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Memoirs of an Indian Diplomat

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B S Das

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Tata McGraw-Hill

Published by the Tata McGraw Hill Education Private Limited,
7 West Patel Nagar, New Delhi 110 008.

ISBN (13): 978-0-07-068088-3
ISBN (10): 0-07-068088-4

Vice President and Managing Director—Asia-Pacific Region: *Ajay Shukla*
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Typeset at Tej Composers, WZ-391, Madipur, New Delhi 110063, and printed at Gopsons, A-2&3, Sector 64, Noida, UP-201 301.

Cover Visual: Nirmala Das

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To
My Parents

Preface

My book shows my search for an answer to existence—its real meaning. From a village school, with no systematic grooming in a regular urban school, I grew in a world of self-related fancy, exploring various ways of understanding the meaning of life. The only real discovery was ambition to achieve something beyond the constraints of my environment. It was not easy. Materially too inadequate, and spiritually too immature to fathom the depth of my 'mission'—I often lost my way. This would lead me to disillusionment, depression, and even suicidal at times. There were no answers, as I was experimenting.

The path was hazy right through. Having achieved success in some of the most unexpected ways, my ego would supercede the delicacy and sincerity of my thoughts. And whenever the dream crashed, I had to always find a new way. The constantly lurking fear of going back to a past from which I had always wanted to get away, ignited my enthusiasm to stand up and achieve. All through, I struggled to realise the iconic image of a dream world. And yet, strangely in this continuous process, there was always a surprise. It raised my spirits and rebuilt my hopes.

Religion evaded me as an anchor. I could not ever believe in ritualism. Religion as ritualism did not interest me. Nor could I believe in God as a physical manifestation. However, I did believe that there was a law or power of nature which governed the universe and instilled power to the self to face life with a mentor to guide.

Yet, there had to be physical manifestation to provide a support system. I was lucky to have had a few supportive persons in my life as that physical manifestation. The material, emotional and spiritual efforts in my search left me as a wanderer. Perhaps, the nearest I came to an answer was through the love and care I received from my parents. Constrained as they were, there was nothing left with them to give except total compassion. When they left this world, they left only this sentimental gift, because they had no other possessions. That greatness made all of us achieve what we did. My idea of role model revolved around them. I therefore dedicate this book to them.

I was initially reluctant to author this book. But, friends urged me to pursue this exercise, as my experiences were unique and rich. I am grateful to Ashley Tellis of the Carnegie Endowment, whom I had met on a casual visit to Singapore and who motivated me all along to continue writing the book. When I voiced my apprehensions about it being too subjective, he said "Who is not? A book reflects the person and his life experience, translated into understanding and action. Others must use your experience to know and learn".

But the most persistent of my motivators was my friend and colleague A.N. Ram who felt I would be unfair to the future generations if I did not share my insights and experiences of some interesting events in India's history. He referred particularly to my stints in Bhutan and Sikkim. Bhutan graduated as a member of the United Nations, and its phenomenal economic and political transformation needed to be brought out. And Sikkim's merger with India, a correction of India's historical blunder of 1947, needed to be highlighted too. I am grateful to Amar for encouraging me so persuasively.

Bhutan and Sikkim moulded my philosophy into a Buddhist one. Though ritualistic in content, Buddhism as practiced in these

areas had a history which gives them a unique and rich cultural identity and heritage. Since 1986, I have been practicing Buddhist philosophy, based on the teachings of Lotus Sutra without affiliating to any religion.

My career and involvement with affairs of India's post-independence history gives me a sense of satisfaction of having been a part of a historic process. China linked Bhutan and Sikkim to itself, as fingers to its palm. Yet, my mission in these places changed that perception. It became a historical correction with these two "fingers" of China finding their new path, a way of changed destiny, and all without any conflict. I was a part of that transformation.

With Khruschev's advent, the total change in Stalin's perception of India as a British colony, and the shifting of communist ideology from Marx to the "Nation State", changed the world. The almost certain nuclear conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States in 1962 was averted. The ideological content of the Soviet-China relations, changed too. Closer home, Indo-Soviet ties improved after the Sino-Indian war, and India emerged as a country of consequence. The 1965 and 1971 wars with Pakistan involved me distantly in the political consequences that followed.

Perhaps, this was the way in which an idea drove the search for an icon. In all these years of involvement in India's foreign policy since 1946, I learnt a lot about human nature, which played a key role in shaping the events. If there was one aspect that could define this long journey of self-realization, it was the feeling of pride as an Indian. I saw the Soviet Union shifting from Leninism to Nationalism, with an urge to protect the greatness of Russia. The communism of Mao too transformed pragmatic China into a Han nation first. For me, being an Indian mattered more than any political or religious identity. India could not be conceived without forging a pan-national identity. To search for answers within or outside the country was a mission that inspired a large number of Indians. As for me, having been a witness to the Gandhi and Nehru era, and having participated in the freedom movement of 1942, I could never visualize my country in terms of religion or caste. Perhaps that was my way of searching for an iconic way of understanding India's identity.

This book begins with my childhood experiences. I felt it necessary to give a sequence to my pursuit in my own peculiar way. I could not be restricted or channelised into a groove. I was a dreamer lost in a world of improbability. I had to find a way, like flowing water crossing boulders in its path. I regret that though I crossed many a boulder, I was unable to reach the sea to unburden the "self", and to merge into the infinite. I still remain a wanderer in the sea of dreams. Perhaps that was the only way I could survive and be what I am—but at least I did everything my way.

B S Das

Acknowledgments

This is the most difficult part, as any acknowledgment is inadequate.

But for my chance meeting with Dr. Ashley Tellis of Carnegie Endowment, and our sojourn at the Indian High Commissioner's residence in Singapore, I would have discontinued writing this book. I am deeply obliged to him for collating my thoughts on the events as I remembered them without reference to any records. We have not met since then.

The key motivator was former Ambassador A.N. Ram, who worked with me in the early days of his service when I was posted in Bhutan. An extremely modest person, Ram persisted and forced me to complete the book. He was the first person to whom I gave my draft. Both he and his charming wife, Shanti, daughter of Shri V.V. Giri, gave me a "certificate of approval". Only then could I proceed further.

Nalini, wife of Vice-Admiral P.S. Das, my nephew, has been a source of great strength. She undertook the task of going over the manuscript, editing it and giving it the final shape. Without her

help and suggestions, it would not have been possible for me to complete the book. I am sincerely grateful to her.

Sangeeta Gupta, my Executive Assistant, was constantly reminding me of the deadlines I had fixed. Whenever she found me casual in pursuing this goal, she would remind me of the commitments I had made. She was aware of my earlier writings and felt I owed this book of my wanderings to posterity. Finally, I did it, and she collected all the handwritten notes and typed them. I truly value her assistance.

Finally, the source of my strength has been my wife, Nirmala, who has been a witness to all these wanderings, having shared with me all the ups and downs I faced. As a partner, she was always there to hold my hand, especially through the difficult days when I had nobody to turn to. Most of all, she was an active participant in the changes that occurred in my life and adjusted herself accordingly.

Eminent persons like P.N. Haksar, T.N. Kaul, Kewal Singh, Nirmal Mukarjee, Sushital Banerjee, and some others—all were my mentors. They trusted my capability to shoulder various responsibilities. I would never have achieved what I did without their confidence in me. My sincere thanks to them.

I am grateful to my daughter-in-law Mrs. Madhur Das, Executive Director, WWF, for introducing me to the publishers Tata McGraw-Hill Education, who have been meticulous in enhancing the book. Madhur has, as usual, given a lot of attractive ideas for the book and is a constant source of inspiration.

B S Das

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PART I

WANDERINGS

ONE

Early Days

I JOINED THE UNIVERSITY OF ALLAHABAD in 1942. It was the year of the Quit India movement. As youngsters, we were all enthused by the patriotic spirit, and I jumped into the fray. Shortly after joining the movement, we were swept away with the events. Gandhiji's arrest precipitated matters, and I joined the students' union. We participated in anti-British processions. One day some of us were leading a huge procession of students, with the girls in front. As we reached the District Collector's office, we were asked to disperse by the police. When we refused the police attacked us with batons. Yet, we surged forward. Then, when the police cocked their guns at us, we threw some girls to the side and covered the others to protect them. The firing started and one of our student leaders fell and died, while many others were injured. The rest of us were chased away as we hastily started gathering our injured colleagues.

The University was shut down, and we left for our homes. As I reached my home in Kurwar, a small village town in Sultanpur District of Uttar Pradesh (UP), I was told that the telegraph wires had been cut and the authorities suspected all those who had come back from colleges. I was the only one in Kurwar, but I had no hand in it. It was my father's reputation that helped in proving my innocence, or else I would have been in prison.

After some months, the University reopened, and we gradually settled down to our studies. But, some friends continued their political activities. Two of them emerged as political leaders in the future—H.N. Bahuguna and N.D. Tewari. Both grew up as decent politicians with a record of integrity and sacrifice.

I went on to graduate in 1944 without any major achievements. But, I was beginning to challenge life in various ways, which paved my way to acquire a confidence level that helped me greatly in later years.

In 1946, I was completing my Masters degree course in Political Science. The All-India services like the ICS and Indian Police had stopped recruitment since 1942. Since the Central Government was the only major employer then, only State services were left to opt for. Though only 20, I was desperate to start a career because of my financial constraints. My father, having exhausted all his savings in educating 10 siblings, had hardly any resources left to provide for his remaining two children.

I was very ambitious. I wanted to go abroad for studies but there was just no way. In 1944, I wished to join the Air Force and was selected, but my parents would not permit me, what with the Second World War raging right at India's doorstep. The State Civil Service, to which my father and three brothers belonged, was no great attraction. Burmah-Shell and Imperial Tobacco were two very large British companies which recruited trainees for their executive cadre, but only a handful were selected after careful vetting of family connections and educational soundness. I was keen to join them.

Luckily my father, with his British titles and long innings with the British government, knew the Chief Commissioner of Delhi, Mr. Harper. He wrote to Mr. Harper and he promptly introduced me to the Shell people. I was interviewed even before I had finished my Masters and was told to wait for the result. All was forgotten thereafter till, suddenly, I got a letter from Burmah-Shell appointing me as a covenanted trainee at Bombay. I was asked to join immediately on a stipend of Rs. 700 per month. It was a princely sum in those days, and a great boost to my ego.

Finishing my Masters, I rushed to Bombay and joined the company. Totally dominated by the whites at the executive level, we were just four Indians. Two of us were trainees. The other two were formidable Indians called Charanjiva, a ranked tennis star of India, and N.K. Sen, a sprightly young officer.

My experience of Burmah-Shell was quite tragic. Not used to the sophistication of an upper-crust British class, I felt totally out of place. The first question my General Manager asked was about where I was staying. When he learnt it was at Dadar, and that too with a cousin, pat came the reply, "No Shell officer stays in Dadar. Find a suitable hotel for yourself matching the dignity of your position". I shifted to a hotel on Marine Drive, paying almost my entire stipend as room rent!

Charanjiva, my Indian boss, took me on a tour to Ahmedabad by train. As I changed into *kurta-pyjama* for the night, he glared at me and said, "Nobody wears this dress in Shell. Don't you have a proper night suit"? The guiding sentiment was, "You were lucky it was *me* traveling with you. If it had been a British officer, you would have got a minus rating". I was crestfallen and wondered if I had chosen the right profession.

When I was in Surat alone, as part of my training inspection tour, the Shell agent whose installation I was inspecting, came to see me off at the railway station. He brought a large box of expensive sweets and chocolates, which I returned with thanks, saying that I did not accept such hospitality. Even before I reached the office the next day, this episode had reached the ears of my seniors. I was put on the mat for such behavior. I had to show courtesy to my franchise holders! Accepting sweets was not bribery!

I felt very lonely and lost. Neither my education nor my culture fitted into such snobbish attitudes. But the worst was yet to come. A few days later, I was invited by the General Manager for drinks! (I did not drink then). The "dress code", I was informed, was "black tie". I did not understand this term, so I checked with a friend and was shocked at learning, it was a black formal dress with bow tie, and needed special tailoring. A mere two days were left for the party, and I realized the only tailors were "Laffans" in the Taj Hotel! I had to

pay Rs. 700 for their efforts, which was my salary for the entire month! Naturally, I did not have the money, so I borrowed it from a friend.

I attended the G.M's "party", only to discover that no one else had been invited. I was there merely "for a chat". When the G.M. learnt that "I didn't drink", he glared at me so fiercely that I almost fell out of my chair. I was subjected to a lecture as to what a young Shell officer was supposed to do. Besides staying at a decent place, we had to have a car, a proper valet and a good wardrobe, and yes, a membership of the Yatch Club of Bombay. I rued the fact that I had spent a month's salary just to dress up for this lecture! By now I was convinced of my total unsuitability for Burmah-Shell.

Nevertheless, having no other option, I had to stay. I asked my father for funds to manage my frugal existence in Bombay, hoping for a better future. But, he had no money, and stated clearly his inability to finance me. I then decided to part company with Shell. One fine morning, I learnt that the All-India Services were likely to be revived. I took one month's salary and quit Burmah- Shell, sending a message home of my date of return.

When I reached home after seven month's of service, I was surprised by the cold reception I received. Father assumed that I was sacked, and could not accept it. So, he wrote to the G.M. immediately, enquiring about the reasons for premature termination of my training. It took over a month to receive an answer, which clarified that I had done nothing wrong. In fact, the G.M. felt it was unfortunate that I had not found Burmah-Shell a comfortable workplace. He did add a word of praise for me at the end, though.

My father promptly wrote to all family members, enclosing a copy of Shell's letter. I was rehabilitated in his eyes. But, the next question was, "what next"? It was mid-1947 and India was on the verge of gaining independence. Meanwhile, the interim Indian government had announced the setting up of India's new Central Services. I rejoined my University for taking another Masters degree, this time in International Affairs, a new course. This started my search for a government career, the career I dreamed of.

TWO

A New Life

INDIA BECAME INDEPENDENT ON 15 AUGUST 1947, and all of my University friends danced on the streets of Allahabad in a night-long celebration. Nehru's words, "tryst with destiny" and "a new India" enthralled us. I felt liberated at having left Burmah-Shell, which I saw as a legacy of white supremacy.

Since leaving that company, I had begun preparing for the competitive exams of the All-India and Central Services. The exams came around. At that time there was nothing to refer to in terms of earlier papers or a well-defined curriculum. But I struggled hard, and since I had earlier topped in my Masters in Political Science, that was the subject I banked upon. The results were announced. I had been unable to make it to the IAS or IFS, as a first class was essential to qualify. But, I scored sufficiently to be selected for the Indian Police Service. I was very dejected. Meanwhile, I had already been selected for the Army, and my results of the Provincial Civil Service were awaited. I was on the point of joining the Army when Dr. Amarnath Jha, former Vice Chancellor of our University, asked me to wait.

Dr. Jha had an affection for me, and thus took me to Mrs. Vijaylakshmi Pandit, the then Chief Minister of UP and Nehru's sister. He recommended my name for special recruitment to the

Indian Foreign Service, as a topper of Allahabad University. Mrs. Pandit forwarded my name to Delhi, but I was informed that the minimum age required was 24, and since I was only 22, I could not be considered. Thus ended my diplomatic career even before it began, or so I thought.

Meanwhile, the State Civil Services results were declared, and I obtained the second position, so my father insisted that I join the PCS. In fact, I was totally surprised when he handed me an envelope containing two hundred rupees as a reward! He had never ever done this for anyone before. My mother explained that though he was a man of few words, he wanted to congratulate me for retaining the family legacy of service in the PCS. My grandfather had been one of the first Deputy Collectors in UP in the 19th century, soon after 1865. He was joined by my father in the same service around the year 1900. My three elder brothers followed the same family line. Even one brother-in-law was a PCS officer. My selection to this service was thus a family honor which my father greatly appreciated. I could not have expected greater appreciation from him. But I wanted much more.

So, rejecting the PCS, I joined the IPS on 14 September 1948, in the first batch of free India. Our training school was at Mt. Abu and we were a group of 40. Our commandant was P.L. Mehta, an officer from Punjab. The Deputy Commandant was a British officer, De Schazel, who was quite unlike the arrogant whites in Burmah-Shell. He and his wife were an embodiment of gentleness, having adjusted to the Indian environment; and we hit off very well. Nearly 20 years later, he traced me in London, where I learned from him that he was now a priest, and his wife, a nurse.

At the training school, some of us who had missed qualifying in the IAS and IFS by a few marks, applied to reappear in the 1949 competitive exams as a second chance. We received our roll numbers and studied hard. Two days before our departure to Delhi for the exams, we were summoned by the Commandant. He said, "Boys, I have some good news for you. The government has decided *not* to permit you to appear for the exams, having spent so much on your training. Since you already belong to an All-India Service, you

cannot appear for another of these unless you resign! In any case, the Foreign Service is a Central Service. Surely you cannot appear for a lower service!". This was an illogical argument, but hard to defeat. Yet, these were revised rules made at the instance of the Commandant himself! His ungenerous pleasure made me determined to leave the IPS whenever the opportunity came. I never stopped dreaming of becoming a diplomat, though it still appeared an impossible dream.

While under training, my family put much pressure on me to consider matrimony. Interestingly, my father, two brothers and a brother-in-law had identified different "suitable" girls for me! So, when I was denied permission to appear for the exams, I decided to take some leave and visit Delhi. My father arranged a meeting with the girl *he* had in mind. Before he could take me for the meeting, my sister hijacked me to Meerut, the same day. She had "set up" a meeting with another candidate, the choice of my mother and one of my brothers! This young lady was Nirmala. We met, and the engagement was performed the next day, much to my mother's delight.

In August 1949, I learnt that my mother had suffered a brain stroke. I rushed to Sitapur where she was lying in a coma. My final exams on completion of training in IPS were due and I could only stay for two days. The doctors were not sure of her pulling through, and all I could do was pray. Somehow, I wrenched myself away from an emotionally broken father, and rushed back for the exams. The papers got over without any missive from the family. Then I received my sister's letter disclosing the news of my mother's demise. She had come out of her coma only fleetingly, and they had chosen to keep the news from me until my exams got over. I was devastated. I locked myself in my room, and just got drunk. When I did not respond to my friends' knocks on my door, they broke in and found me practically unconscious. The next few days were unbearable. I had to get back to my father.

The Mt. Abu course ended on 14 September 1949 and I rushed back before joining at Moradabad for my State training. Life had greatly changed for me now. After my mother's total emotional

support was lost, I tried to find solace in my fiancée. But those days were different, and we could merely exchange letters. It was only the next year that I got married, on the 15th of January, and finally settled down with a posting at Dehradun. I took over as the Assistant Superintendent of Police. My career with the police had begun.

THREE

A Wrong Choice of Career

I HAVE DEVOTED THIS CHAPTER TO my police career of 10 years, before the advent of some very interesting and unexpected events in my life.

Still dreaming of one day finding an alternative to the police service, I settled down to an uneasy acceptance of realities. Life was not so bad. There was great dignity and respect, and the traditions of the British system of governance persisted. As a junior officer with barely a few months of service, I enjoyed the status bestowed by the public, and the recognition accorded by other service colleagues. Gian Prakash of the IAS was the Joint Magistrate, and we were the only two officers in the district at that level, at the start of our career. He became a good friend, and remained so over the years, even from his perch as the Auditor General of India. B.B. Lal, an ICS officer, was the District Collector. He too treated me more kindly than as a colleague. He would often give me a lift to my own office, as I did not possess a car at that time. It was he, in fact, who in 1974, succeeded me as the Chief Executive of Sikkim, something quite unimaginable when we were younger, as he was so very senior to me!

I had hardly completed eight months of service when I received a call from the Inspector General's Office at Lucknow, informing me of my promotion as Superintendent of Police, and of my posting to

Jaunpur. Not only could *I* not believe the news, but neither could my colleagues! In fact, my boss, Leela Singh Bisht, muttered, "There must be some mistake! Nobody gets promoted to a senior scale before completing six years of service". But promoted I was. The orders arrived, and I was asked to meet B.N. Lahiri, the first Indian Inspector General of Police.

I was a lean and thin individual, with a height well below five-and-a-half feet! Yet, when I appeared before Mr. Lahiri, I was indeed taken aback. He was even shorter than me! But, in keeping with his rank, he shouted, "Who selected you for the IPS?" I gave no reply, naturally, although I did wish to retort, "Those who selected *you*". Despite my inflated ego, fortunately propriety and better sense prevailed, and I held my peace. Years later, well after I had left the service, Lahiri confessed to me that he had been shocked to see such a boyish looking lad, and had wondered if he had not made a mistake in promoting me. But, his consequent assertion, "I was so right in my decision then", put paid to my discomfort.

Jaunpur, being a sleepy little town, had a typical village environment. My wife hated the place. There was just a small club of civil servants which she hardly found attractive, coming as she did from an academic environment, and a larger city, Meerut. Our first child, Ranu, was born there. I was so naive at that stage that I never realized how difficult childbirth was. In those times, not many women had a hospital delivery. So, a lady doctor visited our house and delivered the child on a jute-woven cot. Numerous such deliveries had been conducted in my father's household over the years, hence I saw no problem in that. To top my "misdemeanor", I promptly rushed to a dinner engagement the evening I was becoming a father! My wife never forgave me for my absence that night, and neither did she ever let me forget it in later years! How inconsiderate I must have been!

I was also immature in the ways of the police. Amar Singh, a notorious dacoit, had been on the prowl in our region for several years, and no one had succeeded in capturing him. I assigned this task to Sub-inspector Zubair Ahmed. One fine day, Zubair turned up to give me the "good news" of the dacoit's capture without a fight. So, where was Amar Singh? I enquired. Zubair replied, "Sir,

both Amar Singh and I are Rajputs. Since I found him unarmed while easing himself in a field, I hesitated to arrest him. Instead, I asked him to run so that I could capture him. He refused, and reminded me that two Rajputs never fought an unequal battle. He suggested that we face each other when he too had his revolver. I agreed to this style of arrest, but warned him that I would have him in my lock-up within the month."

I was so idealistic that I accepted Zubair's version as a real expression of honor and dignity. Instead of suspending him, I reported the matter to my DIG, B.B.S.Verma. He blew up. I had never before been shouted at in this manner, even as a child. In the usual course, he should have reported this case to his seniors for action against me. But he did not. Instead, he himself gave me a month's time to produce the dacoit in the lock-up. "If you do not," he warned, "both you and Zubair shall be in serious trouble". Zubair was known for his integrity and bravery. I conveyed the DIG's message to him. Fortunately for us, he fulfilled his promise and captured Amar Singh in an encounter in three weeks time!

I was now even more determined to find an alternative career for myself. I just did not understand the police system. It was too steeped in discipline and rigidity for a person of my nature. I began dreaming again of the Foreign Service.

Years went by. In between, I had important assignments over a span of the next seven years. All were beyond anyone's expectations. My reputation soared and I was appointed as Assistant Inspector General, attached to the office of the I.G., and wielding enormous power and prestige. Yet, I wished to leave the police force! Rapid promotion from an A.S.P. to an S.P. within eight months, to an S.S.P. in the next five years, and to an AIGP in the next three, was no mean feat, especially in the large and prestigious state of U.P. It would have been any other young officer's dream. Despite all this, the police was not my cup of tea. Why?

Perhaps part of the answer lay in my genes. I did not know then that my own grandfather, who started his career under the British in the mid-19th century, actually joined the police. Even though he went on to being described (and that too, in writing), as one of the

best detectives of India, he decided to quit the police force at the peak of his career! He later joined the Civil Service and rose to become a Divisional Magistrate, and even earned the award of the Imperial Service Order.

All this I learnt only recently, when in 2001 these records came into my hands. I do not know why *he* wanted to leave the police. But I *did* know why *I* wanted to quit, back in 1960. I just could not stomach the culture. If the Sessions Judge had to invite me for a friendly drink in order to obtain my real views on an accused, despite having all the evidence at hand, or if I had to witness police brutality against a student friend, and his being shot to death, then I could not accept my identity as a police officer. It was too claustrophobic for me.

Hence, I applied for selection to the Indian Frontier Administrative Service, a newly formed organization to cover sensitive assignments in Frontier States. My application was rejected because they could not spare me.

It was 1960. All the State governments in India were directed by the Central government to nominate IPS officers for foreign assignments. The requirement was at least 12 years of an immaculate record. There would be an interview by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and selections made for their missions abroad as First Secretaries, to handle all security matters. These would be MEA posts and not related to any of the intelligence services.

