schedule with pressing matters, there were some interludes. One morning, I got a call from the prime minister requesting me to attend a small meeting called by the president. Gujral did not provide any further details but only suggested that I might help sort out a minor problem. The Cabinet secretariat is located in the Rashtrapati Bhawan. It was only a few minutes walk to reach the president's office. I had no time to find out what the meeting was about. As I walked into President K.R. Narayanan's office, I found the Foreign Secretary Raghunath and the Civil Aviation Secretary M.K. Kaw with the president, in addition to his secretary. The meeting had begun. I could make out that it involved the question of providing Air India planes for foreign tours scheduled by the president in the summer of 1997. The president was to visit some Latin American countries for about two weeks, and then after a gap of fortnight to visit a few European countries for another period of time. Security requirements were that the main plane for use of the president and the back up plane had to be taken out of the Air India fleet and delivered and reserved for the president's use a few weeks prior to the visit to Latin America. Thus in all, the two planes would not be available for Air India's normal services for nearly two months. The secretary for civil aviation was explaining his difficulty in getting the planes detached from the fleet, in view of the several disruption to the heavy summer commercial schedule of Air India flights.

The background to his objections stemmed from an earlier discussion in the Cabinet about the airlifting of Haj pilgrims from Jeddah to Delhi and Mumbai the previous winter. At that time, one Air India aircraft and two Indian Airlines planes were pulled out of their normal schedules, to meet the emergency to clear the Haj backlog. At the Cabinet meeting, I had strongly objected to such an action disrupting the commercial schedules of Air India and Indian Airlines flights. I had raised the issue that the concerned authorities should have planned the requirement in advance as the post-Haj traffic jam was an annual feature. I referred to the foul reputation enjoyed by Air India, due to the cumulative impact of such ad hoc disruption in its schedules. For the Haj traffic, planning should have been done to hire aircraft from the open market, to clear the traffic backlog. After discussion, the Cabinet had taken a decision that in future, planes shall not be pulled out on an ad hoc basis from Indian Airlines and Air India, and that they should lease in the open market to meet any special needs. This was to build a good commercial reputation for Air India in the international market. The Cabinet decision was duly conveyed to the civil aviation department. This was the background, based on which Kaw was expressing his inability to provide the aircraft for use by the president.

At the meeting, a dogfight started between the foreign secretary and civil aviation secretary. The foreign secretary said that traditionally Air India aircraft had been used for presidential travel and he had merely followed past practice. Kaw replied very politely that the foreign secretary had never contacted him in this matter and that he was unable to spare the planes in view of the Cabinet directive. There was an impasse. The president looked at me. I confirmed that the Cabinet direction did exist. The president then asked Kaw to go to the Cabinet and get the decision reversed. Very politely, Kaw replied that it would be appropriate if the president himself took up the matter with the prime minister. At this, the president flared up and angrily asked Kaw. 'Do you think a presidential visit to Latin America and Europe is not important? Will this not get a lot of goodwill for India?' To his credit, Kaw was unfazed, as he replied calmly and in an even tone, 'I am not competent to give an

opinion on the subject.’ There was complete silence in the room. The president asked me then to speak to the prime minister, to direct that two Air India Boeing 747s be released. I explained to the president very politely that it was on my initiative that the decision was taken and that surely the civil aviation ministry would be able to arrange suitable sized planes leased out for the presidential visit. I also added gratuitously and totally needlessly, that in many countries the prime minister or the president travelled by commercial aircraft. Perhaps for the day of the president’s flights, we could book the entire First Class for the use of the president and his family, and as I understood it this was done when the Queen of England visited Africa sometime earlier. More silence, and then a phone conversation between the president and the prime minister who apparently agreed to spare the planes, Cabinet decision or no Cabinet decision. The president looked at Kaw and mentioned that a particular 747 aircraft that had been acquired most recently by Air India should be kept at his disposal. Kaw was again unfazed. He said that the particular aircraft was in a very heavy density sector; and he would pull out another smaller aircraft for the use of the president. The president then referred to the high safety standards that required the latest aircraft to be provided to him; at which Kaw blurted out, ‘Sir, is the safety and security of 350 passengers not equally important?’ That was how the two identified planes were placed at the disposal of Rashtrapati Bhawan, in the public interest. That was how also, I was never invited thereafter to any Rashtrapati Bhawan function; I did not check with Kaw if he ever was.

Another case of subsidy that I raked up was that of Haj. When I studied the case, I found that the subsidy was initially meant for very poor pilgrims and the numbers were small. As the years passed, the number of pilgrims and the quantum of subsidy increased by leaps and bounds.

I prepared a note for the Cabinet on this issue. It brought out clearly that such a subsidy was only allowed for Muslims for Haj only. What was suggested was a gradual tapering off of the numbers and extent of subsidy, so that it was reduced to nil in the fifth year. It went to the Council of Ministers. Gujral held a special meeting at his residence and called a representative of each partner in the coalition whether they were members of the Cabinet or not. Gujral insisted that each member present should express his views. As expected, the proposal fell through.