I fell short by two years to qualify for the nomination. When I went to the I.G. Shanti Prasad, he clearly ruled out my name. Firstly, he could not spare me and lose an IPS officer of good calibre, and secondly I did not qualify. I was heartbroken. Again, I was missing an opportunity to serve abroad. But I persisted and requested the I.G. to recommend my name along with the others and leave it to the Central Government to reject my application. When the matter came before the Home Minister of the State, Charan Singh, he rejected my name outright.

I sought an interview with the Minister and pleaded with him, citing my poor luck back in 1949, when I was refused permission to appear for the IFS competitive exams. After two meetings, the

Minister finally relented, but with a warning that if I was needed back in the State, I would return without any hesitation. I accepted. I never returned. When in 1979, Charan Singh became India's Prime Minister, he remembered me and called me. That is a story by itself, meriting narration in another chapter.

I go back to 1960. I was called for an interview by the Ministry of External Affairs. There were 14 of us from all over India, all the others naturally senior to me. I stood no chance, and it looked impossible. The interview committee was headed by Mr. Badruddin Tyabji, Secretary, MEA. After an hour, the names of the selected four were called out. I had topped the list and was informed of my posting to Washington, following six months of training in External Affairs as OSD (Security). It was unbelievable. I rushed back to my sister's place where I was staying, and broke the news. All were thrilled and celebrations started. As for my wife, who had greatly encouraged me, and was at Lucknow, she was taken aback too!

The elation at this "Washington posting" news was, however, short-lived. After an hour I received a call informing me that my posting had been changed to Moscow. Though all of us were disappointed, in retrospect it was the best decision they could make for me. Had it not been for this very tough assignment, I could not have graduated into diplomatic service. And ironically, T.T.P. Abdullah, who was posted to Washington instead of me, did not last beyond a year.

This is how my innings with the Central Government commenced, a new and important phase in my life indeed. I never returned to the police, or to my state. My dream had finally come true. I became a diplomat on deputation!

FOUR

A Decade Spent

THE TRANSFORMATION FROM A POLICEMAN TO a diplomat was not an easy task. Yet here, I was ready to "take on" the Foreign Service!

When I joined the Ministry of External Affairs, the sneer on the faces of my new colleagues was unmistakable. Ah, a spook has come to keep a watch on us, they thought! But, since I was now a part of the MEA, I had to be accepted, however, reluctantly. A sense of fear existed about me, as for the others who joined up like me. Distance was maintained, which made me very angry. At least in the IPS, I was recognized as a matter of right and given due respect and dignity. Nevertheless, I could not take defeat in the face of this challenge and harbored a personal conviction that I was as good as "they" were.

In 1961, I was deputed to fly out to Hanoi to investigate a serious breach of security in our mission. A war was then raging in Vietnam, and there had been a leakage of some sensitive documents in the mission, due to poor relations between our IB and MEA staff. The IB was furious at my deputation, since they had no control over me, now an MEA person. I was naturally under great pressure. Should there be loyalty to the police or to the MEA? I had to be absolutely fair, as the matter was serious, and at a serious time. I was very well received by our Consul General, Krishnamurty, who

allowed me free access to all papers and personnel of both the IB and MEA. It was a tragic case where bad vibes between the staff and their spouses led to the disappearance of secret documents. Luckily, these papers were not passed on to outside agents, but burnt within the Consulate premises. The guilt was established conclusively, as involving an IB staff member. I recommended immediate transfer of the person and action to be taken against him. As was to be expected, this did not go down well with the IB, as they perceived it as a breach of loyalty to my former service. But, they were helpless about having my report rejected. In spite of my IPS background, I had judged the case on its merit, without any bias. That was my first step in proving my credentials as a competent "security" officer, and I became partially "acceptable".

Occasionally, there were moments when I felt isolated. I had left my roots, opting to be in an alien field. And though I was now generally accepted by this service, I could never be one of them. Even today, after decades, this distance remains. I often wonder whether my decision to quit the IPS was the right one. Perhaps it was, as it exposed me to the wide world, where I could fly in freedom. But, my wings were often clipped while trying to soar higher in this new arena of professional diplomats. However, it did accord me a lot of space, and much learning.

As this book continues, I describe the many bridges that I crossed, and the unusual and unexpected events that unfolded, carrying me in their wake. It was like a story, a novel, which I have therefore given shape to as this book. My experiences were those which few had encountered. The journey of this "wanderer" thus continued inevitably on the search for an identity. It was not an easy task. But read on…

FIVE

Stepping into A New Domain

In September of 1961, I was posted to the Indian Embassy in Moscow as a First Secretary. It was a long journey to the USSR in those days. We travelled by sea in a P&O liner from Bombay to London and then by the Baltic Lines to Leningrad. Passing through the Suez Canal and the Gilbraltar Straits via London, Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Helsinki, and finally to Leningrad, taking nearly a month! What a treat that was, and everything on the house! To top it all, a "red passport" diplomat that I was, and accompanied by a young wife, two children and a man-servant in tow, I enjoyed a right royal treatment from the ship's captain during the cruise!

Reaching Leningrad, which still carried the scars of World War II, our first exposure to the mighty Soviet Union was not a pleasant one. Except for a formal letter from our Embassy to the Travel Agent to help us board a train to Moscow, there were no welcome signs. The biting cold did not help matters either. Things were not easy on this first overseas travel. What was worse, the Russian language seemed so daunting and incomprehensible. I felt extremely homesick. But, there was no going back.

I reported to our Embassy located in Ulitsa Obokha, a historical place with a small hut called Napoleon Dacha. Legend has it that the place got its name from the fact that the great man spent a night

at this place in 1812! No one received me at the Embassy. The seniors were too busy de-briefing after a recent visit by Prime Minister Nehru, as also adjusting to a new boss, Ambassador Subimal Dutt, who had just taken over. I observed that having been the Foreign Secretary and very close to Nehru, he was feared by all.

So, who was I, in this scheme of things, but a novice, a new entrant, and a mere underling? I searched for a seat. There was none until a junior staff took pity on me and vacated his chair. Later, he even shared his piece of bread with me at lunch. I felt heartbroken. Was this the life for which I had given up power and comfort? I wished to return. But neither was I prepared to bear the humiliation of defeat. I became determined to stand up and face the new challenges of which I had dreamt of so much.

The second day was pleasant in contrast. The Counsellor, S. Than, next in line to the Ambassador, was a kind-hearted and polite South Indian, and totally unassuming. He welcomed me and gave me a place to sit, along with two other junior diplomats. The call on the Ambassador was as cold as the Moscow winter. A man of few words, Dutt's stern look made me feel like a total outsider. The message was a reluctant acceptance of my entry into the sanctified portals of an Indian territory abroad, of which I would not be made a regular part, if he could help it!

Things changed gradually. Between Than and N.P. Jain, a colleague and head of the chancery, I gradually settled down. There was hardly any work, and no flat to live in. The children had to be sent to school. My wife, braving the bitter cold dark mornings, would drop them there by bus. Winters in Moscow meant only four to six hours of daylight, and with nothing to do, and no house to run, she was miserable. Then, as luck would have it, we were allotted a flat in a block which housed two other colleagues. Nothing was available in Moscow. The furniture had to arrive from Finland, and a diplomat's regular household requirements from either Copenhagen or Helsinki. Even for the basic necessities, one had to queue up at the stores. But, we adjusted to all this quite fast.

I was "under watch", not by my colleagues, but by the Russian staff, including the housemaid! All diplomats were observed carefully,

but in my case, it was special. The Embassy staff knew of my security duties. Through them, the concerned agencies knew of all our movements. It was made very obvious to me through two particular incidents.

I invited a few foreign guests for a cocktail party, which included some Russian officials. Half an hour before the scheduled time, a Russian officer, an invitee from the Soviet Foreign Office, walked in. He subjected me to searching questions on my previous postings, nature of work and the like. Not used to diplomatic nuances, I fumbled repeatedly till my other invitees arrived, and I realized that no other Russian invitee was attending my party. This "early bird" was the only one from the host country. He stayed on and calibrated the credentials of all my guests in his own way. Much later, I learnt that he was the sounding board for Russians to assess me.

On another occasion, I was getting ready to leave for work, when I saw a note book placed near the telephone. It was in Russian. As I began glancing through the pages, my maid servant came rushing and snatched it away. I found that very rude. At first she became very offensive, then later, on finding us deeply embarrassed, broke into tears and walked out. She never returned, and was promptly replaced by another maid. In those days diplomats were not permitted to employ servants, except through a Service Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Security called Burobin. The staff supplied was required to report on the diplomat. My maid's note book had contained her daily report on us!

So, rigorous was the system that immediately on a diplomat's departure to work in his car, the police booth covering the flats would phone up. As soon as one reached the place of work, the policeman posted outside the Embassy would pick up his phone and confirm the arrival to someone. We eventually got used to this and would often laugh about it.

As I settled down, I found my colleagues in the Foreign Service mellowing down. I began to be accepted socially as part of the crowd. I was allotted the duties of looking after all consular functions. Gradually, the Indian agencies dealing with Soviet projects in India—such as Bhilai Steel, the Heavy Engineering

Corporation, and others—were placed under me. My colleagues Hejmadi, the Commercial Counsellor, Teja and Jain, the other First Secretaries, Purushottam, a Second Secretary, all became friends. Added to these were the Service Attaches. For the first time, I began feeling at home in the new environment. Even the Russians got indications that I was not posted in Moscow as a spy and therefore I became slightly more acceptable!

Ambassador Dutt kept his distance from everyone. A widower and lonely, pining for his only son studying back home in India, he made us all feel distant. His parties were taken care of by the wives of the Service Attaches, who never failed to let us know how close they were to the Ambassador. We took that myth in our stride.

An incident took place that shook me. While the Ambassador was away, the CDA Mr. Than found one senior officer misusing his position and putting in false TA claims. Than asked me to verify the allegations and I found them to be true. We reported the matter to our Ministry in Delhi with all the facts. Ambassador Dutt, who was in Delhi at that time, was shown our report. He was furious and thought I was being used to spy on his officers. He summoned me on his return, and gave me the dressing down of my life. Than defended me, assuring Dutt that whatever I had done was within the purview of my duties. Since I was from a different "breed", I was told that I would be summarily sent back to India and that investigating the conduct of others was not a part of my duties. I had assumed that is what security in an Embassy implied. So, I came away broken. No one had ever treated me so harshly. Doubts again came to mind about my decision to leave the IPS.

Nothing happened thereafter, but a very sad event changed the entire perspective of the Ambassador. His son, who had come on holiday, took ill and passed away. Dutt was shattered and broken. It was in these moments of terrible tragedy that he found a true friend in me. He would make me sit on his bed to console him. He would hold my hand and cry. Sharing with someone, perhaps for the first time, his private feelings, he narrated his tragic life to me, even producing the letters he exchanged with Prime Minister Nehru. He had pleaded with Nehru to send him back to India to be with his

only son, but Nehru had persuaded him to stay on in Moscow for at least another year, on account of growing tensions on the Chinese front. He even shared with me some of the most personal exchanges, he had with Nehru.

I was at a loss to understand his behavior. From being on the verge of banishing me to India on one side, to such emotional closeness and dependence on the other, and all this when I was still struggling to graduate into a professional diplomat? Perhaps, he realized the truth, which was that I had no axe to grind or vested interests to serve; that I was a decent human being, not given to exhibiting the superficiality which others displayed. We spent hours together. Nehru finally recalled Dutt to Delhi. On his farewell calls to other countries of accreditation, I accompanied him to Budapest. There, once again, he would sit with me on the riverbank for hours, seeking a spiritual answer to his tragedy. I had no such depth in me, except to truly feel his intense pain. While on the return flight to Moscow, my boss, the epitome of strict discipline and stern expression, apologized to me for his earlier shabby behavior. His words were, "Now, I realize how unfair I was to you. Yet you stood by me as no one else could. I am returning to India. Please come and see me every time you are in Delhi. And if I can do anything for you, never hesitate to ask me." I could only respond with a meek "thank you".

I always met Dutt on my visits home. When he was the Secretary to our President, he received me as a family member. Perhaps in a way, this episode made me a part of the fraternity that was the Indian diplomatic corps. I would say that I graduated into the reality of human life. Now, it did not matter what breed we came from!

SIX

Graduating in Diplomacy

T.N. Kaul succeeded Dutt as our Ambassador in Moscow. Their personalities were poles apart, the new head of mission being a dashing, vibrant person. A scion of the ICS, he was groomed to be a leader of a team, and soon changed the stiffness in the staff into smiling faces. Though married, he lived apart from his wife. He had a colorful personality. He enjoyed being seen as such.

Mr. Kaul took to me quite early in our dealings. I was never made to feel different from the "regulars". In fact, he assigned me a section of the Chancery work to which others had no access, namely the NGO chapter. Even in consular work, he gave me additional responsibilities such as handling Indian students wishing to take Russians as their spouses. And with Rikhi Jaipal replacing Than, the environment changed completely.

I was assigned three young IFS officers—Beni Agrawal, Moni Chaddha and Purushottam—who were a delightful bunch. I began shedding inhibitions of an ex-police officer, which made me more acceptable to the Embassy crowd. Hejmadi, the Commercial Counsellor, N.P. Jain, the Head of Chancery, Jaskaran Teja, the First Secretary (Information) apart from Rikhi and the new Military Adviser, Brig.O.P. Malhotra—all became my good friends. Being a part of the Embassy naturally became a pleasure now. Of course, Air

Commodore Bill Lodhi, the Air Adviser, remained in a different class, what with his impregnable reserve.

The only squash court in the Soviet Union existed in our Embassy. Members from other Embassies would come and play with us and we, lacking other facilities of service, took it upon ourselves to maintain this court as a very prized asset. As an added benefit to me, this outdoor activity brought me in touch with numerous foreign diplomats, and I learnt a lot from them.

Some hilarious moments of that time come to mind. One squash player was a First Secretary from the Finnish Embassy. Naturally, he invited us for "sauna and dinner", little suspecting that I did not know what a sauna was! As we reached our host's place, we were handed towels. I did not understand its significance till it was too late, and I had already entered the hot closed wooden room in my three piece suit! To my alarm, I observed that the other invitees were completely one with nature, relaxing comfortably on the wooden benches merely in their towels! I blushed profusely and sweated like a galloping horse. Mercifully, the diplomatic training of the viewers came to the fore, and they refrained from calling me a fool! I fled to the room outside, and was never invited to such a party again.

But, not being able to bear the shame of my ignorance, I was determined to become well-versed in the health club scene. Many years later, on finally returning to India, I joined the Taj health club. Even now, the health club of my colony remains a regular part of my active life. On looking back, I am grateful to my mishap in Moscow! Ignorance can sometimes be educative.

When Purushottam, Chaddha and Agrawal were posted out on completing their training, three new probationers were attached to me—Prem Budhwar, S.N. Puri and J.S. Dhoddamani. By this time, I was a fairly senior First Secretary, and was thus assigned the task of training these IFS officers in consular work and general standards of diplomatic behavior. Even their entertainment obligations were vetted by me before their bills could be cleared.

Rikhi Jaipal, who was now a Minister in the Embassy, and his wife Sheila, became great friends. Rikhi involved me in many areas of

diplomatic work. When the Sino-Indian war broke out in 1962, and the Cuban crisis was building up, Rikhi would often share his thoughts with me. After the debacle of 1962, India's Defence Minister sought Soviet help in the purchase of defence equipment. The very first item which came up for consideration was the MIG 21, a versatile fighter aircraft which ultimately became the backbone of the Indian Air Force. This arrangement was followed by one on the AN12 and MI4 helicopters. American and Israeli diplomats, keen observers of such deals, would often be over-friendly. When the senior IAF officers came to carry out trials, one sensed hostility and a negative attitude in some. These persons felt that Russian equipment was inferior and should not be accepted. However, on account of our negative experience of the Americans and the British, the deal was finalized, and it ultimately saw India through very difficult times. We emerged over the years as a strong military power with more than 70% of our defence equipment originating from Russia at comparatively lower costs. I learnt my first lesson in diplomacy at a substantive level.

By now, one could see trends of gradual change in Soviet dealings with India. Though China was described as a brother and India as a friend, it was the beginning of a politico-economic relationship which lasted till the break-up of the Soviet Union. Indian Embassy officials were less under scrutiny. We could visit certain Russian homes, and they could visit our residences too, though selectively. It was not that we escaped Soviet scrutiny. But its intensity had reduced. As diplomats, we observed and analyzed very carefully, the political changes under Nikita Khrushchev's leadership. Ambassador Kaul would conduct regular monthly meetings where all of us exchanged views freely. This helped us grasp the subtle changes in the political scenario of that country. With a spurt in economic relations, visits of delegations from India increased. Many persons came for training in technical areas, such as steel plants, heavy machinery and engineering across the nation, and their officers were positioned in the Embassy. From a single stream of diplomacy, the Indian Embassy now began to acquire a multi-dimensional role. Through all of this, my own involvement increased substantially, I being given charge of some of these

programs. Occasionally, the Ambassador would ask me to visit the defence centres or the technical trainees attached to industrial plants. So, my exposure to varied subjects, and my understanding of them increased manifold.

These tours took me to distant Soviet regions like Trans-Siberia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Georgia and others. I interacted with a variety of sections of people. When I "took over" the Indo-Soviet cultural and scientific exchange programs, I came in touch with various institutions such as the Soviet Academy of Sciences, the Patrice Lumumba, and the Moscow University. With our increased reach in commercial activities, my sojourns led me to Poland, Hungary, Rumania and Czechoslovakia which opened my eyes to a new world altogether.

Being in-charge of the prestigious NGO section, I was privy to all the sensitive files which provided a deep insight into the development of Indo-Soviet relations from 1947 onwards. Stalin's deliberate snub to India's first Ambassador, Vijaya Laxmi Pandit, by refusing to meet her; the first meeting with Stalin of her successor, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan; rejection of Sardar K.M. Pannickar's appointment as Ambassador; Soviet invasion of Hungary; and Tito's standing up to the Soviets—are only a few of the episodes giving an insight into the recent past. This was a changing era in our relationship, India's and that of the USSR. The monthly reports of Ambassador K.P.S. Menon to Nehru were pieces of literature, with deep understanding of the minds of Soviet leaders. In the historical perspective, no one contributed more towards the growing relationship between India and the Soviet Union than Menon. His coverage of the events, and his insightful analyses were masterpieces. Unfortunately for me, he left Moscow just a couple of months before I joined, so I was deprived of his tutelage. But, he continued to visit Moscow, and I could at least meet him then.

Life in Moscow became exciting in many ways. With the easing of restrictions on diplomats, I began traveling to some distant places. I was dealing with HEC, the Heavy Engineering Corporation, a Soviet project set up in Bihar. The machinery was supplied by a Russian counterpart, a Soviet firm located at URSK in the Urals.

I visited the place accompanied by a Soviet representative and the HEC representative, Venkataraman. Apart from inspecting the machine building plant, we were taken to an adjacent museum which housed old German equipment captured by the Russians. The Soviet engineers worked upon these machines and re-fabricated them for use in the Soviet Union as part of their heavy industry programs. This was an effort at self-reliance, as the West had stopped all economic aid to the Soviet Union.

The next day we drove to the airport for the return flight to Moscow, happy in the thought that the weather was ideal, with bright sunshine all around. Strangely, our flight was cancelled on account of "low visibility and poor weather conditions". So, we were subjected to a train journey all night, in order to reach another airport. But, this was not the end of the matter. We woke up the next morning to be greeted with awful weather and heavy rain, and I remarked that no flight could take off under these conditions. At this Venkat said, "Sir, the flight will take off". He offered the following explanation. "When we were driving to the airport in bright sunshine yesterday, a cat had crossed the way from left to right. Today, when I was just getting into the car, a black cat crossed the path from right to left. The plane will take off". And it did!

Another time, and another experience! In the Soviet Union then, many centres used small ferrying aircraft to connect with each other. Such planes were staid and functional, and with no frills as they catered to both humans and animals alike, and often on the same flight! While we were once traveling in such an aircraft, our plane was rolling and pitching from side to side, and so were we! Most of us were petrified. In fact, I even observed a Russian naval officer on his knees, praying! And this was a communist society where even uttering the word "God" was banned. But, my friend Venkat was totally unaffected. When I shouted to him, asking if we would be alive in such weather conditions, he smiled and said, "Sir, just relax. Nothing will happen", and we returned to Moscow without mishap. What inner power did Venkat have to foresee things, I never understood, but his unbelievable confidence saved me on many occasions.

One day, the radio announced that the first woman astronaut had gone into space. Everyone was excited. Valentina Tereshkova became an instant hero not only in her country but all over the world. Some of us in the Embassy were privileged to attend her official welcome function at the airport. What a sight it was, this stupendous reception right through the streets of Moscow! The Indian Embassy invited her for a welcome lunch, which was accepted, not only by her, but by Khrushchev himself too! This was indeed a huge event for us as, normally, Tereshkova did not attend diplomatic functions, much less with the big man himself present as the chief guest. The improved Indo-Soviet ties were now abundantly visible. Of course, we became the cause of envy amongst the foreign embassies. The Chinese, in particular, were understandably unhappy, and the Americans greatly suspicious of our growing closeness. That was Kaul's crowning glory.

T.N. Kaul was always "up to" something. I recollect two very interesting incidents. One related to a lady called Atiya Habibullah, a Pakistani with a British nationality, whose roots went back to the famous Habibullahs of India. An extremely attractive personality and a femme fatale to boot, she and her family were known to Kaul quite well. Now, she arrived in Moscow, as a guest of the Pakistan Ambassador before returning to London.

After a few days, she moved to our Ambassador's residence, and Kaul decided to personally drive her to Leningrad. I was discreetly roped in, perhaps in lieu of the driver! Even the Indian flag on the car was removed. All the way through, Kaul drove with Atiya at his side, and me bringing up the rear! He was naturally in elated spirits and therefore driving very fast, when out popped a policeman from nowhere. The cop could not identify the dignitary for he was in front, but he could recognize the diplomatic number plate, He mistook our Head of Mission to be the chauffeur, and me, regally ensconsed in the back seat, as the Ambassador! My boss received a mouthful from the policeman so, when I suggested him to permit me to explain the correct position, he told me to shut up. My instructions were to only keep the cop engaged and assure him of a sound punishment to my "driver" later! Atiya lost her cool and begged me to save the situation. I apologized to the policeman and

promised that my driver would not commit such mistakes in future. With a smart salute (to me), he addressed me, "Your Excellency, we love our foreign guests but we do not welcome their rashness which causes accidents and death. Never do this again". Driving on a little further, we had a good laugh, and Kaul, now the Ambassador again, said to me, "You should be grateful, as I made you India's Ambassador this way!"

On our return, Kaul asked me to get Atiya's visa extended. Since she was not an Indian, I could indicate this requirement to my friends in the foreign office only informally. They came back to me with this long remark: "We do not understand Ambassador Kaul's recommendations. Madame Habibullah is a British national, came here as a guest of the Pakistan Embassy, and now, the Indian Embassy is asking for an extension to her visa! She is truly an international person! If this could lead to better diplomatic relations amongst all three of you, we shall be very happy to extend the visa". Her visa was extended.

On another occasion, Kaul once sent for me and declared, "Das, all the world says that Gromyko (the then Soviet Foreign Minister) never smiles. He is dour and gruff. Now, I am going to make him not only smile but laugh. Would you take a bet?" I accepted, saying, "Nobody, least of all we Indians, has the wit to make Gromyko unwind himself". We decided on a case of wine as our bet. Gromyko was duly invited for a formal, diplomatic lunch by Ambassador Kaul, and we did our best to make him relax. But, the smile was far from coming.

I was enjoying myself, certain of winning the bet. But, Kaul should not have been underestimated. When two hours went by, Gromyko asked to take leave, in view of another pressing commitment. Kaul casually replied, "Your Excellency, just a few more minutes, please. It is rare to get such august company over lunch". Gromyko magnanimously obliged, and spent another few minutes. Finally, he rose from his chair, and it seemed Kaul had surely lost the bet, when he just burst out, "But your Excellency, how can you leave without giving us a broad smile! After all, my First Secretary feels you never smile, and I want to prove him wrong!" At

that Gromyko burst out laughing. Kaul had won. In a childlike manner he expressed his joy and said to me, "Never take a bet with me. Now you know how I can make things change. But I will take just one bottle of wine from you". I gave him the bottle of wine. Generous as he was, he returned the gesture with a bottle of Champagne for a celebration. Such was the man, and such was our friendship.

SEVEN

Friendship with the Soviets

As I GRADUATED INTO A DIPLOMAT, the posting to Moscow was an education in itself, to understand and analyze the events which ultimately affected the world order. The 20th Communist Party Congress changed the Stalin era to a more liberal political environment. The elimination of "inconvenient" party functionaries came to a stop. While the ideological constraints remained, the midnight knocks of the KGB started disappearing. The collective role of the Communist Party began to be highlighted, with a fresh Marxist application to Stalinist ideology.

Of major interest was the change in the Soviet approach to India in the economic and political fields. K.P.S. Menon Sr., India's Ambassador in the crucial years of transition, contributed significantly in the Soviet leadership's response to India. The gradual change in the close-knit Sino-Soviet relationship, coupled with China's suspicions of the new Soviet moves, brought out India's significance. Added to that, the regime of the Party's First Secretary, Nikita Khruschev, had already started a process of "de-Stalinisation". As the Soviet Union's relations with China deteriorated, it led to the withdrawal of Russian experts from that country. The Chinese were now worried, and to rub it in, India was now termed as "a friend". China realized the dangers of the Russians building up a counter power like India, and hence made the Sino-Indian border dispute an

excuse to react militarily against India in 1962. This war shattered India, and its leader, Nehru. The absence of an adequate response from the western powers to India's defence and political needs, and the Kashmir issue becoming a bargaining point, caused India to turn to the Soviet Union. Its defeat in the 1962 war strengthened this relationship with Moscow, now providing the required economic and political support.

Handling these issues in 1962 from Moscow, I could perceive the "opening of a window" to India. K.P.S. Menon Senior, who had now left Moscow, played a behind-the-scenes role in encouraging this trend. Krishna Menon, an anti-US votary, was India's Defence Minister and a confidante of Nehru during the war. Though he was forced to resign as a consequence of India's defeat, he had rightly visualized a Soviet role in aiding India with defence and technical support. The MIG deal, with the USSR becoming the major supplier to the Indian Air Force, was a result of Krishna Menon's rigid stand against opposition from some Indian quarters. The UK, which had been India's prime supplier of defence equipment, began playing its own game, by keeping India under pressure.

I had seen the same kind of pressure applied by the British during the 1965 Indo-Pak war, when it discontinued all defence supplies. Being posted in our High Commission in London at that time, I witnessed how our fervent requests to their government to restore the supplies under established agreements were ignored. Much later, Harold Wilson, their Prime Minister, admitted that he was misguided on who started the war.

I go back to Moscow in my narrative. I was part of the negotiations with the USSR government on supply of defence aircraft like MIG 19s and 21s, AN12 and MI4 helicopters, with technology transfer to India. There were a few unpleasant reactions on the Indian side, where some IAF officers walked out of the negotiations, citing poor quality of the Soviet aircraft. However, Delhi pressed on and concluded an agreement with the Soviet Union. The long-term benefits which accrued to India were obvious. Apart from an assured supply and reduced costs, it also meant that there would be no drain on our foreign exchange, since payments were made a part of a rupee-rouble funding arrangement.

What went into these negotiations was a revelation in itself. This was not an economic deal, but a political one, which continued in favor of India till the break-up of the Soviet Union. These altered relations between the two countries led to the Indo-Soviet Peace Treaty of 1971 which in turn helped India to overcome American pressures in the 1971 war with Pakistan, and the perceived Chinese threat.

I also observed new trends in our economic relations. The Soviets agreed to set up the Bhilai Steel plant and Heavy Engineering Corporation, covering steel and machinery. Both the USA and Germany, which had been approached for setting up these plants, demanded very high commercial terms. America was opposed to financing any public sector venture. Though the Durgapur steel venture did come up later with British support, Bhilai, with Soviet help, was the cheapest, and it laid the foundation of the steel infrastructure in India. A spurt of economic and defence activity developed between India and the USSR, with Ambassador Kaul and his deputy Jaipal playing a key role. The latter, having become a good friend of mine, would often comment, "It is interesting to become a part of history. My Moscow posting has been very exciting and fruitful".

Changes in Soviet thinking were reflected in State-controlled newspapers like PRAVDA (meaning "truth"), and IZVESTIA, (meaning "news"). Every diplomat scoured through these papers diligently, to discover the new trends. A popular joke amongst our community was that what was "news" was not the "truth"! Yet they were the only source of information on the changing scenario in the Soviet Union. The political changes in the hierarchy of the Communist Party were also reflected in gigantic bill boards which displayed photos and names of important functionaries. We were constantly on the lookout for such information, which we would later analyze.

Our Embassy began to feel the effect of the changes in the Soviet approach to our country. We, and to a lesser extent, the Egyptians, began to be patronized in various ways. Some middle level Party functionaries started socializing with us. Selectively, some of them

would also accept our invitation. We could visit them occasionally for a drink or dinner. We were also now invited to Soviet functions.

Here I wish to recount some amusing episodes. Dr. Sushila Nayyar, India's Health Minister then, visited Moscow. I was deputed to attend to her programs and escort her to various functions. The Minister asked for a meeting with Khrushchev, which was normally not possible. The Soviet Protocol advised me to explain this to the Minister, but she would not understand. She shouted and fumed at me. Since she was a "Gandhian", she had brought some of the Mahatma's books as gifts for Khrushchev. These were now rudely handed over to me for delivery. Finally, after great persuasion on my part, the Soviet Protocol got her invited to a function where Khrushchev would be present, though for other reasons. That mellowed her somewhat. Later, the Minister attended the famous ballet, "Swan Lake", at the Bolshoi Theatre. She was advised to be punctual, as no entry was permitted once the performance started. But she defied this "restriction on an Indian Minister", and arrived late, only to be subjected to a wait till the interval! On return, she expressed her extreme annoyance at thus being "insulted", when in fact she had been a guest of the Soviet Government! Mercifully, she left shortly thereafter.

I was subjected to similar whims of some of our visiting dignitaries from time to time, but this was part of the "package", which I accepted gracefully. At least it gave me a deep insight into the nuances of human nature!

Special attention now being lavished on the Indian Embassy was noticed by the other diplomats. The Americans, especially their second-in-command, Richard Funkhauser, became over-friendly with us. So, did the Australians, who never ceased to be Europeans in spite of their geography. They would constantly needle us for information, analyzing Indo-Soviet closeness thereafter. We took in our stride their uncalled-for discussions on debatable issues like Kashmir or Indo-Pak relations, and it was fun observing how their aggressiveness reflected on their personality. The Japanese were, as expected, smooth but very incisive. We made good friends with the Indonesians and the Egyptians.

I traveled occasionally across the Soviet Union, especially with work related to the Soviet Academy of Sciences, the Indian trainees from the Air Force, and the Bhilai Steel plant. When I visited the Air force base Frunze, I was received by the local Commandant and taken for lunch at the Air Force mess. On the commandant's table sat his driver and two Indian trainees, both officers, and now, me! I squirmed, till a Squadron Leader trainee whispered in Hindi that this was their culture. All Indian trainees, a mixed officer/non-officer group themselves, had to follow these rules, and appeared quite well-adjusted. Would that have been the scene back home?

The most momentous experience for me was the Cuban episode. The day dawned when Soviet ships were planned to move towards Cuba, where they planned to install nuclear warheads. The Americans warned them that their vessels would be intercepted and turned back if they carried these lethal warheads. A nuclear war could break out, causing the annihilation of Moscow and other cities, including those on American soil. President Kennedy and Khruschev were in touch behind the scenes. The issue was that America could not allow these missiles to be located at Cuba, as their proximity posed a serious threat to the USA. For the Soviet Union, this had far reaching implications, in terms of emerging power equations.

That evening, some of us decided to get together to raise our last toast. Moscow being most vulnerable, none of us would survive. As the clock ticked on and neared the boarding time of the Soviet ships, each second was most torturous. Some of us were even without our families, and the looming disaster seemed more ominous. All radios were silent, and Moscow's streets were deserted. Only death stalked our minds. When we drank the "last toast", with a minute left for the deadline, some persons even broke down. But, the minute passed and nothing happened. We saw a ray of hope. Nearly 10 minutes later there was an announcement on the radio that the Soviet ships were turning back home! A secret agreement had been arranged, to relocate their missiles in Europe and to withdraw from Cuba.

It had been the worst moment of our lives, that of facing a nuclear threat. My own feelings cannot be expressed in words. My posting to Moscow was, thus, a momentous one.

EIGHT

Opening A Window

THE POST-STALIN ERA UNDER KHRUSCHEV saw many changes in the internal and external structure of the Soviet Union. During the three years from 1961 to 1964, while posted in Moscow, I saw the beginnings of the opening up of Soviet society. While the basic ideology of the Communist system remained, the enforcement process of an imposed social and economic structure eased! This was confirmed by our increased interaction with specific locals. Culturally too, the strictures on art and literature were reduced. Eminent artists such as Tomsky and Glasunov began changing their styles in public exhibitions. Some of us were permitted to receive Soviet artistes and academics in our homes. When my wife and I invited a ballet group from Latvia for an evening party at our flat, they just danced away the night, literally on a high note. We visited the homes of some academics like Dr. Erzin, Rector of the Patrice Lumumba University, and Chelashev. All these activities were unthinkable in the Stalin days. Of course, this liberty was extended to only a few friendly countries like India and Egypt.

One instance of this more liberalized policy led to problems between Kaul, the Ambassador, and me. I was among a few diplomats to be invited by the Foreign Office to a visit to the nuclear reactor located outside Moscow. There were only a dozen of us,

including colleagues from India, Egypt, Indonesia, East Germany, Hungary, Romania, Poland and a few others. It was the first ever invitation by the Soviets to foreign diplomats. On my return, I was warned by Rikhi Jaipal as to what awaited me the next day. As expected, I was put on the mat and berated for taking such a liberty without the boss's permission. Kaul threatened to repatriate me. It was only after my profuse apologies and Rikhi's pleadings in my favor, that he forgave me. Later, I learnt that Kaul was furious that such a sensitive visit was offered to a comparatively junior officer like me. Things settled down, but it was obvious how the Soviets were selectively opening up even at such levels. From a "friendly country" India was transforming into a "very friendly country", with us being given special treatment wherever we went.

The more revealing aspects of the ideology-based system were visible when I travelled in the eastern States of the USSR. With fear of the "midnight knock" of the Stalin era having reduced, one saw the locals asserting their cultural and linguistic identity without hesitation. For instance, the Rector of the Tashkent University refused to talk to me in Russian, a language that both of us knew. He conversed with me in Uzbek, through an interpreter, saying that Russian was not his language. Similarly, at other places in Georgia, Kazakistan or Kirgizh, people would avoid the use of Russian. In Tashkent, I saw Islamic prayers being openly offered in mosques. A new assertiveness through language and culture was palpable. The Russian language and a Godless society had earlier been in dominance, but these restrictions and hurdles were gradually easing now.

Even in Poland or East Germany, the locals were very reluctant to speak in Russian. In Poland, I was ticked off by a roadside villager who said, "You are an Indian. Don't you have your own language? Why do you speak Russian?" Yet, one did not decipher any signs of a loosening of the Communist system that could indicate that the State structure was cracking. In retrospect, however, one could analyze that the break-up of the Soviet Union had deeper causes—the imposition of language, culture and ideology on its people. This could not integrate them, so the system eventually crumbled.

Another very obvious and very interesting feature was the "wall" between the western and eastern Pakistanis. Students from both west and east Pakistan were enrolled in various Soviet institutions. Since I held the education and culture portfolio in our Embassy, my interaction with South Asian students was ongoing and easy. I observed the East Pakistanis keeping to themselves, conversing in Bengali, and hesitant to project a Pakistani image. Mixing easily with the Indians, they would often go out of their way to be friendly with us, which the West Pakistanis studiously avoided. The ethnic and cultural divide between the two was very obvious. I could sense these divisions even politically, as a few East Pakistani students would openly call themselves residents of Bengal rather than of Pakistan. What was worse was the superior attitude of West Pakistanis over their compatriots from the East.

So, I reported on this to the Ambassador, the perceptible "divide" within the Soviets, and the one within the Pakistanis. About the latter community, I went so far as to suggest that this factor could lead to trouble in Pakistan later. In 1978, when I was on a visit to Moscow, Mr. I.K. Gujral, the then Indian Ambassador, mentioned to me how accurate my assessment had been, with Pakistan now having lost its eastern territory to a new nation, Bangladesh.

Nobody could have predicted the break-up of the Soviet Union, but even that occurred. In both cases, there was a glaring absence of a unifying and binding factor. A political or religious ideology is not a means to unity. Even today we are witnessing this in various parts of the world, especially in the Islamic countries. The shape of the currently-defined boundaries, based on some artificial imposition, is bound to change in the coming years. It is inevitable as an evolving process of developing events. The roots have to be deeper, especially with a new materialistic world order where unity and togetherness are tenuous, and based on economic considerations. Globalization is a misnomer in this context.

The gradual opening up of Soviet society was creating its own complexities. The element of dissent was becoming visible. Khruschev's efforts to raise the USSR to the level of a competing

super power vis-à-vis the USA were failing, primarily because of its poor economic growth in fields like agriculture, increasing financial burden in technology and defence, and lack of sustainable power equations in the global arena.

China was contemptuous of Khruschev's liberalization efforts. Though Mao was not a Stalinist in approach, he had very strong views against the new Soviet thinking, and considered Khruschev an upstart with no ideological base or commitment. It was obvious that this dislike was mutual. The Soviet Union was heavily committed to China in the matter of technical and financial support. When this support started weakening, and the Soviet's "reach" to the non-Communist world like India and Egypt started increasing, the Sino-Soviet relations became shaky.

Some odd remarks in various Republics of the USSR were revealing. In Georgia, I was talking to some locals who were generally critical of Khruschev. One said, "At least we got bread in Stalin's time. Look at today. We do not have enough food to eat". At other places, people talked in hushed tones of the weakening of the Communist system. These disgruntlements, though, would not be adequate enough reasons for a crack-up. There had to be more and deeper causes.

Khruschev came from a background which reflected his boorish personality. His overwhelming domination in the Polit bureau created inner conflicts and dissensions. When the Soviet economy came under stress and economic reforms remained half-hearted; communist ideology did not provide a sustaining system to bank upon. With agricultural production and industrial growth not meeting the consumers' expectations, the common man started getting critical. Within the Communist Party itself changes in the Polit bureau reflected an uneasiness. Khruschev's efforts to dominate the group resulted in inner conflicts. The break-up with China had some ideological fallout too. Mao, by then, had almost emerged as the new Lenin of the communist world. Khruschev, who despised Mao, was no ideological match.

These were some of the factors that affected commitment-based governance. However, no signs of a major crack-up were visible till

1964 when I left Moscow on transfer. Khruschev's downfall soon after, was a big surprise to the world. It did affect India. The emerging close relationship between the Soviet Union and India came under some stress, especially with Khruschev having been the architect of the new era. The unquestioned support on Kashmir became less vibrant. Yet, the relationship did not weaken, either on the economic or defence fronts. There were loose ends which got tied up and adjusted. The intervention of USSR's Prime Minister Kosygin in Indo-Pak post war negotiations in 1965 was an example, where he mediated between Shastri and Ayub Khan.

The trend, post-1965, was to play a conciliatory role in Indo-Pak issues, where they, the Soviets, could act as facilitators. However, the main thrust of the Soviet role in the Asian region was of becoming an effective player with India as a key power heading the non-aligned groups, and this got strengthened. The aim was to contain American or western dominance, and to prevent China from becoming an intervening power in Asia. This served Soviet interests, as a global player in which India would be a key element from several points of view. One saw its manifestation in the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1971. Pakistan, whom the USSR tried to mellow down in its conflict with India, was now being supported by China, both in the economic and defence areas. This was clearly in conflict with Soviet interests. The emphasis on India remained right until 1990, when the break-up of the USSR finally occurred.

NINE

The London Chapter

On finishing my tenure in Moscow, I was posted to the Indian High Commission in London. T.N. Kaul wanted to retain me in Moscow, but finding me reluctant, agreed to my move to London. After a month's leave in India, I joined at London in October 1964, where Dr. Jivaraj Mehta was the High Commissioner, with Kewal Singh as his deputy. The welcome that Kewal Singh accorded to me reminded me of my police past. He said, "We don't need a police officer here. Since the Ministry, in its wisdom, has chosen to post you, please ensure that there are no complaints against you".

I did not understand his attitude. It made me feel like an outsider all over again, but I bore his remarks in silence. The same, Kewal Singh, in later years as the Foreign Secretary, changed his views and entrusted me with a major responsibility of heading the Sikkim government when the Chogyal's regime collapsed. His parting remarks on his retirement, when he invited me for lunch, were, "Brij, you were a true diplomat".

The High Commission was a sea of people from various departments of government, MEA having the least in number. Defence, economic affairs, audit, commerce, civil supplies, railways and several others had their offices as part of the High Commission.

We were over 1400 persons, the largest anywhere abroad. Apart from my duties as Counsellor (Protocol) and Staff Officer to the High Commissioner, I had to coordinate many other areas of activity, such as helping to drastically reduce the strength of the High Commission. Here, a very devoted but simple IFS officer, R.C. Shukla, was attached to me. Despite being full of wit and vigor, he later committed suicide, after his retirement.

Soon Kewal Singh left on transfer as Ambassador to the Soviet Union and P.N. Haksar replaced him. He became one of my mentors in later years. Some very eminent persons like N.C. Sen, U.S. Bajpai, A.J. Kidwai, Eric Gonsalves, C.V. Panikar, and Salman Haider were then posted in the High Commission. In spite of the contingent being large, we were a happy group, and two persons in particular, namely Uma Bajpai and Panikar, became my close friends.

Dr. Jivraj Mehta, though a doctor by profession, was a politician and closely linked to the Congress. His wife Hansa Mehta was a renowned social activist. A very decent and simple couple, they were involved in spiritual and cultural life. For Dr. Mehta, the day came to an end by evening, leaving little time for any social life. For all policy matters and Indo-British relationships, it was Haksar who was the key player. An intellectual, he could not suffer fools. From amongst all of us, he clicked best with Jamal Kidwai, the Education Adviser, fondness for poetry and love of the Persian language being the bond between them. Haksar, for all practical purposes, played the role of the high commissioner, except ceremonially. Between him and Bajpai, they conducted India's relations with the British.

The year 1965 was bad for that relationship. When the Indo-Pak war broke out, the British showed great animus towards India. Harold Wilson, their Prime Minister, almost accused India of starting the war. This led to some difficult situations. The British, who provided a considerable amount of defence equipment to India through our India Supply Mission in London, banned all supplies. Even simple 12-bore cartridges used for hunting and sports were banned. The supply of other cartridges for start-up of Hunter fighter aircraft was stopped, and that caused serious problems. When the Indo-Pak war was over, I asked Donald Kerr, Special Assistant to

Wilson, as to how and why a wrong perception emerged on this war. He did not answer. But when Wilson quit as UK's Prime Minister, Kerr himself told me that it was a tragic mistake on their part, based on wrong information by anti-Indian lobbies. But Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's image soared, with his own tough stand and Pakistan's failure to defeat India. One could gradually see a change in British attitude, distancing itself from Pakistan as it did in subsequent situations. However, Britain now lost its prime position as the key defence supplier to India.

Talks were on at Tashkent between Shastri and Ayub Khan. These were sponsored by Moscow under Kosygin, the then Soviet Prime Minister, for the purpose of settling the Indo-Pak dispute. These talks were almost concluded when Shastri suddenly died of a heart stroke. I was woken up at midnight by BBC breaking this news, and asking us to depute some persons knowledgeable about Shastri's life, to come to the radio station to speak. It was not easy, but we managed, despite the shock of this sudden development. "After Nehru, who?" had always been a question. It was even more difficult now, till Kamaraj, the veteran Congress leader, saved the situation and arranged for Indira Gandhi to be elected as the Prime Minister.

I was asked to arrange a condolence meeting in the Royal Albert Hall. British Protocol being what it is, this was not an easy task. I took the help of Col. Hugo, the British Chief of Protocol, in preparing a list of British invitees. There were large numbers amongst the British public who were associated with India since Nehru's time. The Queen would be represented by the Lord Chamberlain. Protocol demanded that the Queen's representative sit on a higher chair a few feet in front of the main dais, in order to maintain the dignity of the Head of State. Prime Minister Wilson was the main speaker. Lord Mountbatten, who declined our invitation at finding one title missing on his card, finally accepted, after due apologies were made and the error corrected. We saw titles and heritage taking precedence in the seating pattern, when Col. Hugo's deputy, a Lord by birth, took precedence over his boss! Such were the demands of British protocol. We were very amused when the Prime Minister came out after the ceremony, and enquired of the

policeman on duty where his car was parked. Without demur, the Bobby simply replied, "Mr. Prime Minister, your car is parked out there". Then, with no fanfare or escort, Wilson walked to his car and drove away. Had this happened in India, the cop would have been suspended!

In India, the Kashmiri leader Sheikh Abdullah felt lost after Nehru's death, as he had not been given any importance by either Shastri or Indira Gandhi. He came to us on a visit, but none from the High Commission took note of him. The Government of India was giving financial support to his son Farooq, who had joined a medical college in London, while the younger son, Tariq, was employed by the High Commission itself, and attached to my office. Tariq, who was full of venom and anti-India feelings, praised Pakistan constantly. He did not last long with us and left.

Before Shastri died, a veteran of India's freedom struggle, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, popularly known as Frontier Gandhi, came to London from Pakistan for treatment. His visit was under wraps, as he had been under house arrest for several years in Pakistan. I was deputed by Dr. Mehta to visit him and hand over a letter to him from our Prime Minister. He was over 90 years old and staying with a land lady who had contact with the Pakistan Red Shirts, as this group was called, based on their red colored dresses. I found Khan Saheb looking frail, his tall frame stretched out on a large bed. I conveyed the High Commissioner's greetings and handed over the Prime Minister's letter. He read it and remained quiet. Then, becoming very emotional, he uttered, "Why did India and Pakistan have to become two entities when culturally and historically they were one country? What tragedies have been inflicted upon them!" He again fell silent and I informed him that Mrs. Gandhi would come soon to call on him.

After a week, Mrs. Gandhi, our Information Minister then, arrived, and I escorted her to Frontier Gandhi. She went inside the living room for a personal talk. Having been Nehru's close friend, the old man was very fatherly towards Indira. He hugged her and blessed her, and the two had an intimate chat. During this tete-a-tete, Mrs. Gandhi emerged once, carrying a cup of tea for me. I was

greatly touched, but forgot to drink the tea. When she came out again and noticed this lapse on my part, she gave me a taste of her brusqueness. "Here I am, a Minister, handing over a cup of tea out of courtesy, and you did not have the manners to drink it! This is disgraceful." I had learnt that when this lady lost her temper, it was best to keep quiet. I meekly apologized.

It was decades ago, in the year 1940, when I had seen Nehru, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and Sheikh Abdullah leading a procession in Srinagar. I was a school boy holidaying with my family in Kashmir. Now I saw two of these personalities in London, 26 years later, one a prisoner in Pakistan, and the other removed from the Chief Ministership of Kashmir. To find them in such shape was very depressing. As a young student, I worshipped the three, as being our leaders who were fighting the British for our independence. Times had changed and so had the new political set-up. Nevertheless, it was a privilege for me to meet these two leaders in London in 1966, after so much water had flown.

Then there was another day, and an encounter with another personage. It was the first time that I had the opportunity to be associated with Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, our Prime Minister. He came to London for the Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference. It was before the 1965 war between Pakistan and India. Field Marshal Ayub Khan, and President of Pakistan, also came. There was an interesting contrast between these two personalities. The Indian visitor was described as the "Sparrow from India" by the British media. Being a diminutive figure of merely five feet, Shastri looked so mild and simple. Ayub, on the other hand, was a tall and hefty figure, who towered over all others. With the pro-Pakistani lobby active in London, it was Ayub all over. Yet, he went out of his way to be courteous and even patronizing to Shastri. He was constantly putting his arms around our P.M. and being most affable, which surprised all. At the conclusion of a Buckingham Palace party given by the Queen for the Conference, just when Shastri was leaving, Ayub rushed out to open the door of Shastri's car. We were all taken aback by such gestures, and genuinely wondered if this could not be translated into a lasting friendship. None of us, not even Haksar with his shrewdness, could realize the deep conspiracy

which was being hatched by Pakistan at this very moment, to intrude into India. Observing these overtures, no one could have imagined that Pakistan was on the verge of attacking India as soon as Ayub returned! When, later, the Indo-Pak war commenced and Pakistan launched a media drive accusing India of having crossed the international boundary as aggressor, many in London did not believe our version, which, we asserted, was merely retaliation.