There were bilateral agreements being negotiated with many countries. Two major agreements that came up during my time related to Singapore and China. I decided to tackle these myself.

When I reached Singapore, the Indian Ambassador called me over to lunch. He said the Singaporeans were tough negotiators and I should not be sanguine about the results. As the parleys dragged along, his prophecy seemed to be correct. I had to leave the next day. When it got to be 11 p.m. I decided upon desperate measures. Recently I had done a Reiki Master Level 2 course.

I requested my officers to leave me alone for twenty minutes. When they left, I faced the direction of the room in which the secretary (Transport), Singapore Government was sitting. Across the wall, I sent the cosmic waves by pointing my palm at him.

Believe it or not, at 11.30 p.m., we got a positive message from the Singaporeans and at midnight we signed the agreement.

The Chinese had also been lukewarm to direct flights between New Delhi and Beijing. Even the Air India top brass were not optimistic about the result. I requested Aruna Mascarenhas to accompany me to the local market and help me buy some pearls.

In the evening, the Chinese had called us for dinner. After a few toasts had been drunk and some camaraderie established, I broached the subject of Hindi film songs. My host loved Hindi films and

remembered some

film songs. I sang a favourite number of his from a Raj Kapoor hit and he also joined me. Soon it became a chorus. The atmosphere became quite light and exhilarating.

Next day, we signed the agreement without a hitch.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation had established a tradition of giving additional charges of the PSUs to joint secretaries in the ministry. It would bypass the jurisdiction of the Public Enterprises Selection Board, by taking a special clearance from the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet. This arrangement suited everybody. The minister controlled the PSUs through the joint secretaries and the joint secretaries enjoyed the enormous perks and privileges of the chief executive of a PSU.

I changed all this. We started sending proposals to the PESB. Resultantly, we got an expert for the Airport Authority of India and another for the Helicopter Corporation of India. For the Air India, we had a problem. One Brajesh Kumar was the CMD. During his tenure some needlessly exorbitant pay agreements had been signed with the employees. Losses were mounting. Brajesh had leased the Maharajah suite of Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay as his residence. Despite this, Brajesh was angling for one more stint of deputation. In order to achieve his objective, he launched a blistering media offensive at a cost of several crores with the sole objective of proving that he was a great chief executive.

We assessed Brajesh's performance in the ministry and found it wanting. An IPS officer was the chief vigilance officer of Air India. He gave a frank report suggesting a number of lapses on the CMD's part, including those involving moral turpitude. I forwarded a copy of his report to the cabinet secretary and the CVC. Resultantly, the proposal for a second tenure for Brajesh did not have any takers. We were able to place this prestigious post with the PESB.

A powerful contender for the post was Anil Baijal, a joint secretary in the ministry. He was very friendly with the minister. Ibrahim had this tendency to go on long tours to Gulf countries. These were official trips but there was no agenda for his visit nor was he invited by the Sultanate concerned. He insisted that a joint secretary should accompany him on his tours. He asked for Anil by name. When I offered to depute a Sikh joint secretary, he balked at the prospect and insisted that it had to be Anil and nobody else. Perforce I had to clear Baijal's official tour.

When the minister returned, I summoned Anil for a confidential chat on what business was transacted by the minister during his visit. Anil pretended not to know. I asked him what business he had been asked to transact. If he was to be believed, he had spent the entire month in a hotel room, watching the TV and drinking free beer!

Not that I needed Anil's corroboration of what everyone in the industry knew, the special interest in a particular airline, the Gulf connection for that airline, the interest of the D Company, the benami ownership etcetra.

The PESB selected Michael Mascarenhas, who was an old Air India hand, and he took over during my time. It is another matter that after I left the ministry, the powers that be (including Baijal) saw to it that Michael was suspended and chargesheeted, and his life generally made miserable. Even Aruna, his wife, a top ranking executive of the airline, was not spared.

Today, when Air India is in a terrible mess and Karan Thapar asks me on 'India Tonight' what ails the airline, I am sometimes tempted to break into a loud guffaw. It is a fascinating saga of benami ownership of airlines, demands for bribes, destruction of all rival airlines one by one, unwarranted purchase of aircraft, mismanagement by bureaucrats and politicians, free jaunts on inaugural flights,

subsidized travel for many categories of travellers, VVIP flights, Haj flights and so on. It is a story of shameless exploitation and ruthless corruption.

Then the government changed. Vajpayee was the new prime minister and Ananth Kumar the Minister for Civil Aviation. Ananth Kumar was a greenhorn. This was the first time he had held an assignment of this stature. The rumour was that he was a stooge of Pramod Mahajan.

Things were awkward right from the word go. I called on the minister and offered to make a presentation, so that he would get to know what problems we had and how we were tackling them. He had other ideas. He thought he knew everything and did not need a briefing.

Jet Airways got jittery. They had already engaged Pramod's son as a pilot. Naresh Goel now tasked Mahajan to see that I was out from the ministry in three days flat. Those were the early days when Mahajan used to more or less stay in the PM House for 18 hours a day. It was quite simple for him to spin some story about me.

One evening, the newly appointed Cabinet Secretary Shri Prabhat Kumar rang up. 'I am sorry to tell you, Kaw,' he started, 'You have been shifted to Planning Commission. You may kindly take over the new assignment at once. P.V. Jayakrishnan will assume charge tomorrow morning.'

I tried to reason with him. 'But sir, would you not hear my side of the story? I don't know what version has been fed to the PM.'

He was clear. I should first implement the orders. Post mortem could follow.

I did not speak further. I called my PS and had the handing over note signed. Then I found out where I had to join the next morning and made the necessary arrangements. Next morning, I went to Yojana Bhavan and took over as Principal Adviser (Education).

I never called on the cabinet secretary for that post mortem. It was no use. He never told me what had triggered the sudden change. It was my old friend Virendar Chanana who spilt the beans.

'Maharaj, you may be wondering what has happened. Lalit (his brother-in-law) told me the entire story. Naresh Goel had told Pramod Mahajan that he would camp in Delhi for three days and Kaw should be shifted in that period.' Lalit Suri was a hotel tycoon who moved in the best circles and could be depended upon for authentic information.

Much later, Ananth Kumar and I happened to meet in Paris. He was very kind and expressed his apologies for how poorly he had treated me. He said that his ears had been poisoned and he realized that he had lost a gem of an officer like me.

Whether he was sincere or not, one cannot say. It is difficult to trust politicians either way.

It was around this time that I joined the astrology classes run by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan on Saturdays and Sundays. My batch mate Ramesh Chand Tripathi was also a class fellow. After two years we both cleared the Jyotish Acharya examination.

But with all my astrological certificates, I was no match for the self-taught Rup Krishen Baqaya, who is a first cousin, and more like a younger brother. His surname is Baqaya because his father was adopted by his maternal grandfather.

His explanation for my problems was elementary. As he put it, Saturn has a thirty-year cycle and as such returns to the position it held thirty years ago. Something had happened to me in 1968, thirty years ago. It was the Indraprastha episode, when I was charge sheeted and almost lost my job. So it was obvious that *ceteris paribus* (other things being equal) something was bound to give way thirty years later, that is, in 1998. Q.E.D.

Yojana Bhavan

I joined the Planning Commission in May 1998, with a huge sense of grievance. If the prime minister or cabinet secretary had called me and ticked me off for something, I would have taken the sudden transfer in my stride. As it is, I felt like a victim of Mr Ten Percent.

After three months, I called upon Prabhat Kumar, the new Cabinet Secretary. He heard me out and conceded that I had been unfairly treated. He promised to have me rehabilitated at the earliest opportunity. As it happened, there were a number of officers of my batch in the commission. Very soon, three of them were accommodated in the BIFR. Thereafter, I met the Cabinet Secretary once every three months, to remind him of his promise.

Meanwhile, I concentrated on my work. I had been allotted the subject of education. I spent my time in renewing my acquaintance with the various developments in that field around the country. I held several meetings with Shri Dasgupta, who had been Secretary, Human Resource Development for several years.

The first impression I got was that while we had liberalized in most other sectors of the economy, we were a little conservative in the field of education. Having brought about public-private partnership in civil aviation, I started visualizing how PPP could be made operational in the field of education. I wrote a policy paper on the subject and had it sent to the Ministry of HRD, after getting the approval of the deputy chairman.

Here my brief thesis was that the government schools, especially in the urban areas, were centrally located and well endowed. What they lacked was a cadre of inspiring and enlightened teachers. We could experiment with several models of public-private cooperation, including one in which some schools were leased out to private managements for operation. Already, some Kendriya Vidyalayas had leased out part of their land to private entrepreneurs for development and operation of tennis courts, swimming pools, etc. Such experiments became economically viable because the entrepreneurs were permitted to use the infrastructure for members of the general public at market rates. These could be tried out on a larger scale.

I also advocated the nurturing and development of a cadre of educational entrepreneurs, who could be provided training, land at subsidized rates, soft loans and certain incentives for the first ten years to fill in the gaps in the educational infrastructure.

The second major step I took was the formulation of the concept of Educational Development Index or EDI. I wrote a preliminary paper on the concept and then circulated it for comments. I also put my division on the job of collecting statistical data from the states, so as to work out the statewise EDI figures.