As I have mentioned earlier, the British government took an anti-Indian stance, accepting Pakistan's accusations. However, no one expected Shastri to show the resolve and guts that he did, to beat Pakistan at its own game. He swiftly ordered the Indian Army to move into Pakistan, from many fronts and across the board where the intruders had to be repulsed, such as the Kutch sector in Gujarat, the Akhnoor sector in Kashmir, and the Khem Karan region in Punjab. After Pakistan was decisively beaten, it became panicky at such a fierce response, and hastily sought a cease fire. Shastri the "Sparrow" now rose in the estimation of the UK and other countries. The Tashkent meeting that followed between Shastri and Ayub, was a consequence of India's superior position. Showing our control over the conflict, we agreed to vacate the Pakistani territory. But Shastri's tragic death at Tashkent, after the agreement was signed and sealed, deprived him of enjoying the recognition that his courage and stature would have brought him. We all realized that, after Nehru, there had been no real void. This tiny man, with his unassuming nature and simple political acumen, brought great honor to India's political system. In fact, one could even say that it was Shastri who symbolized the efficacy and strength of our democratic system, with no laurels of an Oxford education, or wealth of a legacy, or even a dynastic background which had given Nehru an edge over others. It was a proud moment for India. Sadly, with Shastri's death, we returned to a dynastic culture, with its sycophancy and confined ethos. Shastri did have a dynasty in his two sons and a son-in-law, but they were never encouraged during his own lifetime. The two sons entered politics, but making no mark in the public field, just withered away in due course.

Indira Gandhi succeeded Shastri. There were other contenders like Gulzari Lal Nanda, the Home Minister, and Morarji Desai, a

very assertive and seasoned politician. But they had no support. On the other side, Kamaraj, the scion of the Congress Party, played a crucial role in supporting Indira Gandhi. As events unfolded, Indira emerged head and shoulders above any other political leader in the post-Nehru era. Hence, it would be grossly unfair to her, to dub her only as a dynastic choice.

I had interacted with Mrs. Gandhi in Moscow on two occasions earlier, although in a limited sense. Soon after her father's death, she was invited to Moscow as a personal guest of the Soviet leader Khruschev. She was then the Minister of Information and Broadcasting. In her press conference in Moscow, she found it difficult to answer questions, especially on the issue of American pressure on India to have Voice of America setting up stations in the country. Kaul, the Ambassador there, took over the questions and saved the situation. She did not create any ripples amongst the Soviets.

The second time, I met Mrs. Gandhi was in London, when she visited the Frontier Gandhi, as I have mentioned earlier. Indira had a dual personality. When she was in an amiable mood, she was a most charming person, but God help those who faced her grumpy or foul mood, at which time she would simply lash out. Between 1965 and 1981, I had numerous occasions to witness her fluctuations of temper. With her, one had to be cautious, and certainly never take her for granted.

When she was visiting London, I went to receive her. She was accompanied by her charming Social Secretary, Amie Crishna. Mrs. Gandhi was arriving from Paris, but her luggage did not arrive. I was naturally expecting a strong reaction from her and kept my fingers crossed. Surprisingly, when the Air France manager apologized to her, she smiled and said to Amie "Do you have a spare brush and nightgown? I will manage for a day". I was greatly relieved. The next day, when I escorted her to meet Abdul Gaffer Khan, she asked me, "How is your High Commissioner, Dr. Jivaraj? He or his wife has put me up in their guest room, with no flowers. The décor is awful". Suddenly she asked the driver to stop the car, jumped out, and began collecting some autumn-colored leaves from

the beautiful trees on the roadside. She soon returned to the car, saying, "Now I can put these in my room, to make it look nice". This was Nehru's daughter in the true sense. I had seen Pandit Nehru in some very exuberant moods, and Mrs. Gandhi displayed the same that day.

Never in my dreams could I imagine this personage, Mrs. Gandhi, looking as gorgeous as she did when I received her at Paris. She had become the Prime Minister then and was on her way to the USA, on the invitation of Johnson, the then American President. Rajeshwar Dayal, the Indian Ambassador to France, was at the airport to receive her along with some of us. As she alighted from the aircraft, she appeared totally transformed. Elegantly dressed, with a small cluster of white hair tucked into a gorgeous hairdo, she came gracefully down the steps like a regal personality. Very friendly to us, she talked fluently in French to the Protocol Officer of the French government. The Press was speechless when she spoke in their language for a few minutes. She became an instant hit, and really enjoyed it to the hilt. On seeing her two sons Rajiv and Sanjay, who had flown in from London, she even made them feel great.

The news of Mrs. Gandhi's great performance at the airport and her speech in French probably reached De Gaulle, the French President. He had invited Mrs. Gandhi for lunch, and he received her at the President's Palace as she got down from the car. This was not the normal procedure there. Visiting heads of Government were normally received inside the Palace. Only Heads of State on a ceremonial visit were received by De Gaulle, the way he received Mrs. Gandhi, despite the fact that she was only transiting Paris and her visit was informal. De Gaulle was charmed by India's lady Prime Minister. It was a great occasion for us. What an unbelievable change in her personality. She even charmed her way through Johnson, the American President, who broke all protocol by dropping in for a few minutes at the Indian Ambassador's reception!

Since I had known Feroze Gandhi, Indira's husband, in Allahabad before his marriage, I had seen Indira on one or two occasions in Feroze's gatherings. She had just returned from abroad and was being courted by Feroze, to whom she got engaged. A silent girl that she was at that time, who could have imagined her

becoming India's Prime Minister one day! I attended Feroze's wedding, and he had given me a small photograph of them both. A few years ago, I chanced upon this snap in a large collection of other photographs. By this time, the entire older Nehru family had been wiped out, leaving only Sonia. Since she was collecting old documents and photos related to Rajiv Gandhi, I sent her this snap, and received a very courteous acknowledgement from her.

Rajiv and Sanjay Gandhi were studying in London during my posting there. Rajiv was doing his graduation while Sanjay was being trained as a mechanic by the Rolls Royce Company. Mrs. Gandhi had asked Haksar to be in touch with the two boys, and provide assistance as required. While Rajiv used to drop in at India House for a meal with me, and also collect a few drinks occasionally for his socials, Sanjay kept away. Both were staying together in a two-room flat, and Rajiv was courting Sonia who had come to London to do a course in English.

Haksar became my mentor. As I sat in the room next to his, he would often share some personal thoughts with me. Between him and Uma Bajpai, the senior-most counselor, I was given a status which helped me interact with others freely, as any other IFS officer would. When I received an offer from the Central Bureau of Investigation to join them on promotion as a Deputy Director, Haksar called me and asked me to refuse the offer as he was planning to promote me from a First Secretary to a Counselor in the High Commission. I accepted and was promoted on par with my colleagues, being given all the privileges of a Foreign Service Officer.

Salman Haider, who later became India's Foreign Secretary, was at that time posted in the High Commission as Second Secretary (Information), under R.N. Gupta who was our Public Relations Officer. They did not see eye to eye, and some unpleasant exchanges took place. Gupta accused Salman of feeding information to his counterpart in the Pakistan High Commission, which was a serious charge. Haksar, to whom a written complaint was made by Gupta, called me and discussed the report. He asked me to enquire into Salman's credentials, keeping in mind his unhappy relations with his immediate boss. Haksar then said, "Das, it is a very delicate issue. While I would not like to protect Salman, but even if the

allegations are true, I feel the accusations are general. You should go into this very carefully. I trust you completely. Let me have an unbiased report".

Gupta, whom I knew well, was vehement in his criticism of Salman's actions, but he could not substantiate the allegations with proof that could make them amount to breach of security, or be termed as anti-national. I also discussed these accusations with Salman. Apart from admitting that he had friends in the Pakistan Mission, he denied having any anti-Indian views or those supportive of Pakistan. There was no evidence of any breach of security. At most, it could be called indiscretion and a casual approach to serious matters. The 1965 Indo-Pak war which needed a marked offensive by our High Commission in its media-related launch, had been handled poorly.

I submitted my findings to Haksar, who greatly appreciated the nuances my report brought out. Salman was exonerated of anti-national charges but advised to be more efficient in dealing with sensitive issues which affected India's interests. The matter was then closed. Salman and his wife Kusum were a very cultured couple and deeply involved in matters related to art. Kusum herself was a known choreographer and dramatist. Much later, Salman succeeded me as Ambassador to Bhutan, a post that he enjoyed.

On the completion of my tenure, I was offered a very challenging assignment. I left London in October 1967, joining the MEA as Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in the Northern Division.

TEN

Bhutan, An Unknown Challenge

In the later part of the year 1967, I received a letter from the Foreign Secretary, T.N. Kaul, offering me a posting to Bhutan to open India's first Mission there. His letter is reproduced below.

> "*There is a proposal to send a Special Officer to Bhutan, who will keep in touch with the King and other important personalities and help in expediting urgent matters. He will not take away any of the political or diplomatic functions of the Political Officer stationed in Gangtok, and will be junior to the P.O. The idea is to have someone who will be useful to the King and his government, so that there is a direct channel of communication between us and the King. The Special Officer will not have any executive functions so far as the large number of Indian technicians and those on deputation are concerned, whose services have been placed at the disposal of the Government of Bhutan.*
>
> *We consider this a very important post and want to select an officer who, along with his wife, will be able to mix together with the people and officials of Bhutan, remove their suspicions and fears, if any, and bring them closer to India. It is not easy, and the first man who occupies this post will either make it or mar it.*

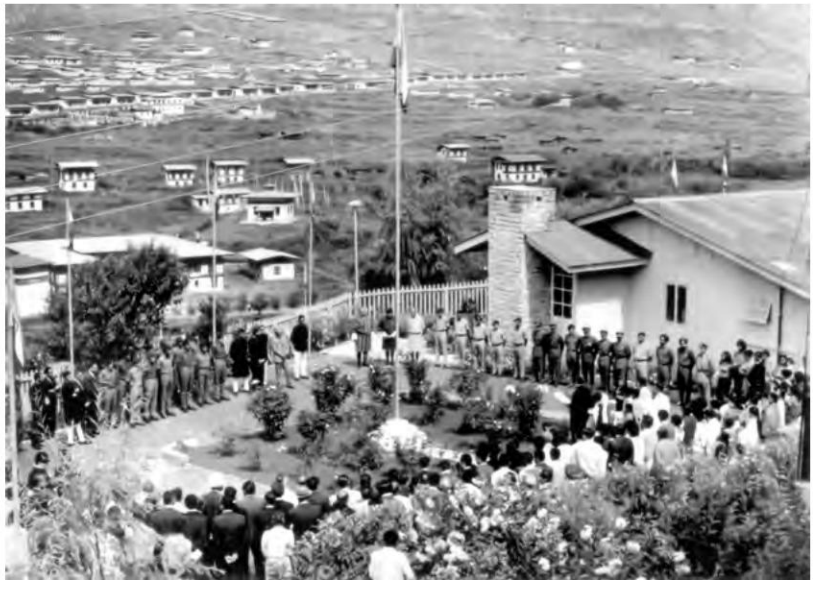
After careful consideration, we are thinking of sending you to this post. The King has not yet sent his final agreement, but should he do so, you may be required to be in Bhutan sometime towards the end of October or thereabouts. Meanwhile, this is by way of advance notice, and I hope you will take it as a compliment to your ability and good work. Please let me know immediately whether you will undertake this post, which will have the rank of counselor with the usual terms and conditions of free furnished accommodation, and the usual allowances as admissible to a Counselor in Bhutan."

Knowing nothing of Bhutan, I was very confused. I discussed the matter with my Acting High Commissioner, P.K. Chatterjee, who, on the other hand, wanted me to continue in London. He took some time to express his reaction, after some thought. "Look, I want you to stay on with me and I have contacted MEA. But, with this letter, I doubt if they will agree. As for Bhutan, I do not know much except that it is highly backward, with no modern facilities. Even regular roads may not be there. But, to be given a challenge of this kind, speaks of the trust MEA has in you. I would accept it. I would, however, caution you on one count. Bhutan is on the Tibet border and the Chinese could be adventurous. Keep the risk factor in mind, for your family."

I accepted the offer, and never regretted it, in spite of all the practical discomforts we faced. In several ways, it opened a new life for me.

Since the King of Bhutan had not cleared my name as per normal diplomatic process, I was asked to come to the MEA to join the Northern Division as a stop-gap. My friend Avadhut Kakodkar was already heading the division covering Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. It gave me an opportunity to learn a lot about the religious and political background, and the highly sensitive and volatile issues relating to the Chinese claims in the Himalayan region. The occupation of Tibet had thrown up its own problems, with the constant flow of refugees into Bhutan.

Author with Present King Jigme Khesar Wangchuk



First Independence Day of India at Special Office of India—1968

I joined at Delhi in October 1967. November came, and there was no response from the King. But Kaul, with whom I had worked in Moscow, was his usual self, and did not accept things lying down. Since China was a major factor in our relations with Bhutan, India apprehended the dangers of Bhutan's isolation with a remote control by the Political Office in Sikkim. On Diwali day itself, which was 14th November, Kaul rang me up to accompany him to Bhutan's capital Thimpu to meet the King. It was my first Diwali in Delhi in several years, with family and friends, but Kaul brushed that factor aside.

Sitting in a mud-plastered shack of a guest house, with two rooms and a double-rod heater to cater to near-freezing temperatures, it was the most miserable Diwali that I ever celebrated. There were hardly any lights this Diwali in that small sleepy town of Thimpu, with a population of just about 3000. We both felt very depressed. The compassionate man that Kaul was, he produced a pack of cards from his briefcase and we celebrated the festival of lights together in the shivering darkness. In retrospect, it was a very emotional moment for us both. Kaul, a lonely man because of his family separation, and me, having returned home after three years only to be "sent away" on this festival to such a depressing environment, it was a moment of bonding.

Next morning we were taken to the Royal Court housed in the Dzong, a fortress in literal terms. We were to have an "audience" with King Jigme Dorji of Bhutan. It was never referred to as a call or meeting here. As per the local custom, one was always received in "audience" with the King, as I was to learn later. Panting and gasping, we climbed to the top floor, where stood before us an ordinary person, spreading out his arms in welcome, without any ceremony or embellishments. He was King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, the absolute ruler of Bhutan, the third King since 1907.

Kaul introduced me as Mrs. Gandhi's emissary, who was ready to "take over" immediately. It was a rather unusual introduction of an emissary, and the King was embarrassed, but being a calm and composed man, he was quick to recover. Receiving me very politely, he told Kaul that Thimpu was too cold at that time, and suggested I

join when it became warmer. Kaul, instead, made me take over on 15th January of the following year, when it was not only colder, but even snowing in the higher reaches! Since the King's assent had been obtained, Kaul wanted to take no chances by delaying the setting up of the Indian Mission.

At the end of the "audience", Kaul produced a letter from his pocket. It had been sent by the Speaker of Bhutan's National Assembly to Mrs. Gandhi, asserting that while Bhutan welcomed the establishment of an Indian Embassy for enhancing the friendship between India and Bhutan, the Indian emissary would be summarily sent back if he worked against Bhutan's interests. When Kaul handed the letter to the King, it was obvious that the monarch was aware of this, and that in all probability the letter had, in fact, been sent at his behest! But, at this time he reassured us that the Speaker and other Assembly members had no knowledge of diplomatic nuances, and that this letter may be ignored. At the conclusion of this audience, the King agreed to the opening of the Mission, and to my heading it.

What was the reason for this reluctance of Bhutan to have India set up a mission? A peak into Bhutan's history gives the clue. Faced by centuries of invasions from Tibet, and by China's sovereignty claims, Bhutan always forbade any foreign presence on its territory. In fact, after their defeat by the British in 1868, they refused the UK permission to open an office in Thimpu. That is how the remote control of Britain's Political Office in Sikkim came into play. With the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1949, and India's defeat by that country in 1962, Bhutan became even more apprehensive of Indian presence, fearing that China could react and demand the opening of their Chancery.

The situation was untenable. In view of the Chinese presence in Tibet, and its political consequences in the entire Himalayan region, it was necessary for India to have a visible face of its special relationship with Bhutan. This country had been living in isolation till the present, and India was now committed to its diplomatic presence here, offering assistance in security and economic development. To assuage Bhutan's fears, India designated the Indian Mission as Special Office, and my designation as Special Officer of

King Jigme Dorji Bidding Farewell to Author—1972

India. This prevented the Bhutanese from demanding their own Embassy in Delhi, headed by an Ambassador. Bhutan was now covered under Article 2 of the Indo-Bhutan Treaty, which provided for its external relations being guided by India's advice. Thus, with the title of "Special Office" for our Mission, other countries were prevented from seeking diplomatic presence there.

Apart from that, Bhutan and its ruling elite were highly suspicious of Indian intentions. They feared that, like Sikkim, they too would be controlled by the Indian Mission, and lose their independent status. Operational attitudes of India at the functional level, coupled with some indiscreet actions of lumping Bhutan and Sikkim together in policy formation, made the Bhutanese suspicious of Indian intentions. I saw written evidence of this when one P.R. Bakshi, the local representative of Bhutan in Calcutta, showed me a personal letter of his King. Bakshi was close to him, and the letter indicated that the King was very apprehensive of Indian intentions in opening their Mission. He had stated, "let us see how they behave". I was shown this letter by Bakshi almost a year after the King wrote it, and by then the Indian Mission had been well established and accepted as an agent of friendship. I now appreciated and understood T.N. Kaul's hint about the assignment being a "challenge" to me, in his letter sent to London. Bhutan's suspicion was so great that I was kept under constant watch, as were other senior Indian officers, till things began to settle down. The Bhutanese gradually realized that India had no plans to either dominate them, or to treat them on par with Sikkim, which was only a protectorate with a different relationship. Separation of the Political Office for Sikkim and Bhutan in 1970 brought about a radical change in Bhutanese' perceptions.

Shortly after my posting in 1968, India's Deputy Prime Minister Morarji Desai came to Thimpu on his first official visit. His trip had many interesting episodes. The King, who till now had no personal interaction with Desai, was apprehensive, as he had learnt of the rigid views and dourness of the Indian dignitary. Morarji, along with Finance Secretary T.P. Singh and Joint Secretary Ashok Bhadkamker, landed at Paro airport by helicopter. The airport was under construction to take on regular flights. There were no cars

either, as roads had not yet been constructed. The mode of travel, for everyone, was a jeep. While driving from the airport to the guest house, Mr. Desai enquired of me, "Das, why are we building airports here when the Bhutanese seem to be happy on horsebacks and jeeps! I don't think we need to spoil them". It was difficult to respond to India's Deputy Prime Minister on such an issue, when India was pouring in money to develop Bhutan's communication system in view of India's own interests. But then, Morarji was Morarji, with his set views. What worried me was that, being the Finance Minister, he may object to many schemes that we had in mind for Bhutan.

Before Mr. Desai's arrival, my friend Daulat Singh, Deputy Secretary in the MEA, was flooding me with inputs on the personal needs of the visiting dignitary. His main emphasis was on food, and on no liquor being served. One message from him said, "He drinks fresh cow's milk only". I passed on the message in its original form to the Home Minister of Bhutan, Tamji Jagar, a scion of the old guard, and the person in-charge of the visit. He promptly made arrangements for a dozen cows to be tied at the guest house, for fresh milk. Dawa Tsering, (later their Foreign Minister), had something to add in his own style. Bemused, he stated, "Mr. Das, we do not have fresh cows. That is why the Home Minister has provided a dozen cows to choose the fresh ones from!" We had a hearty laugh at Daulat Singh's language faux pas.

We received a bombshell as soon as Mr. Desai settled in the guest house. The MEA had informed us that Tuesdays were the days when he fasted, consuming only milk and dry fruits. Consequently, no food was prepared for him. At lunch time, his son Kanti Desai came rushing to me. "Where is my father's lunch?" We looked confused as it was Tuesday. Kanti was furious, explaining that his father fasted only in India, and not abroad! We hurriedly mustered up some vegetarian dishes for the V.I.P., along with the usual milk and dry fruits.

From the airport, Mr. Desai drove to Thimpu, where the King received him at the Royal Cottage, his retreat. It being a cold day, the heaters were on. After an hour's chat, the King took leave and

Mr. Desai retired to his room. In a few minutes, I heard Mr. Desai shouting for me. "Das! Das! Where are you?" I rushed in and found him under the bed. He called out, "I do not use heaters when I sleep. But I can't find the switch anywhere to put it off". Neither could I, nor could the entire staff ! It required the old architect Zori Chechup to be called in to put off the master switch and thus turn off the heaters.

It is necessary to introduce Zori Chechup. A grand old man in his late seventies, he was the Royal architect, and had designed the Dzong, all in mud and wood, and without using any nails. There were more than 100 rooms that housed the entire government, apart from the monastery in the centre. On hearing of Morarji's discomfiture, the King became furious with Zori Chechup. The architect was asked to demolish the entire Royal guest house and build a new and modern one, as fast as possible. As soon as Morarji departed, the guest house was razed to the ground, and a new and larger one was constructed within six months. The King shifted there and so it became known as the King's Cottage.

T.P. Singh and Bhadkamkar loved their drinks. On the other hand, Morarji was not only a teetotaller, he also would not tolerate his staff drinking. Yet, he was accompanied by two very senior officers who drank in public! This led to a hilarious incident. At the time of Morarji's departure, Singh was expected to accompany him, but he was missing. Without saying a word, Morarji boarded the plane and pushed off, leaving the officer to fend for himself. Much later, at around 10 in the morning, we found Singh lying in bed in his underclothes. After an enjoyable late night, he had decided to visit the Indian Military Training Team that morning, before emplaning. But, carrying the hangover of the previous night, he missed noticing the fresh paint on the chairs. He sat on a wet seat, enjoying his tea. But, when he arose, his suit had stripes all over! The baggage having left with all the clothes he had, he undressed and sent his suit to the Army for an octane wash. This held him up for a few hours all by himself! But, in his work sphere, T.P. Singh was a sharp and generous person. When Bhutan sought financial assistance, it was he who persuaded Morarji to give a substantial grant for their developmental requirements.

This visit built up a personal rapport between the King and Morarji. There was a better understanding of Bhutan' growing needs, which helped in making funds available. Even Paro airport, of which Morarji had been critical, was given substantial assistance. Today, regular air services operate from this airport.

In those days, Bhutan lacked a proper administrative and financial structure. Invariably, our Mission got involved in framing requests where India's help was needed. It appeared odd, but such was the level of trust that had developed between the two sides. Our Mission was asked to set up a civil service framework for Bhutan and train the selected cadres. The same was done for their Diplomatic Service.

Chogyal, the Finance Minister, was asked to visit India and call on Morarji for financial assistance, and I was to accompany him. It being the Chogyal's first ever visit to India on such a mission, and that too for a discussion with Morarji, whose aloofness was well known, he was extremely nervous. Apart from that, in a way, it was his trial, to represent Bhutan at this level. He had to succeed, in order to come up to the King's expectations. He could not speak English, which made things worse and added to his discomfiture. But he could not afford to fail either. Uttering a few sentences in Hindi to convey the King's greetings, the Minister blurted out, "Our Special Officer, Mr. Das, knows the details of the request for which I have come".

I was India's Special Officer, not Bhutan's! Perhaps Morarji realized how unprepared their Finance Minister was for such negotiations. On hearing the formal request for assistance, Morarji mellowed, and fondly recalled his recent Bhutan visit. He then cut the meeting short, commenting that India would certainly consider some assistance, and that a decision would be conveyed shortly. We left the room, and the Chogyal came out, having lost all hope. Even my comforting words were no consolation to him.

We were sitting in the Ashoka Hotel, where we had put up, and I was busy assuring the Chogyal of all feasable support. But he was worried about the possibility of a failed mission. Just then the telephone rang, T.P. Singh was waiting in the lobby and calling me

there. As I wished him, he put his arms around me and said, "Das, my boy, your mission has succeeded! Morarji has approved a grant of Rs.100 million, and has also sent a message for the Chogyal to let us know whenever Bhutan needed financial help."

When I conveyed this to the Chogyal, he almost fell off his bed. He could not believe his success, even rejecting my suggestion to call up the King's secretary about the news. He felt he would convey the news himself later, after it was properly confirmed. This Delhi visit enhanced the King's trust in the Indian leadership, and consequently in me, as a friend.