Towards winter, the usual meetings on the Annual Plan started between the chief ministers and Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission. As principal adviser, it was my responsibility to raise issues with the chief ministers so as to enhance the attention they paid to education. It had been customary for us to raise the issue of total investment by the centre and states in education, as a percentage of the GDP. A figure of 6 percent was generally suggested, but it had not made much of an impression on the chief ministers.

I decided upon a new strategy. Just before a meeting, I would have a comparative statement on the EDI figures circulated to the concerned CMs. When my turn came during the discussions, I would

only raise one point. The EDI for the state was the lowest or second lowest in the country. When it was put that way, the chief ministers felt awkward and did not know which way to look.

Gradually, the concept of EDI got acceptance. It was responsible for the larger investments that started taking place by the state governments across the country.

Around this time, Murlī Manohar Joshi, who was the HRD minister set up a committee in his ministry to examine the whole matter relating to universalization of elementary education. He kept the education ministers of some important states and also a representative of the Planning Commission on this Committee. When I attended the first meeting, I got the impression that Joshi was earnest about the subject but was groping in the dark about how to achieve the lofty but distant objective of universalization. Dasgupta was also not ambitious enough.

Back in my room in the Commission, I started a series of brainstorming sessions with my officers as also the experts in the ministry. It became clear that the subject of education had traditionally been a state subject and the states had not paid much attention to it. Even though education had been made a concurrent subject under the Constitution, this had not resulted in any heavy investments by the central government. There were only half-hearted initiatives like the school nutrition programme and the so-called Operation Blackboard.

Gradually I got clearer and clearer in my analysis, with the result that I could come up with a power point presentation in the next meeting of the committee. In the meeting, I made the following points:

*The first decision required to be taken was that the centre and the states would jointly assume responsibility for universalization of elementary education.

*The nation should devote six per cent of the GDP on education. The Centre and the states should decide how much of the total liability would be borne by each.

*There should be an amendment to the Constitution making universalization of elementary education a fundamental right.

*The estimate of Rs 1,75,000 crore for the financing of this programme seemed to be an overestimate.

*There should be a National Programme for Universalization of elementary education, with the clear objective of achieving universalization within a definite time frame. Instead of making haphazard allocations to states under just two schemes, the Centre should agree to undertake a district wise survey so as to identify the deficiencies and agree to fill them up.

I did not realize the fact at that time, but apparently my presentation had impressed the HRM no end. He felt that I had a clear vision and would deliver the goods.

Three days after the meeting, the private secretary to Joshi rang up.

‘Would you like to shift to the ministry, Sir?’ he asked me. I thought he was joking. Postings of secretaries to Government of India were not made like this.

‘HRM asked me to enquire. If you have no objection, he will speak to Cabsec.’

I told him I had no objection. I frankly didn’t expect anything to come out of it. Things were not supposed to happen that way.

Except that they did. Soon thereafter I was asked to move to HRD.

Apart from education, I was also the Principal Adviser for J&K State. There were many interesting

skirmishes with that state government, but I shall only allude to two.

A proposal for release of central assistance to J&K came up to me for decision. When I looked at the figures, I was amazed to see an entry of Rs 272 crores for implementation of the Fifth Central Pay Commission recommendations. The amazement was not at the size of the estimate, but the fact that the state government had asked for this figure twice over. In other words, they had not asked for Rs 272 crores but for Rs 544 crores.

Naturally, this could not be permitted. I called my joint adviser as also the finance man. Both were flabbergasted at the enormity of the blunder and profusely apologised. They averred that the duplicate entry escaped their notice due to rush of work. They quickly corrected the patent error and issued the revised letter, containing the correct figure.

Having done the right thing, I turned to other matters. I do not know what I expected as a reaction from the state government. The best strategy would have been to keep quiet. The last thing I expected was the duo of planning and finance secretaries of the state perched in my room requesting for reconsideration of my decision. We had a long discussion. The officers knew that they were on a weak wicket, but they were obviously working under the pressure of their political masters.

It was with surprise that I found myself summoned to the prime minister's residence. Farooq Abdullah was there, along with Rather, his finance minister and a bevy of secretaries to the state government.

Atalji was his usual cheerful self. He spoke to me in Hindi.

‘Kaw Saheb! Yeh Farooq Sahib kya farma rahen hain. Aap inki plan assistance kaat rahe hain.’ ‘Mr Kaw, what is Mr Farooq Abdullah saying? He is complaining that you have cut down the central assistance to the state.’

I explained the position. Atalji looked at Farooq Sahib.

‘Farooq sahib! Ek hi saal main aap dobar kyon wohi rakam maang rahe hain?’ (Mr, Farooq! Why are you asking for the same amount twice over in the same year?)

Farooq was not the one for going into details. He looked at Rather for help. Rather tried to bluster, but Vajpayee had caught the nub of the matter and he would not let Rather fudge the issue. After he had spent himself, Vajpayee turned to Farooq.

‘Aur koi baat thi, Farooq Sahib?’ (Anything else, Mr, Farooq?)