Readers may find my narration unrealistic and exaggerated. One did not expect that such things could happen in the 20th century, where a foreign country conducted its official relations in this manner, and a Minister chased a request for such a small amount of aid. I myself was baffled, coming from London as I did. But gradually I began to understand the simple innocence of a small nation trying to stand on its feet, a nation that had never been exposed to foreign dealings of this protocol-oriented culture. I began to enjoy learning the new power game, with my spirits elated as never before. Where does an Indian diplomat get an opportunity to participate in the development of a country graduating from the 16th to the 20th century, galloping over centuries of backwardness? I absorbed it all and felt privileged indeed.

ELEVEN

Visit of the Prime Minister

WITHIN TWO MONTHS OF MORARJI'S TRIP, the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, decided to visit Bhutan on the King's invitation. It was May, and we were housed in a mud-plastered structure bereft of any furnishings and modern conveniences. There was no guest house or hotel either which could cater to the stay of her party, which included her daughter-in-law Sonia, T.N. Kaul's daughter Priti, and her Social Secretary Usha Bhagat.

Since the Queen was living apart from the King, one could not place the Indian Prime Minister in an awkward situation. The Queen in any case was away from Bhutan. When I broached the subject of her stay, the King mentioned that Mrs. Gandhi and her party would be put up at the Dzong, where he himself stayed. But this venue did not permit ladies even to visit it after sunset as per monastic laws, as it housed the monastery. Within a day, the issue was sorted out in a dramatic way. The King asked the Head Lama, Jey Khenpo's permission to allow Mrs. Gandhi and her party to stay in the Dzong, as she was to be seen as a Prime Minister and a guest, not as a woman. The Council of Monks conferred, and accepted the King's request, and the guests were put up in the Dzong!

An interesting episode occurred when Mrs. Gandhi was to land at Thimpu. The King, his Cabinet, and we were at the helipad to

Visit of Indian Prime Minister in 1968

receive her on that beautiful sunny day. Suddenly, we received a message that Mrs. Gandhi's aircraft could not take off, as the weather in the foothills was bad. The King, who was very upset, called the Home Minister who was also in charge of ecclesiastical affairs, and said, "I had asked you to put all the monks on prayer, for a safe landing. How can this happen? Go and see if the prayers are going on. Put everyone in the monastery on intensive prayers". The Home Minister rushed to the Head Priest and conveyed the message. In hardly 15 minutes time information came in that Mrs. Gandhi's plane had taken off from the Indian Air Force base at Hashimara! Sure enough, soon thereafter, we heard the sound of rotor blades, followed by a view of the dignitary descending the steps, beaming from ear to ear. Needless to say, the King was delighted.

The ceremonial procession which escorted India's Prime Minister was out of this world. Dressed in traditional attire, the participants of the procession danced their way to the Dzong with songs and music from traditional Bhutanese musical instruments. A brand new red Rolls Royce car, which had been flown in earlier, carried Mrs. Gandhi and the King down the newly built road. The locals enjoyed the sight of the first-ever luxury car in their midst, and the welcome they gave was overwhelming.

Mrs. Gandhi stayed in Bhutan for three days. As she herself told us, she had never felt so relaxed earlier. There were no public meetings or speeches. The only ceremony was laying of the foundation stone of India House, for which the King sanctioned a 64-acre site next to the Dzong. Beautifully located in the centre of Bhutan's capital, it had the Thimpu river on one side and the Dzong on the other. In return, India gave a plot to Bhutan in the diplomatic enclave in New Delhi, next to the Rail Museum. This was a much smaller piece than what we were given in Thimpu, and the King, in his jovial way, remarked, "Your Excellency, Bhutan will build its Embassy in New Delhi much sooner than India House here". And that he did, with a beautiful Bhutanese façade. On the other hand, India House in Bhutan ran into problems. Dinesh Singh, India's Foreign Minister then, suggested a modern glass structure, but Mrs. Gandhi vetoed the concept with the remark, "We must be one with Bhutan's nature and colorful designs".

After some roadblocks, the Indian Embassy came up as a sprawling structure. We were aware of the inevitable procedural delays, and till my stay there in 1972, we made a small golf course on the land and a fishing hut on the river. The hut still exists today.

Plenty of issues came up for discussion between the King and Mrs. Gandhi on this visit. The young generation of Bhutanese, led by the King's step-brother Namgyal Wangchuk, was wanting India to sponsor Bhutan for UN membership. But the King, aware of the limited finances and lack of a trained diplomatic service, was more concerned about the prospect of foreign presence which would inevitably follow the UN membership. Yet, he could not himself convince the young group of these various pitfalls, and thus sought Mrs. Gandhi's help in talking to his brother. Some Ministers also backed this suggestion, and so Mrs. Gandhi met all the Ministers and assured them of honoring India's commitment to sponsor Bhutan. It was for Bhutan to decide when it wanted to join, she urged. Meanwhile, India would send one or two Bhutanese officials as part of the Indian delegation which visited the UN in September when the General Assembly would meet. This would expose the Bhutanese delegates to the various nuances of joining the UN. The King heaved a sigh of relief when this suggestion was accepted. Kaul played a crucial role from behind the scenes, and I was constantly in the picture. India met its commitment of sending Bhutanese delegates with Namgyal as their leader.

With Mrs. Gandhi's visit successfully over, I began to set my office in order. I needed to plan for proper accommodation and facilities for ourselves and the staff, which was done in a modest way, considering the constraints that existed. It was like staying in the countryside with very basic living comforts.

India was concerned with the security of the King. Jigme Dorji, Bhutan's Agent General and the Queen's brother had been assassinated, and an attempt had been made on the King's life, possibly from a Dorji. We were asked to plan the King's security.

The Queen's younger brother, Lhendup Dorji and sister Tashi were suspected of a coup attempt when the King was away in Switzerland, and both were banned from Bhutan, which further

aggravated relations between the King and the Queen. The Dorji family suspected India's participation, and even wanted the arrest of Yanki, the King's mistress, for complicity in the murder of Jigme Dorji.

While the King stabilized his position with the exile of Lhendup and Tashi, the issue of UN membership became a soft spot, with his own brother Namgyal Wangchuk heading the group of youngsters in the Bhutanese hierarchy and the Army. None of this could be ignored. The King also noticed the unhappiness of the old guard in not being granted a status commensurate with their functional responsibilities, which resulted in their being deprived of dignity by Indians and other foreigners. There was no Cabinet system. The Chief Secretary, Tamji Jagar, was virtually the first Minister handling Home and Cultural Affairs, and Dasho Chogyal, the first to hold the finance portfolio, but they were designated merely as Secretaries. Visiting Indian officials or others treated them on par with Indian civil administrators.

The most critical was Col. Lam Dorji, Chief of the Bhutan Army, who was designated as Chief of Operations. As he was just a Colonel, all visiting officers treated him as a junior, and his having been trained at the Indian Military Academy strengthened that attitude. He was particularly upset with the Commandant of the Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT), as the latter was a Brigadier, (and later promoted as Major General). The Chief of Dantak, the road building organization of India located in Bhutan, was also of Brigadier rank, (and promoted as Major General later). Lam Dorji remained a Colonel of the Bhutan Army.

The King decided to change the format of the government and recommended a Cabinet system to the National Assemby. He also recommended upgradation of the post of Chief of Operations of the Bhutan Army, and suggested Col. Dorji's promotion as a Brigadier. Though the King had the power to make these changes himself, he wanted the National Assembly to be associated with the decisions. While the proposal for a Cabinet system was unanimously approved, that of the Bhutan Army ran into problems. The Assembly recalled the past history of two earlier Brigadiers having caused serious problems, the first one being shot for assassination of Jigme Dorji,

and the second exiled for attempting a coup against the King. They felt it was not wise to upgrade the post. The King accepted the views of the Assembly. It is a different matter that much later Col. Lam Dorji became a Major General and headed the Bhutan Army when Bhutan joined the United Nations.

The first Cabinet of Bhutan was formed in March 1968 but, without a Prime Minister. The King, with his experience of Dorji family intrigues, was averse to the idea of having a Prime Minister. He himself became the Head of Government, along with being the Head of State. No Minister was given overriding powers, though Home Minister Tamji Jagar, by virtue of his seniority, was looked up to by others, and the King also conceded that.

With Bhutan inching its way towards an international exposure, including foreign aid, Dawa Tsering, the Secretary General for Planning, was made a Minister, and later became Bhutan's first Foreign Minister. He was the longest serving Foreign Minister in any country. A suave India-educated person, he was able to project Bhutan's new personality before the world fora.

There was another tricky issue which came up before the Bhutanese and us, which was the King's proposal to empower the National Assembly to appoint and remove the King. It was too radical a proposal, and one did not see any political justification for this step. The monarchy was hereditary and had served the country very effectively since its establishment in 1907. The King discussed this issue with me at length. He visualized a future with Bhutan's modernization and membership of UN and other international issues, where the people would be participants in decision-making. The liberal that he was, he was the first King to have established the National Assembly, in 1952, on his accession. He had also introduced a system of partial election to the Assembly.

I was against such a radical change and shared my views with the King, and also Foreign Secretary Kaul. The King raised the issue during Mrs. Gandhi's visit in May 1968. Shrewd as she was, she would not commit either way. As the Prime Minister of a democratic country like India, she could not advise against the process of induction of democracy in Bhutan. She was also aware of the

inherent dangers of such steps, knowing Bhutan's history of turmoil prior to its becoming a monarchy. This monarchy had brought stability and a very close relationship with India, peace having been established in Bhutan. It was too hasty a step, which could lead to serious security problems right on India's periphery. Our P.M. in her discussions with the King, remarked, "Your Majesty, who could know more about the nuances of such a change than you. We always support democracy, but it has to be gradual, for the sake of Bhutan's safety, especially in keeping with its emerging new personality."

She had voiced her opinion, but the King persisted. He was advised against the change by his own Ministers and Assembly members. But, apart from his liberal attitude, the King had a lurking fear of the Dorjis usurping power in case something happened to him. By making a confidence vote of the National Assembly obligatory, he could prevent anyone from outside the Royal Family taking over. The Royal Succession Act defined the successors from the Wangchuk dynasty in case of any mishap. The Assembly would prevent the violation constitutionally. The power to remove a ruler through a no-confidence motion by a simple majority was also proposed. This was later changed to two-third members voting against a ruler. Here again, the King had in mind a contingency for correcting a wrong choice. And, as for an army-supported coup, the King had ready answers. The Assembly would not accept such a situation and the surrendering of its powers. Some radical changes in the election process were also contemplated by the King, ensuring a larger say of directly elected members. He modified his approach after assessing the circumstances that prevailed. But, he got the Assembly the power to remove a ruler with a two-third vote of no-confidence.

TWELVE

U.N. Membership

FROM UTTER SUSPICION OF INDIAN INTENTIONS in 1968, when the Indian Mission was set up under the Political Office located in Sikkim, to the bonhomie of 1970, was a great change indeed. Not only did the Mission get separated from the Political Office, but the post of Special Officer was re-designated to 'Representative of India', with an Ambassador's status. The visits of Morarji Desai, Indira Gandhi, and finally V.V. Giri, President of India, consolidated Indo-Bhutan relations beyond expectations. Since Nehru's visit of 1958, no senior Indian political leader had ever come to this country. Now, some major changes started taking place, politically, and in attitude.

The anti-India factors within the polity, particularly the Royalty, began to change. With the return of Crown Prince Jigme Singhe Wangchuk from his schooling in the UK, the Queen began to show a flexibility that was unknown before. The daughters, Sonam and Dechen, being given positions of responsibility in the Bhutan government, and in their interaction with the Indian Mission, made the Dorji element within the Royalty more perceptive and appreciative of India's support. They realized India's sincerity in dealing with their legitimate aspirations in the matter of succession, and of Bhutan's role as an independent, sovereign country. People like the Queen's brother, Lhendup Dorji, and sister

Mrs. Gandhi briefing Namgyal Wangchuk on UN Membership—1968

King Thanking India on Joining UN—1971

Tashi, now fugitives in Nepal, began to be ignored by the Queen on account of their hostility towards India.

Some other elements like Namgyal Wangchuk, the King's step-brother, and his young friends in the Army, who periodically raked up the issue of UN membership, became subdued when they saw Bhutan's delegation going to the UN General Assembly sessions as part of the Indian delegation, in preparation of the possible UN membership coming through. All through this, the King played his cards in such a manner that, while asserting Bhutan's emerging role on one hand, he did not push for a membership decision till the country became prepared. He chose the visit of India's President in 1970 as the occasion to set at rest all doubts of the Bhutanese on the issue of UN membership. In answer to a journalist's query, (a planted question), the King announced that he had requested India to sponsor Bhutan for the membership of the United Nations. We were aware of this and prepared for it, and announced our acceptance the very next day. The King played his cards shrewdly, shutting out all anti-India elements, including the Dorjis of his family.

It was decided to sponsor Bhutan formally a year later, in 1971, using the interim period to train a Bhutanese team of diplomats to open its UN Mission in New York. Also, it was agreed to create Bhutan's diplomatic Mission in Delhi. Since there was no organized civil service cadre, the King requested us to train a few Bhutanese to take over the responsibility of manning their Missions in New York and Delhi. The King made a special request for the services of A.N.Ram, my deputy, to assist the designated Ambassador of Bhutan in New York, and we agreed.

It was obvious that Article 2 of the Indo-Bhutan Treaty, of being guided by India on foreign relations, would come in the way. We had no desire to amend the Treaty, nor give up this control, what with security threats from China, and with other countries pressurizing Bhutan to permit them to establish their diplomatic Missions. Besides, our economic relations were governed by an open border, with Bhutan enjoying equal privileges with India. Once foreign aid started pouring in, leading to the presence of foreign

institutions, it could pose another kind of security threat. The most critical issue was of India's defence interests. China was claiming major areas of Bhutan as part of its territory. India had no defence treaty with Bhutan. Only a small Indian Army training team was located in the country which, apart from training, covered security aspects of intelligence and Chinese intrusions. All arms for their Police and their Army were supplied by India. But, with UN membership, Bhutan could demand freedom to train and import weapons from any country, since there was no defence treaty.

Apart from these issues, we had to ensure that Bhutan remained within the security parameters of India's interests, as it was a strategic area of immense importance from the defence, economic, and political angles. There were elements within the Bhutanese polity who were waiting in the wings to wean it away from Indian control. Prominent among them were Lhendup and Tashi Dorji, using remote control pressure through the Queen. The most important was the King's step-brother, Namgyal Wangchuk, who had the title of Tengye Lyonpo as a Minister. Dawa Tsering, the astute Foreign Minister, was always sitting on the fence, and could not be trusted by either side.

T.N. Kaul came rushing to Bhutan, and we worked out a strategy which the King would be requested to support, in his own interest, and in the interest of the Crown prince. As a consequence, letters of exchange were prepared in consultation with the King. The most important decision was of Bhutan having no resident diplomatic Missions for the next ten years. The same applied to foreign economic institutions. For defence, India agreed to provide support against any threat to Bhutan, apart from offering modern training and equipment to the Bhutan Army. The Treaty would remain in place with no amendments. India also agreed to provide foreign exchange for meeting expenses on Bhutan's Missions in the UN and Delhi. It was agreed to lend A.N. Ram's services to set up Bhutan's Mission to the UN as the second-in-command.

We sponsored Bhutan for membership of the United Nations in 1971. The King was very apprehensive of the results of the UN voting. We had been lobbying very hard. Some foreign

Ambassadors, who were stationed in Delhi, visited Bhutan. These were the American, Japanese, Australian and Nepalese Ambassadors, all of whom came to ascertain Bhutan's views on their future relationship with India if it joined the UN. Would Article 2 still stay? How would Bhutan function as a sovereign nation? Posing these questions to the Bhutanese personalities, the Ambassadors then came to me, questioning the issue of Indian suzerainty over Bhutan, before their countries voted in the UN on Bhutan's membership. The American and Japanese Ambassadors were quite obnoxious while discussing Bhutan's future. The Ambassador from Nepal had a different take. He told the King how Nepal had sidelined India with China's help. This entire exercise was to assess the new Indo-Bhutan relationship, in case Bhutan joined the UN. The King quoted Nehru's statement of 1958 and made a public pronouncement of India and Bhutan being two independent nations tied to each other by common interests. He also told the visiting Ambassadors that Bhutan never had any problems on Article 2 of the Treaty, and that the provisions under it did not vitiate any aspect of Bhutan's sovereignty.

India began lobbying very hard for Bhutan's membership, which was to be voted upon in September 1971. The King, without saying so, was deeply worried, and he shared some of these apprehensions with me. This was like a litmus test for his relationship of trust in India's commitment. Apart from that, he felt that his son's succession was linked to this trust. If Bhutan failed to win the vote, the negative forces in his country could pose a serious threat, especially the Dorjis who had been working silently in questioning India's bonafides.

To the credit of India's Foreign Office, no effort was spared in pushing Bhutan's case. Special contacts were established at senior political levels, and with the permanent members of the Security Council, giving assurance of India's commitment to Bhutan's independence, and treating Bhutan as a sovereign country in its own right. America and the Soviet Union were concerned about China's threat in this region. This aspect was played up quietly by India. In fact, while the issue of Bhutan's emerging sovereign status was clarified, India told the USA and USSR that the closeness between

India and Bhutan was a safety valve in ensuring peace and stability in this region, a situation which these countries wanted.

Within India itself, in fact even within the MEA, there were powerful lobbies opposed to Bhutan joining the UN. They felt that India would lose its hold in the Himalayan region, citing Nepal's case as an example. Sikkim was bound to follow, they feared. Already, the Chogyal, Maharaja of Sikkim, was demanding an independent status comparable to that of Bhutan. I myself faced some embarrassing situations even within the MEA. Somehow, an impression went around that it was Kaul who was promoting this idea of Bhutan's membership, and I had, therefore, become a part of it. They did not realize that it was Nehru who defined Bhutan's position in 1958, followed by a written commitment from Lal Bahadur Shastri to Bhutan. Finally, Mrs. Gandhi herself assured the King in 1968, in my presence, about India standing by its commitment. Kaul, a pragmatic Foreign Secretary, was merely implementing a political decision.

On the eve of the UN voting on Bhutan's membership, I found the King extremely tense. For him it was a moment of history that was deciding Bhutan's destiny. As the Ruler, he had to tell his people that his friendship with India was for their country's good. If Bhutan lost, the King could not have sustained his standing within the country. He phoned me up, which was an unusual thing, and said, "Das, I would be keeping awake the whole night (as it would be daytime in New York). Please let me know the voting results, whatever the time may be. You must phone me personally. I shall await your call".

At 3.30 in the morning, Bhutan time, the UN Assembly voted in favor of Bhutan's membership. I rang up the King at 4 a.m. giving him the news. He was choked with emotion. It was his moment of victory, of taking Bhutan from a state of suzerainty under the British to an independent and sovereign State, through a policy of friendship with India for which he was bitterly criticized by his own family members. He said, "Das, though it is too early, but can you come immediately? I have something for you". I went to his chambers within a few minutes. He was waiting to welcome me. He

embraced me for the first time ever and said, "Thank you, my friend, for all that you have done for my country". He then gave me a piece of chocolate, with a cigarette which he knew I cherished. We were lost in moments of silent connectivity, words having failed in the flood of emotions that overwhelmed us. No ceremonials were required at that moment. They would have been too artificial and formal to celebrate such a bond. My personal victory was that I had fulfilled the expectations expressed by Kaul in his letter in 1967, when offering me the posting to Bhutan. This, in a small but positive way, helped in paving the way for a lasting relationship which, in turn, paid immense dividends in later years. Thus, I became a part of Bhutan's history, albeit an unrecorded one. May be it was my ego, but I felt I had done my country proud. That I was awarded the Padma Shri by my government, the following Republic Day, speaks for itself. In fact, I refused the award that Bhutan offered me, its highest award. This showed them that what I had achieved was for my country, and not to gladden Bhutan.

By the time, President Giri visited Bhutan in late 1970, I had already overshot my tenure. I was keen for another posting, somewhere abroad. I needed to attend to my children, who had been living in hostels in Delhi and Dehradun, neglected in several ways. Besides, Bhutan had been a long and strenuous posting with very few facilities, and we needed a change. I had mentioned this to Kaul. So, it came as a surprise when President Giri called me up. Appreciating my work, which he mentioned was conducted under difficult conditions, he nevertheless said, "The King wants you to stay on in Bhutan for another year. I have agreed without consulting you. I know you have personal problems, but sometimes duty comes ahead of personal conveniences. I am proud of you. Please stay on. When you complete this period, come to me and I will ensure a good and comfortable posting for you". I could not say anything to that. It meant a total of four years in Bhutan.

An incident happened which changed things completely. No one could comprehend its implications, least of all me. Relations between Bhutan's Army Chief, Col. Lam Dorji and Maj. Gen. Jaganathan, head of IMTRAT, had deteriorated. This percolated down to the Bhutanese Ministers, who in any case were not happy with Jaggi's

arrogance. The King noted this with concern. When his confidante, Dr. Tobgyel, reported to him that the Ministers had refused to attend the annual IMTRAT function at Ha valley, as they had not been invited formally, the King decided to refuse the invitation himself too, even though he was the chief guest. I was told all this by the King himself. I requested Jaggi to sort this out quickly, while I myself apologized to the Ministers, as IMTRAT was a key Indian organization. The King agreed to attend, but kept his distance, thus showing his annoyance. During our two days' stay at Ha, headquarters of IMTRAT, I was kept busy trying to cool down the tempers around me.

The King made it very clear to me that he resented the snobbish attitude of the IMTRAT, which often caused unhappiness amongst his senior Ministers. Apologizing on behalf of IMTRAT, I asked him if he was personally unhappy with General Jagannathan. He replied, "He has been here long enough. Perhaps, it may be in his interest if he goes away with grace". I wrote to Foreign Secretary Kaul, conveying the sequence of events and the King's feelings. He forwarded my letter to P.N. Haksar, Principal Adviser to the Prime Minister. Mrs. Gandhi herself directed Haksar to show the note to General Maneckshaw, the Chief of Army Staff.

The General not only questioned my authority to discuss such an important matter with the King, but refused to believe that the King was upset. He rushed to Bhutan to meet him. However, he refused to talk to me. Apparently, the King assured him that he had nothing personal against Jaggi, but that some of his Ministers were upset, a matter which could be resolved. Maneckshaw returned to Delhi and met the P.M. He criticized me and also questioned Kaul's domain in receiving such requests or complaints sent by me.

It was indeed very embarrassing for me. I received a polite letter from Kaul, asking me to sort out problems at the local level. I knew I could not go further to try and prove what the King had told me. It was the first ever episode during my tenure where I felt the King's attitude to be inexplicable. When Kaul later suggested my posting to Afghanistan as Ambassador, it was shot down by the Prime Minister. Her noting said that I should return to India, having been

abroad too long. I approached P.N. Haksar who thought favorably of me, but at this instance he felt embarrassed. He said, "Das, it is a great honor to be wanted back by no less a person than the Prime Minister, and that too as Municipal Commissioner of Delhi. Accept it".

I was shattered. After 10 years of diplomatic postings, considered to have been successful ones, to be sent as Municipal Commissioner about whose functioning I had no idea, was unimaginable. What was the significance of Kaul's call to me in 1968 to improve diplomatic ties with Bhutan, and of my being awarded the Padma Shri for it? I felt humiliated and upset. Even the posting as the MCD, was not confirmed, since the IAS cadre was up in arms, questioning the legality of posting an outsider, and that too an IPS officer! While all this was going on, I received a letter from Govind Narain, the Home Secretary, who controlled the affairs of the Delhi government. He wrote, welcoming me to the new post. He went on to state that he needed a strong personality who could handle the sensitive issues, especially with 'certain forces' in power in the Corporation. (He meant the then Jan Sangh Party.) He continued that my diplomatic success abroad would be an asset. Even Kaul advised me to accept this as an honor, being at the Centre in such a sensitive post. The final punch came when T. Swaminathan, the Cabinet Secretary, called me, saying, "Das, I have 'de-cadred' the post and now the IAS can say nothing. Take up the assignment." I accepted the offer, as it was preferable to going back to the Police. Much later, I learnt that it was my unfortunate episode with General Maneckshaw that had led the P.M. to reject my name for Afghanistan.

When I called on President Giri, I reminded him of his promise a year earlier about a suitable posting. He congratulated me on my good work, but said, "Please see the Foreign Secretary". I realized he had sidelined the issue. In those days, no one, not even the President, or even the P.M.'s own Principal Advisor, had the courage to intervene in such matters. I lost the battle for continuing to be with External Affairs. The only saving grace was that everyone of consequence continued to treat me with great respect.