Farooq did not know how to handle the PM. He said that I was forcing the state government to do additional resource mobilisation of Rs 100 crores. The PM was aware of the Kashmir situation. Was it possible to do additional resource mobilisation in the state?

Vajpayee turned to me. ‘Kya chahte hain aap, Kawji?’ (What do you propose, Mr Kaw?)

I explained that J&K Government was charging just 36 paise per unit of electricity, while the marginal rate had reached Rs 2.50 even for Delhi. ‘All we are requesting the state government is to try to impose a marginal rate of Rs 1.00 per unit.’

Atalji's eyes twinkled. ‘The Planning Commission's proposal does not seem to be that unreasonable, Farooq Sahib.’

Farooq could see that he was not getting anywhere. He made a light comment that the PM was not in a mood for giving that day, and left with his entourage.

The second incident took place when the central government decided to send a high-powered

delegation of central ministers to Srinagar to see what kind of package could be offered to the state. Unfortunately for Farooq, our Deputy Chairman was not free and he decided to field me in his place.

The Conference was held in the Sher-i-Kashmir Convention Centre. I thought it was the right opportunity to rub a few home truths in. I pointed out the way the state government was frittering away the plan funds. There was a report by the CAG that the state PWD had charged several hundred crores for a road to Leh that was never built. Crores had been spent on deepening the Dal and Wular lakes, but there was more siltation than before. The satellite images showed that far from the state moving to the ideal figure of 60 percent of its geographical area under forest cover, the cover had actually come down.

I do not think that Farooq had faced such a blistering attack from any central functionary in his lifetime. He went around complaining to anyone who would listen that there was a Kashmiri Hindu officer who was mortally inimical to the interests of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. He also sent his buddy Ashok Jaitley who was a batch mate of mine, to mollify me by offering a helicopter ride to the Amarnath Yatra. I did not show any interest.

I am sure Farooq must have heaved a deep sigh of relief when I was shifted to HRD.

Shastri Bhavan

I like to spruce up the places I go to. One of the first things I did was to convert the committee room of the HRD Ministry into the Office of the secretary. It got artifacts from Handicrafts Emporium at Janpath and new furniture from Malik. It now boasted of an attached bathroom and a compact committee room.

HRD was a huge ministry. I had fifteen officers of the rank of joint secretary and above. I soon found out that most of them did not know what the man in the next room was doing. We started an Internal Coordinating Group, which met once a week. All new ideas were placed before the ICG.

I also appointed the brightest young officer I could lay my hands upon, one Amarjit Sinha, as my executive assistant, to pursue all my pet fads with the divisions concerned. He was outstanding.

We started a move for amendment of the Constitution to provide for free and compulsory elementary education to all children, between the ages of six and fourteen. When somebody objected that this was not an achievable target, we said that government would find the funds, as it always did for anything worthwhile. This amendment took a long time coming, but finally it did.

We challenged the received wisdom that universalization would cost Rs 1,75,000 crore. First, we said, the figure was a gross over-estimation. Second, even if it was right, it was affordable. Thirdly, if not affordable, we would somehow raise the money. All three predictions have been fulfilled.

I remember telling Dr Joshi in a meeting, ‘Why can’t we levy an education cess or fee or surcharge or something and raise the money?’ One day, much later, even this joke became a reality.

Moral of the story is: Be careful what you say in the corridors of power. Anything is possible!

I still remember the day I sat on my table with blank sheets of paper trying to finalize a good name for the scheme we were about to launch. After many attempts, I zeroed in on Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, which was accepted and is even today the name of the most ambitious literacy programme in world history.

In similar vein, one day, when we were discussing the plan proposals, I raised the issue of when we shall have universalization of secondary education. Someone tried to shut me up. ‘Sir! We cannot even visualize, let alone achieve, universalization up to class VIII. Is this the time to talk of Class XII?’

Unfazed, I replied, ‘I know that, boss! But can’t we at least start talking about it?’

I read in a recent newspaper report that this is now a serious topic of discussion.

I found the Navodaya Vidyalaya scheme fascinating. This fellow Rajiv was a genius. He is reported to have said, ‘Why can we not have a Doon School in every district of the country?’ I am glad that someone took him at his word and today there is a Doon School in every district. One thing I did quietly was to transfer spare cash from wherever I could, to fund the Navodaya Vidyalayas adequately.

But even I could not get a pension scheme sanctioned for the new recruits to Navodaya Vidyalayas. It was so heart-rending to find the new recruits discovering the anomaly and feeling the mortification of not being entitled to pension, despite their heroic services to the poor in the rural areas of the country.

When Professor Ambasht came to call on me, I asked him as to how open the National Open

School was. He did not understand the question. It was as open as could be. When I started asking whether there was a minimum age and a maximum age, whether some time should elapse between two examinations, whether a student could appear in any examination centre of his choice on any day and so on, we discovered a maze of rules and regulations.