There is always a silver lining in the dark clouds. When the day of departure from Bhutan came, a most unexpected event took place. The King was himself present at the helipad to bid us farewell, this being the only time he had ever done so for a non-head of government. It was a personal farewell, and thus, one of the most precious moments for me.

THIRTEEN

The Chinese Threat

China showed Bhutan as one of its "five fingers", and thus claimed suzerainty over this tiny country. This concept was rejected by the British, as also by us. Yet, this cartographic game went on till Bhutan joined the United Nations. But, the Chinese had a major territorial claim on Bhutan's western region, an access to the Paro and Ha valleys, as well as an area on the tri-junction between India, Bhutan and Tibet. Typical of the Chinese, they would often intrude into the claimed areas and withdraw the same day, just to reiterate their claims. These intrusions must have occurred at least 8 to 10 times during my Bhutan tenure. Apart from our protesting to China on behalf of Bhutan, under the provisions of the Indo-Bhutan Treaty, neither side reacted beyond the protests. China, of course, understood India's sensitivities.

However, one serious incident of incursion took place on the 3rd May 1970, which happened to be the King's birthday. Our President had just returned after a very successful state visit announcing India's agreement to support Bhutan's bid for UN membership. I was taken aback by a personal phone call from the King. He said, "Das, the Chinese wish to give me a birthday gift. They have encroached right up to my Army checkpost in Ha sector. If they move further, I have no choice but to respond. Could you come and see me urgently?"

The King's request of this kind was the first I ever received. I rushed to his chambers and saw him pacing up and down in great distress and anger. After giving me details of this eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation, he said, "I want you to inform your Prime Minister. I also want you to alert the Indian Army and Air Force to prepare to move into Bhutan and protect it. My troops will resist the Chinese if they move further. Please let me know in two hours, if India is moving in to protect my country."

This was a serious situation. I had no modern means of communication to reach Delhi so quickly and get a decision from our Prime Minister. I contacted the GOC-in-C of the Indian Army on our borders, and the AOC-in-C located at the airbase in Shillong in Meghalaya. Both were very understanding of this tricky situation but could not respond without instructions from Delhi at the highest levels. However, they asked me to convey to the King that their forces would be put on alert immediately, ready to move if ordered. I conveyed this to the King, and requested him to wait for a few hours before taking any serious action. I believed, as did some others, that the Chinese would withdraw by sunset after having indicated their claim. Indian Army intelligence also conveyed to me that there was no evidence of the Chinese back-up support for the few soldiers who had entered Bhutanese territory. As expected, the Chinese withdrew before sunset.

On one of the visits of a senior Indian Army delegation soon thereafter, we were in discussion about the Chinese border claims and our defence lines in aid of Bhutan. I was shocked to see three different versions of the defence line. The Chinese claims were clear. But, the Indian and Bhutanese side had no common border line to defend. We had assumed our own line, which Bhutan disagreed with. They had their own interpretation based on tax collected from shepherds who came from the Tibetan side. The western sector was very sensitive, with an easy and quick access to the capital if not properly defended. After the May 3 episode, it was decided to take certain defensive measures. It was also agreed that the boundaries between Bhutan and India be clearly demarcated, and boundary check pillars located. To avoid any difference between India and Bhutan on the northern sector adjoining Tibet, Bhutan opened a

special cell to determine and notify their boundary on the entire Tibetan border. India agreed to help through aerial surveys. These efforts were consolidated and India and Bhutan came to a clearer understanding. Boundary negotiations between India and China were mostly based on this work done with a clear perception of the parameters.

The growing tension between India and Pakistan on the eastern front became another area of great concern for Bhutan. With thousands of refugees pouring in from East Pakistan, Bhutan apprehended an influx into its own territory. Apart from that, the closeness between Pakistan and China could be a serious threat. Bhutan provided an easy access route to East Pakistan for China in case a war broke out. Bhutan then would be dragged into that conflict, but the dimensions of the war could squash Bhutan completely. The lurking fear in Bhutanese minds was about India's capability in defending Bhutan against Chinese incursions, what with Indian troops being engaged elsewhere against Pakistan. The King, in his discussions with Kaul and me, doubted if a new independent entity (Bangladesh), on India's eastern sector, with such a huge Muslim majority, would be in India's interests.

These apprehensions of Bhutan were addressed too. The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship of 1971 removed Bhutan's fears of a threat from China. We also assured the King of our commitment to defend Bhutan in case the Chinese became adventurous. Kaul put it squarely thus, "Your Majesty, though an independent country, Bhutan is an integral part of India's security. Our interests are common".

This ended the concerns of the Bhutanese. The King went out of his way to lend support to India, including a symbolic support of wanting to provide some of his troops to be part of the Indian Army. Not only did he himself visit the refugee camps in West Bengal, he even asked his Foreign Minister, Dawa Tsering, to visit the training camps of the Mukti Bahini, which spearheaded the Bangladesh freedom movement. The King personally raised several lakhs of rupees as donation for the refugees. Thus, Bhutan became the only country which stood up as India's partner without any pressure from

Delhi. This sincerity exceeded our expectations when Bhutan recognized Bangladesh on 4th December, immediately after India's recognition on 3rd December. It was a courageous step for such a small and strategically vulnerable country, but that is how the King was. The amazing part was that he was aware of the withdrawal of the entire Indian Army from the borders of Bhutan.

Few believed that Bhutan could have taken such a decision without pressure, or a discussion with India. In fact, the King called a meeting of his Cabinet on 3rd. December 1971 at the commencement of the Indo-Pak war, where some Ministers highlighted the risk factor for Bhutan in recognizing Bangladesh at that juncture. But, the King convinced them of the relevance of this response, and it paid dividends to both sides. Though, at that time, India did not realize the significance of such a step from such a small nation, it later made amends for this wrong judgement.

Soon after 1971, the King floated the idea of an economic union between India, Bhutan and Bangladesh, to develop the north-east and adjoining Himalayan region, leading ultimately to other countries joining in, as a smaller version of ASEAN. We discussed this issue, but Kaul thought, it was too early to be worked upon. The King felt differently. Not wanting to upset India, he just sent Minister Dawa Tsering to Bangladesh to meet their leadership, assuring close economic links between the two countries. Later, Bhutan agreed to have a resident diplomatic Mission of Bangladesh in Thimpu. The idea of SAARC (South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation) was picked up by Bangladesh in consultation with Bhutan. Though reluctant, India later agreed to the concept and SAARC was formally set up. It now has an important role to play, and may emerge in due course as a major player in the development of the South Asian region, or even beyond.

Though there were initial hitches in Indo-Bhutan relations soon after the King's unfortunate death in 1972, Jigme Singhye, who succeeded him, followed his father's policy of close association with India. I now realize the significance of the late King's discussion with me on how his son would emerge as a true friend, and a better ruler than him. The succession was smooth, and the fear of revival of Dorji

power proved misplaced. Some of the credit for this goes to the Queen Mother, Ashi Kesang, who had told me on my visit of condolence, that India should not apprehend any problems from her family. A similar message was conveyed to me by Rani Chuni Dorji, Ashi Kesang's mother, when I visited Kalimpong and called on her a year after leaving Bhutan.

FOURTEEN

Emerging Scenario of Bhutan

BHUTAN WAS MADE VULNERABLE BY THE 1962 Sino-Indian War, and by India's defeated troops struggling through eastern Bhutan. To add to that, China stepped up its claims on this nation. Even under these circumstances, Bhutan refused the Indian request for an Indian Mission, being suspicious of any foreign presence. It was even more doubtful about India, whom it suspected of wanting to bring Bhutan on par with Sikkim as an Indian administered territory. The final crunch came when Chinese troops moved into Tibet and covered Bhutan's borders. India undertook construction of a road network and some power projects in Bhutan, pouring in men and material with almost total financial backing. It was under these circumstances, and with this kind of pressure, that India pushed Bhutan into agreeing on an Indian Mission being set up there. As a consequence, I was appointed to head it. Initially, my task was merely of removing centuries-old suspicions between the two countries. The regular Indian diplomatic presence came only in 1970, when the Political Office in Sikkim ceased to oversee Bhutan. But the basic suspicion remained.

For some inexplicable reasons, India, on becoming independent in 1947, began handling Bhutan and Sikkim as one major post of their political extension, and treated them almost at par. Bhutan felt that Article 2 of the Indo-Bhutan Treaty restricted them from

exercising their sovereignty, in spite of the 1958 declaration of Nehru terming Bhutan and India as two independent countries. A commitment was taken from India to support Bhutan's bid for United Nation's membership, much against the advice of very senior MEA functionaries, who believed that, with China's presence in Tibet, India would be exploited through Bhutanese manipulations. The game of India being played against China, and vice versa, was visible in Nepal. Article 2 prevented this. While the King understood the implications of Chinese pressure, the Dorji clan and its young supporters, including the King's step-brother, Namgyal Wangchuk, wanted to prevent a British-days' scenario in which their country would become a subservient State. This was apart from their own ambitions, which were to exercise an overriding influence over India-Bhutan relations. They thus became the biggest opponents of our presence in Bhutan. While Article 2 did not put any binding conditions on Bhutan's rights as an independent country, it was a quid pro quo relationship in terms of non-interference in Bhutan's internal affairs if Bhutan followed India's advice in its external relations. It became a kind of bridging, provided India manifested power as the British did. The difference was that in the days of British rule, China had been a weak power, with no military presence in Tibet. In post-independent India, on the other hand, China faced India directly, having now occupied Tibet. This posed a serious military threat, with Bhutan having no means to defend itself except with Indian support. India's defeat in 1962 in the Sino-Indian war complicated matters for it.

Article 2, and the Treaty as it stood, was a baton that India carried, to prevent Chinese misadventures. It also protected Bhutan against the Chinese. Few in Bhutan, or even in India, understood the significance of this political leverage which India had. But, the King did, and he used both these against other countries' pressures for their own Missions in Bhutan. Amongst them, China and Japan were the most aggressive, with offers from Australia, and even Switzerland, tempting the Bhutanese to open up. It was a subtle game being played when the Indian Mission established its presence in 1968, with Chinese military incursions to claim territory being the most visible aspects of it.

The Then Crown Prince Jigme Singhey Wangchuk welcoming President of India Mr. V.V. Giri in Bhutan—1970

President V.V. Giri with their Majesties—1970

The late King Jigme Dorji, on his part, played a very cool and subtle game himself, controlling the pressures of his own people to amend the Treaty, and standing up to nations which subtly threatened to veto, the proposal for Bhutan's UN membership if it did not relax its relationship with India. When India agreed to sponsor it formally in the UN in 1970, the King one day said to me, "Das, I used Article 2 to beat the Chinese, who wanted equal privileges with India. I told their emissaries behind the scene, that Bhutan was helpless under Article 2 and unless India agreed, I could not open it up for others. I explained", he went on, "that Bhutan was constrained by its legal obligations. I played on this aspect, and the Chinese could never find an answer, because they knew Indian interests superceded any liberties to be taken by Bhutan".

This was a very shrewd game that the King played. He went even further with the American Ambassador Kenneth Keating, who was visiting Bhutan to provoke the locals to stand up to Indian pressure. He apparently told some members of the King's family that if India did not protect their interests, America would! When Keating called on the King, the host, in his own way, raised this issue saying, "Mr. Ambassador, thank you for your concern for my family. I doubt if such an occasion will ever arise, with India being our close friend". It shut Keating up. Later he called on me, pleading that India needed to have a more liberal attitude towards Bhutan. After all, Bhutan was an independent country and the UN would take these factors into consideration before accepting it as a member of the UN.

Japan's Ambassador to India, on his visit to Bhutan, was very aggressive with me. He said that with India's attitude, Japan may have to reconsider supporting Bhutan. I need not mention the Ambassador from Nepal.

Without exception, the King snubbed each of these emissaries in a very polite and subtle way, always stating how friendly India was, and how it would be helping Bhutan to take its rightful place in the UN. The King used Article 2 in every way it suited Bhutan's interests. In one of my very animated meetings with the present King's brother, I told him that Article 2 protected Bhutan from

foreign manipulations, and ensured the country's security and stability. When I told him how his grandfather, the late King, used it to put China in its place, the young Prince had no answer to offer.

Why and how this Treaty was revised, I do not know, except through some confidential briefings, I received on a personal basis from both sides. For all practical purposes, Article 2 was never exercised when Bhutan joined the UN in 1971, and neither thereafter. I disagreed with this approach. Article 2 had been the best safeguard for both sides, besides helping to establish a lasting relationship. One visible manifestation of this was the emergence of Bangladesh, and Bhutan's pro-active role in recognizing it so early, that too, without any pressure from India. I remember the King having explained to me after the war, that the Treaty provided for consultation under Article 2, with mutuality of interests forming the basis. Bhutan's interests lay in following India's example. Thus, I was disappointed at the revocation of Article 2.

Bhutan is an enigma in many ways. It appears to be a very peaceful and stable country, closely interlinked with India. However, fast moving events could bring about a major political change in its personality and attitude. With a new democratic constitution, and with various political parties, it will throw up new and serious challenges. With the Indo-Bhutan Treaty having been revised, India's role will take a new direction.

Having had a very close association with Bhutanese royalty and personalities, I can safely assert that Bhutan gained substantially through a manipulative use of Article 2. Now that it ceases to exist, Bhutan will no longer have the protection it afforded, when faced with some difficult decisions in the future. India hardly ever used Article 2, except in taking up the case of the Chinese intrusions into Bhutanese territory, and a few other issues. The Chinese would always reject India's protests, but knew well that India's security interests could not be trifled with. Article 2 was an instrument for this. It will be an agonizing and tricky process now to design benevolent intervention which protects the interests of both countries. I expressed these views very openly and emphatically to important segments of Bhutanese policy framers, and also

mentioned my apprehensions to similar levels in India, but it had no effect. There was no logic in the present circumstances to change the treaty, especially till the boundary dispute with China has been resolved. Functionally, Bhutan and India had evolved a very viable, sustainable, and effective relationship without in any way affecting Bhutan's sovereign status in any international parlays. India's own relations with China demand that our political nuances be effectively used till our relations are stabilized.

The major problem Bhutan faces today is from within. Its ethnic content, with a fairly substantial population of Nepalese origin, and surrounded by a huge Nepalese content in India on its southern borders, will be of concern. Added to, this is the soft belly on the eastern wing. With the tribal linkages of North-East India to the eastern Bhutanese, the nation witnessed an upheaval when it had to launch military operations against the ULFA and the Bodos. These groups infiltrated deep into eastern Bhutan, intermarried and occupied territorial pockets, making them operational centres against Indian forces across the border. It is no secret that some important personalities in the Bhutan hierarchy bought peace with these terrorists, closing their eyes to their entry into India. Repeated requests from India to control these elements had little effect, till the ULFA and Bodos grew to become serious ethnic and territorial threats to eastern Bhutan. Faced with a dangerous situation, Bhutan launched operations in conjunction with India to throw out these well-established terrorist elements.

Another threat which perhaps hurt the Bhutanese, was the sponsored move to use the name of Bhutan's refugees located in Nepal, who were 'reported' to be threatening to use terrorist methods in association with the ULFA and the Bodos. All kinds of stories were circulated. In a meeting held by the UNHRC, I was shocked to hear one of their representatives hinting at such a possibility. I have been one of those who were against the UNHRC running these refugee camps in increasing numbers. One can understand the UN giving funds to run these camps, or looking after their rehabilitation. But when it came to the aspect of "justice", it got bogged down in politics. The human aspect was lost in a blame

game. This continues even today, without a solution being worked out between the two countries.

In 1996, I was approached by a very senior personality from Nepal to advise on seeking a way out, based on my experience in Bhutan. I mentioned that a solution was possible, keeping in mind the question of authenticity of the refugee figures which, I said, should be ascertained by an impartial body, without intervention of the UNHRC or the governments involved. Once this figure was arrived at, negotiations between the two sides could be carried out in the strictest secrecy, through intermediaries. The whole issue, I explained, would have to be divided into two: figures acceptable to Bhutan, and those being left out. The first step would be to ask Bhutan to start the process of rehabilitation of acceptable numbers. I believe Bhutan had identified 12,000 such refugees at a time when the total figure quoted was 80,000. The number now exceeds one lakh, with an unascertained influx. The next step would be to identify the numbers which Nepal would accept, and leave the remaining for India to negotiate, with a scheme to resettle a substantial number within India, and persuade Bhutan to increase acceptable figures within a reasonable limit. If such a process was acceptable to Bhutan or Nepal, I held, one could explore a possible way out.

The Indian dilemma was that, on account of the ethnic content in Bhutan, it did not like to aggravate the problem of that nation by forcing all the refugees to be resettled there. India tried for a workable scheme, but failed. This was because of two reasons. One was the Bhutanese insistence on a verifiable way of tracing the origin, which they alone could decide. And the second was Nepal's refusal to accept the authenticity of such verification. In fact, these refugees were instigated to cross into Bhutan, and India had to prevent such an influx. There was also reason to believe that such refugees were being approached by ULFA to join hands in creating problems both for Bhutan and India. Our MEA was aware of these developments. Keeping the larger view of Bhutan's stability and ethnic balance in mind, India could not support the demand of the refugees, or of Nepal. It has been a very wise decision, Bhutan being

most vulnerable on its southern boundaries, which are dominated by people of Nepalese origin.

The late King Jigme Dorji often talked to me of his apprehensions that Nepal would visualize a "Maha Nepal" constituting Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim, and some Nepalese dominated regions of West Bengal, like Darjeeling. The Southern population of Bhutan, constituting over 90% of Nepalese origin, would be used as a launching pad in Bhutan, apart from the 75% of the entire Sikkim population which is Nepalese. One prime reason for his policy of closeness to India was to ensure protection of Bhutanese culture, and independence from Nepalese political intrusion. Sikkim's merger with India for various reasons resolved Bhutan's dilemma to an extent. However, this entire region could be a source of serious concern for Bhutan's stability, especially with the opening of a political route within Bhutan, through the new Constitution.

There is yet another danger within. The past history of Bhutan has been one of intrigues related to sharing of power, especially within the royal family. With the family having a larger front of vested interests, inner power struggle may pose a problem. This probably started with the earmarking of the line of successors by Jigme Singhe Wangchuk. There was no logical reason for him to abdicate, and that too pre-dating it by a year. Was it that he wanted to play a behind-the-scenes role, controlling family dissensions? Perhaps it was also to ensure a smooth succession for his eldest son, the present King, who was born to the third Queen. He wanted the throne for his eldest son, not the son of the first queen, who was younger. One does not know the truth, but numerous stories do the rounds. Perhaps the former King also felt that with the lurking dangers within, entrusting political power to the people was a more lasting and stable solution for Bhutan's future. Only time will tell. Undoubtedly, the former King's enunciation of the concept of Gross National Happiness as an index of growth, replacing GDP, and giving a democratic system to his people, will go down in the world's history as a unique and unparalleled step. As a friend of Bhutan for all these four decades, and having seen it grow from scratch, I fervently wish and pray for this unique experiment to succeed.

Bhutan's economic prosperity is assured if its political stability endures. With a captive client like India using its entire energy resources, Bhutan's revenue resources should always remain in surplus, apart from its vast forest and mineral assets. This is over and above the aid which is received by Bhutan from other countries. If this role model succeeds, Bhutan could be a living example of political sagacity in South Asia.

FIFTEEN

Municipal Commissioner of Delhi

I WAS SHOCKED BEYOND WORDS WHEN I received my posting to Delhi as Municipal Commissioner. It was obvious that the misunderstanding with General Maneckshaw had influenced Mrs. Gandhi to decide against T.N. Kaul's proposal for me, which was to send me as Ambassador to Afghanistan. But, to be given the Delhi assignment, one so tricky, and of which I had no experience whatsoever, was a surprise. If I were to believe the words and the letter of Mr. Govind Narain, the Home Secretary, my past services were being appreciated. The Cabinet Secretary confirmed it. A cadre post of IAS was being given to an IPS officer, which was most unusual. Though I was very uncomfortable, it was a challenge I could not refuse.

I joined as Municipal Commissioner of Delhi in July 1972. I was warned that I had to speak in Hindi in the House. I brushed up the language, which had been reasonably good in any case. In my first introduction, sitting next to the mayor, Kedarnath Sahni, I had to address the House. Dressed immaculately, I spoke in classic Hindi. Since all the 107 members present were aware that I was a diplomat, with my last posting as Ambassador, they did not expect me to be so familiar with the language. As I was speaking, the opposition leader Kishori Lal raised a point of order saying,

Mr. Mayor, we do not understand the language of the new Commissioner. He may be asked to speak in normally spoken Hindi".

I then used a mixture of Hindi and Urdu words hoping that this would satisfy the Opposition leader. The Opposition party was the Congress, while the party in power was the Jana Sangh, which later became the BJP. Kishori Lal again got up and said, "Mr. Mayor, the shirt which the Commissioner is wearing, disturbs my concentration. He may be advised to come in normal dress, such as we wear". I was wearing a plain coloured beige suit. My shirt was pin-striped, which diplomats normally wear. Being new to this culture, I could not understand these interruptions. After the meeting, the Mayor took me aside and said, "Dasji, these interruptions are common. In your case, knowing your past, the Opposition leader wanted to unnerve you or even test your tolerance. Don't be upset. You will get used to much worse things."

Immediately after a House meeting, a Press Conference is conducted. It was my first, and I was pretty nervous. Luckily, the press spent more time enquiring about my diplomatic experiences, and I added a few juicy stories, which saved my day! But, at the end of it, I was exhausted and uncomfortable. I decided to take rest and go to sleep in the palatial house, the well known 33, Rajpur Road, which used to be the Chief Minister's house in earlier days. I was later told that after the first Chief Minister's stay, his successors refused to occupy that residence. Rumor had it that it was a house which brought bad luck, and that even a ghost visited it occasionally! The politicians being what they were, they refused to stay there. That is how it became the Commissioner's residence. A beautiful house with large airy rooms and well lit lawns, it was built in the British days. It was unfortunate that the nature of the Commissioner's post had made the residence a centre for demonstrations and slogan shouting. During my one year's stay, I could hardly ever be at peace with this situation.

The night was disturbed by calls complaining of water shortage and power failures. Some of these calls came from important people, and it was difficult to refuse attending to them. From the peace of

the lovely Himalayan mountains in Bhutan, I landed in a job where even the Gods could not help in letting me sleep in peace!

Within two months of my joining, news came of King Jigme Wangchuk's death in a safari in Kenya. I was shocked beyond words, as I had become close to him, and we had built up a relationship which crossed the barriers of status. The MEA were kind enough to include me in the delegation of India's Vice President, Mr. Pathak, to go to Bhutan for the funeral. Dr. Jagjiwan Ram, who was the Defence Minister, was also a member of our delegation. I saw the late King lying in State, his body embalmed. It was in the same room of his cottage which I had visited several times. Only I noticed the packet of 555 cigarettes and the lighter kept next to the body. It was the brand that the late King smoked, and that I shared every time I visited him. I knelt beside the body in homage, and prayed. It was a very emotional moment for me. The Crown Prince, who took over as King at a young age of 18, sat in silence, as did Ashi Kesang, the Queen Mother.

A few months went by. As I settled down in Delhi, I began to be pro-active, mainly because the legislative wing consisting of the Jan Sangh members, and the opposition wing consisting of the Congress, together kept me busy. One fine day, the leader of the Congress, Kishori Lal, asked me to get rid of the city's encroachments, starting from his constituency. I did not understand the internal political groupings within the Congress or the Jan Sangh, and so, I readily agreed. After briefing the Lt. Governor, Baleshwar Prasad, I instructed P.P. Srivastava, my Deputy Commissioner, to launch the drive. Within a few hours, I was summoned by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi through her Jt. Secy. Bishan Tandon, a close friend of mine. He told me how Kishori Lal's rival, B.R. Bhagat, the local Congress President, persuaded the P.M. to visit his area where the encroachments, including some huts, had been removed. She was furious. I was ushered into her presence by Tandon, and received a mouthful. I had never witnessed her in this mood. She condemned the entire bureaucracy, accusing them of hurting the poor people. I was asked to conduct an enquiry, fix responsibility, and recommend the action that should be taken against them!

I went to the L.G., who too had received a dressing down. He washed his hands off the entire episode, saying that it was the Municipal Commissioner's responsibility and he had no role to play. When I reminded him that his clearance had been taken, he said, "You know Das, I have so many areas to cover as Delhi's Governor. You have to enquire into the matter". I was very surprised and shocked. It made me realise that we had to be responsible for our actions rather than seek shelter. Since the drive was launched on my instructions as the Municipal Commissioner, I wrote out a one-page report taking full responsibility for the action, as prescribed under the law. I went over to the P.M.O. and handed over my report. Nothing happened, but I was very disturbed.

Connected to this incident was another encroachment drive in Delhi, where we discovered written evidence of the local Municipal Councillors having illegally allotted small spaces on public pavements and roads to the encroachers, from whom they would extract a substantial monthly rent. They made a considerable amount of money, which shocked me. On account of the L.G.'s attitude, I could do nothing, and even more so because of the fact that I had been pulled up by no less a person than the P.M. It was all a game of politics by all the political parties, and it was certainly a money earning racket.

Several incidents occurred during this tenure. I prepared a scheme for beautifying the Jama Masjid, a prime attraction of the national capital. The media got the news and all the newspapers carried the scheme of development. Within a few hours I received a call from Moni Malhotra, a Deputy Secretary in the P.M.'s office, saying that the P.M. was very upset that she was not informed of this. He told me, "Sir, I am sorry but you must know that the P.M. has the final say in all development designs of Delhi monuments. Please send me the Jama Masjid improvement plans. I will take her approval".

Except Kedar Nath Sahni, the Mayor, who was dignified and gave me respect, most of the senior Jan Sangh leaders were very interfering. Balraj Khanna, a veteran leader of that party, committed suicide after being exposed for his deeds. Since the Municipal

Commissioner did not work under the Municipal Council, and was, in fact, answerable to the Ministry of Home Affairs, I would go directly to the Home Secretary, Govind Narain, a suave and intelligent person whom I had known for many years. Jag Mohan, the then Vice-Chairman of the Delhi Development Authority, was a power within his own domain, with close links to the Congress hierarchy. He changed his political allegiances several times; in one instance he become a close confidante of Sanjay Gandhi, the power behind the Congress government under the Emergency in 1975. Later, he joined the successor party of the Jan Sangh, the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), and even became a Minister in the Central government.

The entire working environment of the Municipal Corporation was vitiated by politics. The Central government under the Congress, with a powerful leader like Indira Gandhi, would not permit liberties to the local Municipal Council beyond what the law provided. Jan Sangh had a different approach; it sought autonomous functioning of the essential services. A running battle would take place where the Commissioner, as an employee of the Central government, had to serve as the head of the local body, with control over finances and services, and also act as a kind of collateral to the Mayor, a public figure heading the Corporation. This meant that the Commissioner had to wend his way through these political groupings, and provide efficiently run civic services. This was not an easy task, especially for a person of my temperament. Corruption was rampant, with more than 60 per cent of Delhi now having illegal colonies and encroachments upon public land. To remove an encroachment for building a road or a bridge would become an endless process, what with each political party supporting its own electoral area, and using all the pressures it could muster.

One of the strongest pressures I faced was when the entire cleaning staff of Delhi Corporation went on strike, all 20,000 of them. They were affiliated to the Congress party and, naturally, the ruling Jan Sangh was totally opposed to any deal with the strikers. The representatives of the cleaning staff surrounded my office throughout the working hours each day, shouting slogans and banging drums, preventing me from normal functioning, and

pressurizing me to concede their demands. The Congress party put me under great pressure to side with the strikers. One day I was summoned by the Home Minster of the Government of India. In his own style, he communicated the desire of the Congress to be supportive, hinting that I being a civil servant, had to take a view that was different to the Jan Sangh which was ruling the Corporation. I was even handed a pre-written agreement, drafted by the Minister's staff, resolving the issue. I refused to sign it. While I was no doubt an employee of the Central government, I was at the same time responsible to the party ruling the Municipal Corporation. I could sign no agreement without their concurrence. I came back and discussed this with the Mayor, after which I went up in his esteem. He had appreciated my courage. However, this did not go down well with the Congress party.

I went to the Home Secretary, Govind Narain, and requested him to consider me for some other assignment. He just smiled and said, "You have to handle things. You having been a diplomat, we expect you to find a way". I realized what he was hinting at. But this episode with the Minister resulted in my being dubbed a Jan Sangh man. On the other hand, when the Mayor asked me to join him with others to come out on the streets of Delhi to sweep the roads, I refused, as it was a political gimmick. This was not liked by the ruling Jan Sangh party, which felt that I was under pressure from the Congress. I lost both ways in the political sense, and suffered greatly during the Emergency days of 1975 as a consequence.

The only positive thing for me in all this was the recognition by all the political parties in the Corporation, of my being a completely non-political civil servant. The send-off that I received from all of them a year later was indeed emotional. They passed a unanimous resolution praising my contribution, and sent a copy to the P.M. and the President of India. I felt very happy and surprised.

I also succeeded in breaking up the strike of the cleaning staff in a peculiar way. I came to know that the leader of the Union led a luxurious life, had a car, and that even his son was studying abroad. With his known background, he could not have afforded this life style. Enquiries revealed that he made every member pay a monthly

contribution of ten rupees for his services as the leader, apart from other sources which he built up through the Congress party. He was a rich person through this. In a meeting to resolve the impasse, I casually asked this person if he needed any financial support for his son in the USA. Apparently the members had not known about this fact, so the minute I said this, a few members of his Committee walked out and began shouting slogans against him. The whole agitation collapsed when other aspects of misuse of funds came to light. After a month of noisy demonstrations, peace was restored around my office. I also fulfilled the Home Secretary's expectations of using diplomatic skills in resolving problems!

It being my first exposure to civic administration, I could not reconcile myself to the contradictions in the city management, what with others intruding into the realm of services. There was the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC), covering an elite stretch of 35 square miles, in which Lutyen's Delhi was the prime area. This included the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Parliament, offices of the central government and of political parties, and the residences of Ministers and senior civil servants. The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) controlled all land development activities, including slums and related services. Then, there was the Central Public Works Department (CPWD), in charge of roads and bridges. There were other agencies too, each independent of the other, and working under the State or Central government.

The Delhi Municipal Corporation (DMC), with its 60,000 employees, looked after water supply, power, primary education, sewage, hospitals and sanctioning of all building plans. There were 107 corporators elected from their respective wards. The Corporation was headed by the Mayor, Kedar Nath Sahni, a veteran RSS and Jan Sangh leader, who was cultured and educated. The Commissioner was the head of the executive wing. There were the Undertakings for power, sewage and water supply headed by senior bureaucrats answerable to the Corporation. These senior heads were appointed by the Central government, including the heads of DMC, NDMC and DDA. The Lt. Governor of Delhi was the Chief Administrator. Delhi had a Metropolitan Council which was a

symbol of the State government. Later, when Delhi was made a State with a Chief Minister, this Council was abolished.

Each of these institutions had its role in running Delhi's civic services, and also in urban development. They overlapped each other in many ways, causing serious bottlenecks. The Lt. Governor, working under the Central Home Ministry, oversaw the functioning of various civic services. DMC did not work under the L.G. as others did, but was overseen by him, and he had the power to recommend its dissolution if its performance or actions were violating the Delhi Municipal Act under which it was constituted. The Commissioner played a coordinator's role in financial and administrative matters in which the L.G. was a key figure, though undefined under the DMC Act.

The Commissioner's position was one of putting together all diverse matters in the capital's civic governance with a very delicate and sensitive environment of rival political parties controlling the Centre, and the city of Delhi. I could understand now the emphasis placed by the Home Secretary on my diplomatic role. It helped me to handle the issues differently. Assisted by three Deputy Commissioners, Virendra Prakash, P.P. Srivastava and B.R. Tamta from the IAS, who were on deputation to the Corporation like me, I was able to steer my way through various pressure groups. We also handled the media fairly well without any major mishaps. The problem lay in the totally inadequate civic services like water and power supply. There was no way to meet the shortages, and this caused serious reactions from the populace. My very able and dedicated staff officer, Deshbandhu Gupta, who was a thoroughbred Corporation man, always kept me on the alert. Though well immersed in the political waters, he was uniquely honest and loyal. We maintained a very close relationship even in later years, after I retired. Another outstanding officer was the legal adviser, O.P. Chabra, a man from the judiciary who stood by me like a rock. Forming the core group with all these officers (who became personal friends), apart from the heads of various divisions like M.U. Bijlani, the Chief Engineer, we worked as a very well-knit team. This earned us considerable respect from the legislative wing, and they never played any pressure games with our functioning. All these officers

got promoted to very senior positions within and outside the Corporation in due course of time. In fact, P.P. Srivastava, who started his career as an IPS officer and later graduated into the IAS, had the longest and most successful tenure as Commissioner.

Even though I was able to set up a well-integrated team that functioned fairly smoothly under some very difficult circumstances, I could not be at peace with myself. The utter corruption at the junior levels was unbelievable. The city of Delhi, the nation's capital, was one large chunk of illegal settlements and blatant encroachments on public property. My efforts were fruitless in this respect. When the Minister of State at the Centre, K.C. Pant, asked me to do a quick survey of Delhi's slum population, I was shocked beyond words at the results. Out of Delhi's population of four million in 1972, more than 60 per cent lived in slum clusters and *katras*—one-room living space carved out of old buildings with no sanitary or other facilities. The unauthorized colonies created after 1948, which had come up illegally, stood on land occupied mostly by migrants who were either refugees from Pakistan or small traders from adjoining areas in the national capital region. There were hardly any facilities in the colonies. Water and power were regularly stolen, straining Delhi's meagre supplies. In contrast was New Delhi, set up in a small area as the seat of the Central Government and designed by the famous architect Lutyen. It had luxury and comfort beyond words, with houses of ministers occupying an expanse of 3 to 5 acres each.

Govind Narain, my mentor over the years who was also very fond of me, quietly worked behind the scenes to get me out of this assignment. In this scheme, some of the major players were those with whom I had worked closely. They were P.N. Haksar, Kewal Singh and T.N. Kaul. On 7th April 1973 (a historic date for me), Foreign Secretary Kewal Singh called me up while I was having lunch. He said, "Das, you are being recalled by External Affairs. Leave whatever you are doing, and report to me immediately. You will not talk about this to anyone." I rushed to him, not knowing the exact nature of the assignment, till the Home Secretary rang up to say "Congratulations. You have been selected to head the Sikkim government which has collapsed. Hope you will be happy. Again, we trust your diplomatic skills and capabilities. So, please do not let

us down." I could not believe my ears. Perhaps, exposure to a monster like the DMC had been necessary to prepare me for a much more delicate and sensitive task involving the country in the international arena.

The newspapers and radio broadcasts of the next day carried headlines on my appointment, describing it as a take over of Sikkim by India! A special session of the Corporation was called the same day, and I received some of the warmest compliments from all the political parties when they bid me an emotional farewell. Their delegation, headed by the Mayor, saw me off at the airport on the ninth, a gesture that did not have any precedent.

All this was indeed a surprise to me. Directionless in terms of a well defined service career, the pendulum was swinging for me, from one end of the spectrum to the other, all through unusual, difficult, and sensitive assignments which were not even related to my service! The Sikkim chapter changed the course of my future completely. But, it was not all smooth sailing. Every step was difficult and uncertain.

SIXTEEN

Sikkim

I HAD BEEN TO SIKKIM EARLIER, when posted to Bhutan, and had also met the Chogyal as a courtesy, but this scene, and this occasion were entirely different. On reaching Siliguri, I was pushed into an Air Force helicopter and flown to Gangtok. The helipad was lined on both sides by crowds of anti-Chogyal demonstrators, led by Kazi Lhendup. Sudhir Devere of the Political Office, the Chief Secretary of Sikkim, the Police Commissioner, and the Indian Army's representative, Brig. P.S. Hoon, all welcomed me. I was ceremoniously conducted to a dais from where the demonstrators took over, and I had to walk in front of the group, all the way to my earmarked house, earlier the residence of the *Dewans*[1].

It was a long and tiring walk, but a thrilling experience all the same, with so much suspense thrown in. This was my first occasion in a long career to have been received in this grand fashion, and my ego shot to the skies.

It was shattered the very next day. When I asked for a meeting with the Chogyal, his secretary informed me that he had to consult his royal astrologer to decide the auspicious date and timing of our

[1]After India's independence, a new post of *Dewan* was created to help the ruler in the state's administration. Such a title existed in most of the princely states under the British.

meeting. I may have been deputed by India's Prime Minister to take over the government, but the Chogyal was the ruler and, constitutionally, I was his appointee. I was received by him a day later, at a time that suited his stars!

Our meeting was disastrous and acrimonious. After the usual exchange of ceremonial *khaatas* (white silk scarves), the Chogyal said, "Mr. Das, please note that Sikkim is not Goa, which you have come to take over as Administrator. We are independent, and your services have been lent to my government by yours. Let there be no misunderstanding on this".

Then he burst into a torrent of sarcasm, of how Delhi had treated him, and how the party of Kazi Lhendup was behaving like goons out to destroy Sikkim's identity. He asked me to tell Delhi that it was he, the Chogyal, who was a true friend of India, and not those rogues who roamed the streets spreading terror and violence. He was shocked that in spite of being an honorary Major General of the Indian Army, he had been insulted by this very army. It had taken over all the police stations, confining their personnel to the barracks. "I shall never forgive the Indian army for this humiliation", he said.

Finally he stated that he could not accept my designation as the Administrator. I suggested very diplomatically that perhaps the title could be changed to Chief Executive. Though a very shrewd person, he missed the nuance of this title. 'Chief Executive' automatically gives the status of a head, covering all executive powers. Without realizing it, he immediately agreed, and I obtained the Foreign Secretary's consent. Thus, posted as Administrator, I became the Chief Executive of Sikkim, heading the government with all the powers which the Chogyal exercised as a Ruler, all except judicial powers, wherein he was the ultimate court of appeal over Sikkim's High Court.

On reaching Gangtok, I went straight to my friend Shankar Bajpai at the India House. It was a historical building, constructed by the British in the early 20th Century as the Residency. It was the seat of British power, where the first Political Officer, Sir Claude White, presided in 1904, looking after Bhutan and Sikkim. In those

At Nathu La—1973

very beautiful surroundings, we sat over a drink and lunch, little realizing that both of us together would rewrite the history of Sikkim by correcting the errors of the post-independent Government of India.

Shankar asked me what instructions I had brought from Kewal Singh. Since I had not been allowed to bring any papers from Delhi, nor had any written directions been given, I had just jotted down the key points in a small diary. Kewal had asked me to destroy this evidence after talking to Shankar, though none of these indicated the final objective. Typical of Mrs. Gandhi, she never allowed herself to be pinned down to a political commitment, except in generalities, leaving her close advisers to draw their own conclusions, which must fit into her approach. Shankar and I smiled at one directive: "We must support the aspirations of the people of Sikkim, and should not allow the Chogyal to exploit them". In fact, this was the key to all future planning, and gave an automatic answer to our role, fitting into Mrs. Gandhi's idea of …? (ending in a question mark). The word 'merger' was never mentioned. Even Kewal, our 'controller' from behind the scenes, never uttered this word. But, Shankar and I knew without being told. This enabled us to move ahead in unison and we achieved all that we had to.

But, this was not an easy task. Delhi came under virulent attack by China and Pakistan, and severe criticism from some western nations including the USA, thus bringing us under great pressure. While the Soviet Union was advising caution, others were attacking India, calling it a colonial power. Bhutan, the Himalayan neighbor, which did not like Sikkim, kept very quiet through all this, though it relished the idea of India's 'take over'. Of all the countries which should have been happy, we expected that the primary one would have been Nepal, with 75 per cent of the Sikkimese being of Nepalese origin, thus forming the majority in the uprising. And yet, it was India's biggest critic! The Chinese were knocking on the borders, with a very sensitive point at Nathu La having an access from Tibet with an old connecting road of the British days. In fact, this was the centre point of British political and economic dominance for inner Tibet.

Based on historical evidence, there were two enclaves within Tibet which Sikkim claimed. But, these were occupied by China. As a whole, Sikkim itself was claimed as a part of the Chinese empire. It was obvious that China was concerned with the extension of India's political presence after the fall of the Sikkim government, and viewed it as having been, in a sense, taken over by Delhi. So we expected Chinese reaction soon.

Delhi had not foreseen such an international response, which would be so critical of India. It wanted a quick settlement of key issues, such as fresh elections based on one-man-one-vote principle. The Chogyal was vehement in his opposition to this demand. The electorate being 75 per cent Nepalese under Bhutia domination headed by himself, he knew he would be defeated and lose all his powers.

I was instructed by Delhi to restore normalcy in Sikkim, run its administration without any major incidents, and get rid of pro-Chogyal elements in the bureaucracy who dominated the Court. The Chogyal's American wife, Hope Cooke, had close contacts in America supporting her claim of being the Queen of a sovereign independent country. I was able to restore the administration fairly quickly with all the offices functioning, and the police back on duty. But, I failed to bring the Chogyal in line on the issue of one-man-one-vote, even though he was agreed to hold fresh elections. Sandwiched between the Political Officer putting pressure as India's representative, and myself as his Chief Executive advising him to fall in line with the changed times, the Chogyal capitulated within a month of my joining. The famous May 8 Agreement of 1973 between him and Kazi Lhendup Dorji, with India as a guarantor for maintaining his dynasty and providing justice to all ethnic elements, sealed the Chogyal's fate.

I was allotted a senior IAS officer, R.Sengupta, as the Election Commissioner. Between him and my three assistants—Lal, Manavalan and Sanyal, (also of the IAS)—the electoral rolls were revised and election dates announced. I decided not to make any changes in the top echelons of the bureaucracy, knowing fully well that most of them were Chogyal's men. Except for M.M. Rasailey, the Finance Secretary, whom I shifted as Auditor General, (a post without power), I decided to be fair to the others. I was

under great pressure from Delhi to remove all the key players of the palace coterie, but I evaded the issue and assured Kewal that I could handle them successfully. This confidence was based on my understanding of the Sikkimese psychology, which made them always switch over to the winning side. I spared even the Security Chief of the Chogyal, Karma Topden, and moved him to the Sikkim Trading Corporation at Calcutta. Barring one instance, I never had to use force of any kind, despite the threats.

With the May 8 agreement coming into force, and things beginning to settle down, international criticism decreased. Hope Cooke, whose ambitions were beyond comprehension, realized that she had the status of only a *Gyalmo*[2], and nothing more. She decided to leave Sikkim. The Chogyal pleaded with her to be at his side, as he needed her at that difficult juncture, but she refused. I saw her off on August 14, 1973, when her last words were, "Mr. Das, please look after my husband. I have no role to play now".

Hope Cooke was an enigma to many. Some called her a CIA agent. No one knows the true story. But, she had become the right hand of the Chogyal in his anti-Indian postures. She changed the school books, bringing in anti-Indian stances through stories and cartoons. She had formed a group of young people, including some bureaucrats, who contacted visitors from abroad for propagating Sikkim's independent status and criticizing India for destroying Sikkim's identity. Cooke herself played an active role in deriding India before the foreigners. It was suspected that she was in touch with some foreign elements inimical to India. On the one hand, she would act as a soft spoken royal spouse, projecting herself as the Queen, for the benefit of Indian VIPs; and on the other, would shower a burst of virulent and harsh words on everyone, when losing her temper. Tragically, this dual role exposed her as an actor with no substance. The Chogyal's excessive drinking infuriated her and led to fights, which the family and close friends did not appreciate. With Delhi intervening and taking over Sikkim, she realized she had lost the battle. Very wisely, she quit. Some say, she became withdrawn after that, realizing that her relevance was over.

[2] *Gyalmo* is a Tibetan title for nobility, in this case a wife of a ruler, the Chogyal.

SEVENTEEN

Correcting A Historical Error

PREPARATIONS FOR FRESH ELECTIONS BASED ON 'one-man-one-vote' began. The electoral rolls were finalized, keeping this aspect in mind. Before the elections, the Chogyal wanted to take a tour of the south of Sikkim, which consisted mainly of people of Nepalese origin. The environment was very hostile to him in this area and I advised him against such a tour, but he was insistent. He also wanted me to accompany him in order to prove that he was the ruler and I, merely a symbol of Delhi, was his Chief Executive and, therefore, a subordinate.

As head of the monastic order, the Chogyal started his tour with a visit to the monasteries in this area. In earlier instances, the Lamas would line the streets, but this time they were missing. Apart from conducting a formal ceremony of worship, he found that he had lost the ecclesiastical hold. It was a big shock. But, the worst was to come when he started the tour. He faced abusive slogans, witnessed shoes tied to his portraits, and heard the crowds threatening him. He had lost his charisma as a ruler. With tears in his eyes, he held my hand and said, "I did so much for my people. And now I am humiliated in this way. Why?"

I had no answer. The domination of minority Bhutias, constituting just 14 percent of the population, and the

manipulation and misuse of power through an artificially created proportional representation, had provided the Sikkim Congress, a handle to beat the Chogyal with. I myself felt greatly sad. A tiny Himalayan kingdom, gifted with natural serenity and unimaginable beauty, had become a hotbed of intrigue and exploitation.

The elections were conducted without any violence, or law and order problem. The Chogyal–supported Nationalist Party, consisting mainly of Bhutias, won only one seat out of 32. The newly constituted Assembly was called to take oath, but the Sikkim Congress refused to swear in the name of the Chogyal. His name was substituted by the word 'God'. Then they refused to allow the Chogyal to address the Assembly, as had been the custom. After great persuasion, they agreed to my reading out the Chogyal's inaugural speech, in which he highlighted the separate political and cultural identity of Sikkim. As Speaker, I had to preside over the House under the new constitution, framed under the May 8 Agreement. I was not only the Speaker, but also had to preside over the Executive Council of Sikkim, the replica of a cabinet. While Kazi Lhendup Dorji led the Council, there was no post of a Chief Minister. I was virtually the Chief Minister!

The interim constitution drafted for the new set-up was full of contradictions. As President of the Council, I was answerable for the actions of the government before the Assembly. As Speaker, I could question these very actions as head of the legislative wing, and even had powers to pull up the Councillors!

Very soon, some of the leaders of the Sikkim Congress started a whisper campaign, demanding the positions of Prime Minister and Speaker for the newly elected National Assembly. The Chogyal's supporters fed in the threat that Sikkim's separate identity was likely to be lost, unless the post of a Prime Minister was created. The Chogyal had appointed a *Sidlon*[1], before the anti-Chogyal movement started. I. S. Chopra, a very senior retired IFS officer was the incumbent, but he could not last long in the circumstances that developed. Delhi also refused to recognize him as the *Sidlon*. We

[1] A Tibetan title given to the senior most administrative head, something akin to a *Dewan*

feared that the Chogyal, having lost the first round, would instigate forces which demanded positions and power in the new government that would identify Sikkim as an independent identity. It also became very awkward for me as Chief Executive, to be presiding over the Cabinet, over the head of Kazi Lhendup who was the rightful leader of the government. For me to function as the Speaker as well, was becoming untenable.

Meanwhile, Kazi Lhendup realized that without coming to a closer political and economic association with India, a demand pending from 1947, he would lose the gains of his party's victory. He was also apprehensive, and very rightly so, of the Chogyal and the Nationalist Party creating serious problems in Sikkim's governance. He and his senior advisers decided to approach Delhi for an association with India, enjoying rights and privileges as did the States of India. This written request was accepted by the Government of India, to correct the mistake made in 1947. A resolution was framed to be put up before the Assembly, for its approval to approach India. It was a step towards Mrs. Gandhi's perception of Sikkim's integration.

The Chogyal realized the implications. He discussed the matter with me. Since I was his Chief Executive, he wanted me to be an instrument of opposition to this move, especially as I was the head of government as well as the Speaker. He also engaged a prominent person, a lady lawyer friend, to question the legality of this resolution. I told the Chogyal frankly of the implications of his opposition. Sikkim had no legal status as an independent entity. I reminded him that as he was a member of the Chamber of Princes of India, and an honorary Major General of the Indian Army, he had always been a part of the overall Indian political system. Also, the National Assembly having been elected on one-man-one-vote basis, it gave the legislature the right to bring a resolution of this nature. I cautioned him on his own status. Through the May 8 Agreement, he had become merely a constitutional head, with an assurance by India to maintain not only his position but to ensure his dynasty's succession. I advised him to maintain this position, because Sikkim could never be an independent entity as it had earlier been a Protectorate of India, even under the British. For Sikkim's own good,

and for its peace and prosperity, a close link to India, as was demanded by the Sikkim Congress, would be the real answer. Sikkim's cultural identity would always be protected, and so would the Chogyal's dynasty. He listened but did not respond. When he realized the inevitability of Sikkim's close political and economic links to India through the Indian system, and wanted to redeem the situation, he came to me in July 1974 for help, but it was too late by that time.