I said, 'Professor, please remove all the rules. Anyone of any age should be allowed to appear in any examination of his choice any time and place he wanted.'

At first he was shocked at this suggestion, but later he did take some steps, including an innovative 'On-Demand Examination'.

I made it a point to attend every meeting of the University Grants Commission. My constant presence was a great morale booster to the entire university sector, as it enabled me to pay special attention to its problems.

We liberalized the regime of deemed universities and autonomous colleges. We set ourselves the target of 100 deemed universities and 500 autonomous colleges. The whole idea was to loosen the higher education system from centralized controls.

We set up 28 high-powered groups to devise innovative, job-oriented and self-financing courses in the university system, so as to create manpower that would be productive for the economy.

We allowed universities to set up multiple campuses and offshore campuses. We decided to provide special funds to some universities, to convert them into universities of excellence. We decided to provide much greater freedom in choice of courses, adoption of the semester and credit system, incentives for taking up courses relating to pure sciences, etc.

We gave special grants to twenty universities, to enable them to establish Departments of Consciousness and Yogic Science. We liberalized the rules to enable the Bihar School of Yoga to become a deemed university, and thus the first university in the world to offer bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees in yoga. I tried to persuade the Vice Chancellors to award degrees in Applied Philosophy, so that we could in due course have resident philosophers in all big companies and business establishments.

I tried to persuade Dr Hari Gautam to improve the functioning of the UGC and the university system by involving the IIMs in studying the present system and suggesting a revamp. Although most universities did move into the computer age and created their websites, the UGC itself proved highly conservative in adopting IT and other modern management practices.

I paid equal attention to the All India Council for Technical Education. When I joined the ministry, the Council enjoyed a rather unsavoury reputation. We were able to get first Dr Tandon, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Roorkee as the chairman and when he died of cancer, a very good replacement in Dr Natarajan who was till then director, IIT Madras.

Again I made it a point to attend all the meetings of the Council and I think we were jointly able to bolster the reputation of the Council to a large extent.

An important decision was to convert the regional engineering colleges into National Institutes of Technology, as a first step towards their conversion into IITs. The only new IIT we created was the one at Roorkee.

We decided to hold a common examination for all engineering courses and named it the All India Engineering Entrance Examination. At first, we were ambitious and thought we would have just one exam for all engineering institutions. The IITs, however, refused to play ball. So we thought we

would have two. But many states opted to remain out. Even today, the AIEEE has not been able to become a single combined test for all non-IIT courses as envisaged by us but at least there is some movement.

A similar exercise was undertaken with reference to a common admission test for management courses. The All India Management Association tried to initiate the process, again with moderate success. Today the CAT and MST between the two of them cover quite a large percentage of management institutes.

We tried to energize the functioning of the National Appraisal and Accreditation Council. The target we fixed was to cover all the universities within three years. Accreditation was made compulsory and the universities were warned that UGC grants would not be available to unaccredited institutions after the due date.

Similar efforts were made for the National Board of Accreditation in the AICTE.

The Ministry of HRD had just one PSU called the Educational Consultants India Limited. One Dr Yechury was the Managing Director. We tried to define a new role for this company, so that it could popularize Indian education abroad and make India the preferred destination for students worldwide. We devised an attractive website for the company and held some exhibitions abroad. But before much could be accomplished, a joint secretary in the ministry persuaded Joshi to eject Dr Yechury and give him the additional charge instead.

One of my major initiatives was the education in Human Values. I set up several coordinating forums and then established National Resource Centres in NCERT (for secondary education), NIEPA (for college education), IIT Delhi (for engineering education), IIM Lucknow (for management education), NCTE (for teacher education) and so on. Six regional resource centres were set up in various spiritual organizations like the Sathya Sai, Brahmakumaris, Ramakrishna Mission, Bahais, etc. I earmarked an amount of Rs 10 crores for the scheme of introducing EHV at different levels.

Although the scheme is still in force, it has not made the kind of impact I had hoped it would, because my successors had other priorities.

My old bete noir K.R. Narayanan was still the occupant of Rashtrapati Bhawan. The cases for appointment of vice chancellors of central universities went to the president for approval. In the case of Aligarh Muslim University, both Joshi and I were agreed that the current incumbent Mehmud-ud-Rehman had had a very peaceful stint and deserved a second tenure.

One other name that had been short listed by the search committee was that of Hamid Ansari. As he had just one year and four months of service left, I had dismissed him in one sentence that it would not be wise to appoint a lame duck vice chancellor just for a short period. I had also commented that he had merely diplomatic experience and had no pretensions to academic administration.

To my surprise, we got the file back with a strong note in Ansari's favour penned by the great man himself. He had taken the trouble to counter my points with a one page note signed by himself.

An interesting episode concerns the appointment and dismissal of Shri Manohar Lal Sondhi as chairman of the prestigious Indian Council of Social Science Research. When Joshi suggested his name, I was reluctant and showed my hesitation. Sondhi was a maverick and very impulsive. Joshi said that he was under pressure from political quarters and Sondhi had to be accommodated. Under those compelling circumstances, he was notified.

Within a few months he had made everyone's life impossible. He was fighting with all the

academics. I was also a member of the ICSSR governing body and attended a meeting to assess what exactly was wrong. Sondhi said that he would make a few prefatory remarks and launched on a long-winded tirade on some non-issues. Many members tried to interject their comments but he would not let them speak. I believe he intended continuing his speech right till lunch.

In order to prevent an absolute disaster, I tried to intervene but he would not let me speak either. I sent him a note, but he ignored it and went on speaking. It was obvious that he was demented and could no longer head a prestigious body like the ICSSR.

I reported what had transpired at the meeting to the minister. I advised him to suggest to Sondhi that he should resign and he agreed. But Sondhi would not play ball. Instead he and Mrs. Sondhi called on us at our residence. Sondhi tried to persuade me that he was still in command.

I could see that he had lost touch with reality. Joshi and I agreed that the only way was for the president to withdraw his pleasure to the continuation of his appointment as chairman ICSSR. This was done. Thus Sondhi had a somewhat unceremonious exit.

Also, the appointment of vice chancellors was always a somewhat tangled affair. For example, let us take Delhi University. We got a list of three names from the search committee. The front runner was, in my view, Deepak Nayyar, Professor of Economics in Jawaharlal Nehru University. I had superlative reports about him from common friends, but Joshiji had a negative feedback from his sources. When I praised Deepak, he responded by saying, 'But they say that he is a communist.'

'If you go by what they say, then no one from JNU would ever be eligible. Everyone in JNU is supposed to be leftist,' I argued.

Joshiji replied, 'Can you find out specifically what his links with the communists are?' I promised to make further inquiries.

I tried several people and finally got through to Piyush Gunwantrao Mankad, my batch mate. He was clear in his verdict: 'M.K., if by leftist you mean 'pro poor', then I would say he is a leftist. But then aren't we all?'

'Let me put it this way. Is he a card-holder? Can he be called 'pink'? Will he openly side with the SFI in the elections?'

'No, no, no, nothing of the sort', Piyush remonstrated, rather hotly, 'I can vouch for all that. He will not openly take sides in any conflict on behalf of the Reds.'

Such is the batch mate lobby that I was in my turn assuring Joshiji in the most solemn tones that Deepak's impartiality could be taken as guaranteed.

The minister mumbled a reluctant 'yes'. But all through my tenure, whenever Deepak appeared to side with the left lobby, I was in the dock. I had a delicate balancing act to perform so that the VC would not fulminate against political interference in the university affairs, while the minister should have no grievance against the VC.

As against this, the candidature of Syed Shahid Mehdi went through like a shot. I did not know him from Adam. He and Begum Sahiba called on me in my office. He came across as a cultured, secular, civilized officer of considerable charm. To be frank, I was more impressed by Begum Sahiba. She was the epitome of Lucknawi culture.

I wrote a hugely positive note, favouring his candidature. Both the minister and the president approved it without any hitch.

Ashok Vajpeyi's case was quite different in taste and flavour. When we decided to set up the

Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University at Wardha, it was quite obvious to me that Ashok was the obvious choice. He had been Secretary(Culture), Madhya Pradesh Government for a long time. He was a good poet and a better critic. He had held several international conferences on Poetry.

The problem was that he was a controversial character and was the hero of many a gossip tale. I proposed his name. Joshiji was not in a mood to approve his name.

He suggested that he be asked to give an undertaking that he will develop the university headquarters and spend most of his time at Wardha. Ashok blithely gave the undertakings. But he had no intention of honouring his undertakings, and he did not.

MHRD had unexpected surprises. An interesting item on my plate was the management of the Lawrence Schools at Sanawar and Lovedale. Sanawar was often bracketed with Doon School. We were required to appoint a new headmaster. The Board of Management zeroed in on Andrew Gray, a Headmaster from the UK. who had taught earlier at Sanawar. His wife would also come and be available for teaching duties. His two sons would also come along.

The Board was impressed with the CV and the personality of Gray. He was appointed and so was his wife.

A complaint came that the new headmaster was allowing a loosening of the morals, by permitting the boys and girls to mix freely. Andrew was requested to rethink the policy, as India was not England.

One day, S.S.Barnala (currently Governor, Tamil Nadu) rang me up to plead for his grandson who had been expelled from Sanawar. The matter came officially to me as an appeal against the orders of the headmaster. The boy was a bully and a gang-leader. We did not interfere in the headmaster's exercise of discretion, Later, I believe, Andrew allowed the boy to rejoin the school but on certain conditions.

After my retirement, some elements in the management committee, led by the Maharaj from Radha Soami Satsangh of Beas ensured Andrew's exit. I was a sad man that day.

Meanwhile our son Anurag had also reached the marriageable age. One day I sat down and tried out my limited knowledge of astrology to determine the most auspicious period for fixing the marriage. Having determined a certain period of seven days, I notified the parents of five shortlisted matches, requesting for a meeting between the boy and the girl.

Urvashi was the third girl he saw and having seen her he refused to meet anyone else. So Urvashi it was and after a betrothal in October 2000, we performed the marriage at Jammu in February 2001. Everything went off well except for a curfew on the day following the marriage. We had to arrange for curfew passes and a police escort to reach the venue of the feast!

It was during my stint as secretary HRD that I was approached by one Vinod Sharma, a producer of television serials, with a very different kind of offer. He had been asked to submit proposals for a serial for Kashir channel of Doordarshan. The content had to be secular. It had to have a message that violence was not a solution to the Kashmir problem, but it was not to be overtly propagandist. He had heard that many of my Hindi and English poems related to Kashmir. If I could cull these out and have them translated into Hindustani, they could become a serial.

We held several sittings together and I was finally able to give him several poems of the kind he wanted. After the idea was blessed by the authorities, we requested Shri Moti Lal Bhat Shafaq Bharati to transcreate the poems in Urdu. Vinod Sharma had other experts who wrote a storyline around which the poems could be woven. He hired actors to enliven the action, brought in a bit of

romance and set many of the lyrics to music. Most of this action was filmed in and near Manali in Himachal Pradesh.

Vinod asked me to read the poems in original and part of the script had me reading my own poems. These were filmed in our official residence at C-II/103, Moti Bagh where we were living at that time.

The result was a thirteen-episode serial called Kehna Aasaan Hai which was broadcast several times on Kashir channel. I could not believe that a whole serial could be written around the poems of a single author, till I saw the result.

In November 2001, I retired from service. I was given the customary sendoffs and that marked the end of my 42-year career in the government.

Pearls of wisdom

It is customary to end a book of reminiscences with an epilogue or afterword or whatever. I have called it 'the pearls of wisdom' out of the humility to which we IAS officers are habituated. I have probably harangued scores of your colleagues at lectures or during post-dinner bouts of anecdotage. Here you have the advantage that you can switch me off at will.

First, let me assure you that I have not found any tangible proof for the oft made adverse comments on the state to which the IAS has been reduced. In fact, I find the present lot more qualified, more professional, better informed, more egalitarian and less cynical.

Second, the percentage of officers who are corrupt is not a static or universal number applicable to all times and all climes. It is an eye estimate and so I may be way off the mark. If we do not define honesty in a very strict way, probably not more than ten per cent of all officers are corrupt. There might be proportionately more corrupt officers in UP cadre than in Rajasthan, but this impression might be owing to the comparative physical assets of Mayavati and Vijay Raje Scindia.

Third, the politicians always have their way. You cannot prevent them; you may at best slow them down. Your practical options are either to join them or to find a safe berth for yourself where you can hibernate for a while in peace.

Fourth, don't let your defeats bring down your morale. Remember, even Manmohan Singh is not his own master; he often does what he is told to do.

Fifth, if you survive and do not allow your brain to get unhinged, you will have your sweet revenge. No one remains in power for ever. If you play your cards right, you can pretend to be a victim of the earlier regime and make out a credible case for rehabilitation. Nature also provides opportunities for celebration, provided you nurture the belief that divine forces are protecting you. Sooner or later, your villain will get his comeuppance. He might be voted out of power or meet with a premature demise. You can always convince yourself that it is your protecting angels at work.

Sixth, be on the lookout, especially if you have some distinctive trait. You may belong to the fair sex, which is often treated unfairly. Or you may belong to a minority community. Or be a member of the SCs, STs or OBCs. Or you may belong to the State currently in power, be it Kashmir or Kerala. Watch the progress of people you helped out when they were at lower rungs of the political ladder. Remain in touch, at least at Holi and Diwali. Some day, you may be able to garner the fruit.

Seventh, have one inviolate principle: do not have any principles. Be pragmatic. See what is likely to work in the current situation and do it. Do not let anyone fool you that there are eternal unalterable rules of dharma that always apply. Even Bhishma could not find any.

Eighth, trust in God. No one knows for sure whether He exists or not. Nietzsche pronounced Him dead. Marx called religion an opiate of the masses. Whether you believe in Him or not hardly matters. Be devoted and make a big show of your devotion. There are many fools out there who genuinely think that devotees of the Lord can do no wrong.

Ninth, have a spiritual guru. It would be best to choose the one who is courted by the people currently in power. Believe me, a Guru can get you what the Prime Minister or the Cabinet Secretary cannot.

Tenth and last, if you get no other spiritual guru, I am available.

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