The resolution was carried through with only one member opposing it. Sikkim became an Associate State of India. The government was to be headed by a Chief Minister, which Kazi Lhendup became. A Speaker was also designated. My post of Chief Executive was re-designated as that of a Governor when Sikkim finally merged with India in 1975. B.B. Lal of the ICS, who succeeded me as the Chief Executive, took over as Governor.

From being an Associate State, Sikkim's merger as a full-fledged Indian State was a consequence of ill-advised steps having been taken by the Chogyal when he had gone to Nepal in 1975 for the Coronation of the king. His contacts with the Chinese, and some political statements he made, led to serious misunderstandings with the ruling government back home, as well as the Government of India. Therefore, the Sikkim Congress demanded removal of the Chogyal and merger with India. A referendum was held on these issues and both were voted upon by a huge majority supporting the demands. The Chogyal thus lost the final round, and his kingdom too.

Mrs. Gandhi became the architect of Sikkim's new personality. Her sheer grit and determination against foreign pressure was once again displayed after 1971 when she defied the USA, China and Pakistan, leading to the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent entity. No Prime Minister matched her in the projection of India as the key player in this region. Not even her father Nehru could do so. She exhibited no emotions in decision-making, in spite of being a very emotional person as was seen in later years of her life. She was ruthless in perusing her goals, personal or otherwise. She destroyed what came in her way. She paid a very heavy price ultimately, but she was the only man in her government. No one matched her.

EIGHTEEN

The Airports Authority—A New Venture

After the elections in Sikkim had been successfully conducted, I was informed of my posting as member, International Airports Authority of India. The news shocked me. I had just completed a very sensitive, mishap-free assignment, and had in fact rectified a historical error made in 1947 of refusing the Sikkim Congress' request for merger with India. I had been assured by Kewal Singh and others that an important assignment awaited me on the successful completion of my task in Sikkim. I was disappointed beyond words.

I had no idea of the functioning of the IAAI or, for that matter, of aviation management. Why had I been selected for such a job? This question could not be answered by Kewal Singh or others who mattered. I accepted the task but it was clear that the directions came from sources other than the government. Eventually, it all turned out for the best, ultimately helping in shaping my world in a unique and unexpected way. In fact, this posting paved the way for my future, along with the many challenges I faced, both pleasant and unpleasant. In retrospect, they were all worth it.

Air Marshal Malse was my Chairman. Being a thorough gentleman, he sensed my discomfort at having to work under him, when I had earlier been heading the government in Sikkim and

dealing with very senior personalities. He went out of his way to ensure my involvement in all matters of policy, though I was a non-aviation person. The IAAI had come into being in 1972 as a consequence of the Tata Committee's recommendations to separate international operations from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, which handled all operations and management of India's airports. The Committee recommended that the four metro airports, namely Bombay (now Mumbai), Delhi, Madras (Chennai) and Calcutta (Kolkata), which constituted the bulk of Indian aviation traffic, and which had a very different role related to international operations, should be autonomous entities run on commercial lines. As a consequence, the IAAI was formed.

I had a strange feeling of hopelessness within. Every diverse and difficult task given to me had been completed successfully, particularly to the satisfaction of the Prime Minister, who knew me. The most sensitive assignments were Bhutan and Sikkim, which even had a bearing on national policy, apart from international nuances. In each case, I was assured by top persons in the government that I would be suitably placed if I succeeded. Since leaving the police in 1961, I was constantly on trial, and never knew what would come next. And now this posting, being of no consequence, and most dissatisfying, was very shocking to me.

The first break came when Malse left to take over as Vice-Chief of Air Staff, and I was appointed as Chairman after the usual formalities of selection. I could now interact directly with heads of national carriers and the Ministry of Civil Aviation. I also got nominated as a Director on the Board of Indian Airlines. As I was settling down, news started floating that my appointment would be cancelled, and Air Marshal H.C. Dewan, who was rejected for the Chairman's post, would replace me. As it happened, 1975 saw the imposition of Emergency. The sanctity of the selection process had no meaning left, and I was replaced by Air Marshal Dewan. My verbal representation to the Secretary, Personnel, had no effect.

The foreign projects cell set up by me had its first break through. The Libyan government selected us to design and build a new airport in the Sahara desert on the borders of Chad and Algiers. Visiting the site at Ghat, a small hamlet, I was horrified to see the

vast expanse of hundreds of miles of sand with no habitation or water. To build an airport for 747 operating in this sensitive region was a challenge, we had not visualized. We accepted the challenge.

It was not easy. The main problem was the prospect of taking a large labor force to Libya, and then to the site through the vast desert. We would require a team of no less than three to four thousand people. Local recruitment was out of the question, on account of the very limited population and the unskilled workforce. Further, it was almost impossible to recruit such a large contingent in India, and that too, for work in the desert, which offered absolutely no residential space or drinking water.

I sought my Board's approval to turn this project from a labor-intensive one, as directed by the government, to a mechanised one. Since the Board had no powers to change the national guideline, the matter went up to the Cabinet, which cleared our recommendations. It also gave special approval for induction of foreign machines, and technical expertise from Europe. Appointing a retired Brigadier of the Indian Army to head this $43 million project, we engaged an Egyptian firm to explore the water potential. It took them six months to discover an abundance of water, which was sweet and light, and that changed the shape of the entire area.

We completed our assignment successfully in three years, and I personally handed over the new airport to Libya's Deputy Prime Minister. Being satisfied, the Libyan government assigned us another airport project, this time at Barak, another desert area. Being a smaller project, it was also completed in good time. Without having been an airport designing company, IAAI now started getting recognition in the aviation world. We soon bagged an order for restructuring and redesigning Hulule airport in the Maldives. This project involved reclaiming land from the sea and extending the runway to take jumbo flights. From the Sahara desert to the Indian Ocean was quite an arduous journey, and a very challenging one indeed. President Abdul Gayoom himself signed this agreement in the Maldives in 1978 as Minister for Transport.

All these projects were completed successfully, and the IAAI acquired a good reputation within six years of its establishment. It

came to be recognized as one of the most viable aviation companies, having a sound financial base. As I have mentioned earlier, this posting saw my career going into a different direction altogether, and I never looked back again. The assignment with IAAI was a boon, a fact which I was to realize only much later.

Here, an interesting episode relating to the Hulule airport project comes to mind and deserves mentioning. As the runway construction work was to start, we found that the contractor assigned the construction contract was supplying defective machinery. The work came to a halt.

Mr. Abdul Gayoom, then Transport Minister of Maldives, was shocked and furious. I rushed to Maldives where he put me on the mat. He declared, "Mr. Das, we trusted you. How could this happen? What explanation will I give to my government? Please do something urgently."

We had just three days to show results. I rushed back to Delhi and suspended the contractors. Now, we took over the construction ourselves. But we had no machinery, and even that would have to be rushed by air. My friend, late Sushital Banerjee, was the Defence Secretary. I told him of the problem and requested special airlift arrangements by the Air Force. Sushital was shocked at my suggestion, but soon realized that India's prestige was involved. If we failed, other countries such as the UK and Pakistan, would walk in. Sushital required just four hours to respond to me. Meanwhile, we purchased brand new equipment and positioned it at the airport, ready for the cargo flights to take off.

Sushital rang me up, having obtained the approval of the Cabinet to place three AN 12 aircraft at IAAI's disposal. Since Maldives was a foreign country, we could not fly our Air Force planes without the approval of the two governments. Mr. Gayoom rang me up to convey Maldives' approval. Next morning, our Air Force planes landed at Hulule with the machines, and Mr. Gayoom was there to welcome India's gesture and its planes! It was a great feeling for all of us. The credit went to my friend Sushital, who had managed all the clearances at the highest levels within just a few hours. If only we had more such people running the country, I

thought. Meanwhile, Jagmohan Dalmiya had obtained a stay order from the courts, prohibiting the start of work at Hulule by IAAI. We ignored the judicial order, as it did not apply to works in a foreign country, and later, we had this order vacated.

I served in the IAAI till 1978, when I was selected to take over Air India. There is always a silver lining in the cloud of adversities, and this shift was completely orchestrated by personalities whom I had hardly known.

NINETEEN

Sojourn with the Air India Maharaja

J.R.D. TATA, THE AVIATION ICON AND the Chairman of Air India since its inception in 1953, was shown the door in 1978 by no less a person than Morarji Desai, the then Prime Minister. The manner in which this was done was disgraceful. Instead of extending the courtesy of conveying a message directly, or even through his Minister for Civil Aviation, Morarji asked Air Chief Marshal P.C. Lal to convey the decision. He had, in fact, decided upon P.C. Lal to replace J.R.D. At that time, Lal was holding the post of Chairman of a Tata Company at Calcutta! J.R.D. was shocked beyond words. However, being a thorough gentleman and an outstanding personality of India, he accepted the situation very gracefully. The irony was that Lal had himself been humiliated by the earlier Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi, when he was unceremoniously removed at the behest of Sanjay Gandhi. It was J.R.D. who had then stood for Lal, and had made him Chairman of the Tata Company. It surprises me to this day that Lal, a disciplined and courteous man, for whom I had great respect, should have agreed to this unethical procedure of J.R.D's ouster. Sometimes there are no explanations for the strangeness of human behavior.

I took over as Managing Director under P.C. Lal on 7th June 1979. The Air India Chairman was a non-executive head, and all

functional powers rested with the MD. P.C. Lal also made Delhi his headquarters, visiting Bombay only periodically. It was not a good time for me to take over. Jyotirmoya Basu, a CPM firebrand, headed the Parliamentary Committee on Public Enterprises. This committee had made a blistering attack on Air India, and had thus demoralized its personnel. Several senior functionaries were under a cloud. Bobby Kooka, the famous cartoonist of Air India, had resigned, and so had Nari Dastoor, a very eminent Commercial Director. Appuswamy, whom I succeeded, had also put in his papers. Both Lal and I inherited an organization that was low on morale, which was indeed very sad. Till now, Air India had enjoyed a sound reputation and standing as India's national carrier. But, in this manner it was systematically destroyed, step by step, with almost total political control over it.

The MD was a much sought-after person amongst the elite of Bombay and elsewhere. The power and patronage he enjoyed were enormous. All highly placed persons of the country sought favors of him. Free passes, inaugural tours, programme sponsorships, gifts and travels, up-gradation of class of travel, and various other privileges were the patronage that Air India exended.. The most blatantly misused of these 'perks' was the hospitality enjoyed abroad. All outstation Managers had a discretionary grant, which went unaudited. The Regional and Station Managers used this money for business promotion at their discretion. I discovered its misuse at some places by accident.

My very close and personal friend, Gyan Prakash, was the Auditor General of India. His officers used to glance through these expenses without auditing. Gyan Prakash rang me up one day inviting me for a cup of tea. He then showed me certain entries in these so called "Black Books". I was shocked and aghast. So was my friend. Most of the beneficiaries of this hospitality were politicians or senior bureaucrats traveling abroad on duty. I was familiar with some names. My shock was beyond words, as some of the items listed are even uncomfortable to mention! Gyan Prakash requested me to do something to prevent such gross misuse. He said, "Brij, you have been a diplomat. Could you not use your skills to correct this? I cannot audit these accounts, nor can I speak to the users." I

tried to check some of the blatant misuse by speaking to the Managers, but when they narrated some of the stories, I had to quieten them down and advise a suitable approach. I suggested that they could use the excuse of 'directions from the top', or cite paucity of funds. Since I did not stay too long in Air India, I cannot vouch for any substantive effort or result in this matter.

There was another disturbing front. A long history of conflict between the pilots and the management existed. The Pilots Guild, a volatile union, was prone to using unethical language, sometimes even being abusive in their correspondence. Even J.R.D. had not been spared as Chairman. In my first interaction with the Guild, I said, "Gentlemen, I am happy to meet you and shall do my best to consider pending issues. However, I have one request to make. We should deal with each other and talk in a cool manner, setting aside instant emotions. We are all highly educated and responsible people. What is more, we can use the English language in a very polite way. There are excellent words such as 'thank you', 'please', 'sorry', etcetera. I hope we shall meet more often and discuss the problems." The answer I got from the Guild's President, Capt. Narendra, was "Mr. M.D., have you come to teach us English?"

When I attended the Guild's annual dinner, I was welcomed with these words:

> *"Mr. M.D., we are glad that you have condescended to come down from your high pedestal to attend our annual get-together. You are the first M.D. ever to have accepted our invitation!"*

This was amazing. I spent the rest of the evening explaining to the wives as to who I was, and how wonderful it was to meet such charming ladies. Till now there had been so little interaction at the senior levels! Most of the pilots came from the Indian Air Force, where they had been fairly senior officers such as Squadron Leaders and Group Captains. This, and the subsequent meeting, broke the ice, especially when I invited some senior pilots to my residence for drinks. Cleverly enough, the pilots would call themselves "labor", and not "Executives" or "Officers". If they had accepted these positions, they would have lost their privileges as Union workers! My

friend Narendra, the Guild President who had resented my remarks in our first meeting, began to turn mellow, and became very courteous. Later, he tragically lost his life in the transcontinental flight from Canada to London, in a mid-air bomb explosion.

It was easier to deal with the general labour leaders compared to the seniors. What worried me was the low output of commercial activities as a consequence of the Parliamentary Committee's adverse report. The business plummeted. When I went to call on J.R.D., I found he was very disturbed and unsure of Air India's future. We had a long discussion on morale, and the possibility of the Company getting back to its old glory. J.R.D. had become an icon over the years, and neither Lal nor I could ever fill the gap he left, or match him.

Soon, P.C. Lal fell out with the Aviation Minister, Mr. Qureshi. A new culture of political interference had begun. The matter was so petty, yet a directive was given that Lal was to take the Minister's permission before traveling abroad. He refused, and his visit to Japan blew up the crisis. He decided to quit rather than be under the Minister's pressure.

I took over as Chairman-cum-Managing Director. It was a dream that had come true but, like all dreams, it vanished quickly. Mrs. Gandhi returned as Prime Minister in January 1980. The Sanjay Gandhi factor again came into play, this time without the declaration of an Emergency. Behind the scenes, Sanjay had chosen my successor. By now, Mrs. Gandhi had no role to play in important postings, especially where lucrative patronage was involved. The new Aviation Minister, G.B. Patnaik, liked me. We hit it off very well. When some journalists asked him if I was being replaced, he rejected the entire idea. But little did he realize that he himself was a part of the wheel which Sanjay Gandhi controlled and steered.

A replacement for the aging Boeing 747 fleet was badly needed. Much before I joined, the selection of offers for replacement had been finalized. All that was left for me to complete the deal was to negotiate a loan from the Exim Bank and a consortium of other banks led by the State Bank of India. I signed the agreements for purchase of three aircraft. The delivery schedule was a year, and in

phases. Around February, the President of a private aviation company came to offer the three needed aircraft off-the-shelf, with a proviso that the price would be raised by $5 million per aircraft. I explained to him that this could not be accepted, as we already had an agreement duly approved by the Government and the consortium of Bankers. He left.

Within a few days, I received a telex message from the Ministry of Civil Aviation, that such an offer had come, and that my views were urgently needed. Of course, the Ministry knew very well that this kind of a proposal could not even be considered, what with the party demanding $15 million extra for such a deal! But, before I could even reply to the Ministry, the private company again called me up, suggesting that the deal had merit. It was attractive, as it would make Air India earn immediately from these aircrafts, rather than have a time delay of a year. He also mentioned that these earnings would make up for the higher price. Then he said, "And you, Mr. Chairman, would not regret it. Everyone would gain. After all, 3 to 4 million is a big share, which we are prepared for, if only you can clear the suggested offer." I put the phone down.

I was not aware that this aviation company had close links with the power that ruled behind the scenes. I sent my reply to the Minister the same day, reminding the Government of the legal agreement already entered into, and advising that it could not be altered. Some rumours were afloat about my impending departure from Air India. On 5th March 1980, the Minister again vehemently denied this, and said, "There is no proposal to shift Mr. Das, who is doing well." Exactly four days later, on 9th March, I was summoned to Delhi by the Minister. He was sitting with his head bent. After some time he enquired, "Have you met Sanjay Gandhi?" I replied in the negative. His next comment was telling. "You have been naïve. Why don't you call on him?"

I refused, as Sanjay was holding no position, and I had no intention of begging him for a favor when I had discharged my responsibilities as required of a public servant. There was another reason too. While in London, Sanjay Gandhi got into some problems which I sorted out as desired by P.N. Haksar. Sanjay did not like it. He never forgave me for my intervention.

Minister Patnaik insisted that I meet the P.M. When I expressed doubt about her agreeing to give me an audience, he indicated that he had talked to the all-powerful R.K. Dhawan, Mrs. Gandhi's Special Assistant. He also assured me that I would be getting an alternative assignment, the Chairmanship of ITDC, to which the P.M. had agreed.

All this happened without anyone explicitly telling me that Raghuraj, a banker and a friend of Sanjay, had already been posted to replace me. I proceeded on leave for four months, pending my newly promised appointment. I made a request to R.K. Dhawan for a meeting with Mrs. Gandhi. To my great astonishment, it was arranged within a day! I was received courteously by Dhawan, who promptly ushered me into the presence of the P.M. Mrs. Gandhi smiled and asked me to sit down. I merely asked if I had failed in my assignment, or given any cause for embarrassment to her. I reminded her that I had served in Bhutan and Sikkim on her directions. In none of my postings during a full ten years under her Prime Ministership had I given any cause for complaint. I then explained that I still had three years of service left and would be grateful if I was given a suitable assignment. She just went on doodling with her pen, so I knew I had made no impact. I thanked her and left.

All the talk of my taking over as Chairman ITDC had been an eyewash. No such orders were ever issued. In fact, Dhawan conveyed an informal message to me through my Regional Manager, Capt. M.S. Kohli, to forget about any assignment.

Waiting for nearly 14 months for a posting to materialize, I tired out. The papers relating to the aircraft purchase are still with me. I never publicized them as I could not fight the government. But I never expected the tremendous support that I received from many quarters. Not only did the media question this action, but a person of great eminence, late Nani Palkhivala, called me and offered to fight my case in a court. J.R.D., too, was shocked, and wrote me several letters, all carefully preserved by me till now. He sent Ratan Tata to me, offering me the assignment of Managing Director of NELCO, subject to the Board of Directors clearing it. It was not cleared by the French Directors because I was 54 years of age and they wanted a person below 50. Nevertheless, J.R.D. went on

exploring possibilities to fit me into the Tata Group. It did not work out, as his proposal on the restructuring of Air India had no effect on the Minister.

The spirit of revenge never left Sanjay. Pressures began to build up on me. I was on leave but my salary was stopped. My friend P.K. Kaul, the Cabinet Secretary, after discussions with the Minister of Industries, offered me the appointment of Chairman, British India Corporation, at Kanpur. It was an important assignment and I made preparations to join. Once again, I did not anticipate the workings of the shadows behind the scenes. As I stepped into the Joint Secretary's room, to take final instructions for joining the next day, the phone rang. I heard the Joint Secretary say that he would cancel the appointment orders, as directed. I knew it was about me. Before the official could say anything, I pre-empted him with, "So, my posting orders are being cancelled!" He put his head down and muttered, "Sorry Sir, I wish I did not have to play this kind of role." I thanked him and walked away. P.K. Kaul was crestfallen. He told me later that instructions to withdraw the orders had come from 'the top'. I was not to be given any government assignment.

While this drama was unfolding, my wife and in-laws were waiting at home with sweets, realizing that this posting was an important one. Sometimes, God gives immense strength to face such situations. By now I had got used to so many shocks, that I just walked in, picked up a sweet, and declared, "I am not going. Let us enjoy here". Everyone almost collapsed, having waited for good news for over a year. So, on this occasion, they had prepared to give me a really grand send off. But this was not to be.

I had no home of my own, nor even a car. With salary and privileges having been stopped, and no reserves of funds, I was living on the goodwill of my widowed sister, sharing the little creature comforts she could offer in her meagre pension and small home. But, her caring was loaded with immense love. My son had been working for a small-time poultry firm, which he left to set up his own business. This venture failed in no time, and he found himself jobless. With the help of some friends, I was able to get him an opening in Nigeria. His wife and two young children joined me in

Delhi while they waited for him to settle down. To add to this, my daughter, living abroad with her diplomat husband, now came over to Delhi for the medical treatment of her ailing son. There were not enough beds or finances to go around. We spread out mattresses all over, and managed as best as we could. Only my wife and sister realized that all these consequences of the government's actions emanated from Sanjay's backyard. In a way, being thrown together as a family at this time made us all realize each other's problems, and we became closer. I myself learnt a lot from this situation, and many years later the significance of this 'togetherness' dawned upon me. The emotional strength we generated at that juncture was the best training I ever received.

Only in adversity does one realize the value of a friend. At normal times, it is a friendship taken for granted. Astrologers and priests were of no help. My brother-in-law gave me his car to move about. My friend Mahesh Chandra, a year senior to me in college, was an occasional visitor. He had seen me at Burmah–Shell in Bombay in 1946. He himself was working at this time as a management consultant with Price Waterhouse of the Dalmia Group. He came over to see me, and offered me an assignment with the Dalmias, which was to head their Project Division. I was reluctant, primarily because Dalmia did not command a position in the commercial world.

I was called by Secretary Venkataraman of the Aviation Ministry, asking me if I could take my retirement and seek opportunities elsewhere. I laid down conditions that would enable me to leave with honor. I was losing four years of service under the Air India contract. Here I must express my gratefulness for these conditions being accepted. The government could just as well have terminated my services by giving me a month's notice. Instead, I received all the benefits of Air-India, adding my government service of 31 years to the AirIndia tenure. I also received my dues which had been pending for over a year. Today, I enjoy all Air India travel benefits and other perks, though, on paper, I had served for less than two years. Once again, I realized that there is always some good in a set-back.

But I lost four years of my service, the reasons for which I came to know years later. R. K. Dhawan who had faced his own ups and downs under Rajiv Gandhi, met me at a party. He said to my wife, "Mrs. Das, if your husband had not stuck to his principles, we had so many jobs to offer him." To which, my wife replied "If that was the reason for my husband having to leave Air India, I have no regrets. I am proud of him. But let me ask you if being honest was a crime?" Instead of a reply, there was just a sly smile. His next statement was directed at me.,"Mr. Das, I hope you got your salary."

Everything came out in the open now. It was abundantly clear that my refusal to agree to the purchase of aircraft outside the Boeing agreement, as also my refusal to accept 'a cut', was the reason for my removal. Dhawan knew, as Mrs. Gandhi`s Special Assistant, that Air India had withheld my salary for over a year. So, obviously, this action must have been taken on higher instructions. All this had been done to pressurize me into recommending the illegal deal. Such was the atmosphere then, with Sanjay Gandhi ruling the roost.

Then one day we received the news of Sanjay's air crash and death. Many who had suffered on account of him, celebrated. I started getting congratulatory calls, with people saying that there was a pattern in God's justice, and that I should now expect some good news. I could not stomach this. I looked upon this incident as a personal tragedy for Mrs. Gandhi, whom I had not only known since my University days, but under whom I had worked in later years. I had great regard for her despite everything, and to celebrate her personal loss was just not thinkable. Even J.R.D. Tata wrote to me in his very suave style, that he hoped the recent events would now change the very unfortunate atmosphere prevailing all around.

My time in Air India gave me thorough understanding of the company, and thus an insight, in fact a preview of things to come in the future. Even since this organization went into government hands, its commercial aspect took a back seat to other priorities. It became the fiefdom of government officials and politicians, not only for the umpteen private jaunts abroad, but for the excessively proliferating staff that were engaged and employed. My fears were not unfounded, since we see the predicament that Air India finds itself in.

The Air India episode, of living in uncertainty for 14 months, taught me many lessons. Good friends turned their faces away. Even some highly placed relatives kept a distance, for fear of being identified as too close to me. I was persona-non-grata, an untouchable in many ways. It was not easy for me, but perhaps it was for the better, as it hardened me. As I look back at those difficult times, I begin to understand the meaning of impermanence. Nothing lasts forever, not even a relationship. Very surprisingly, and in strange ways, God sends his own messenger to steer one through. Mahesh Chandra, the Price Waterhouse consultant whom I have mentioned earlier, surfaced from nowhere 35 years after our last meeting, and pushed me into taking up an assignment as a senior advisor in the Dalmia Group. That was my initial exposure to the private sector, and is another story in itself.

TWENTY

Air India in Disarray

IT IS ONE OF THE SADDEST EVENTS IN INDIA'S commercial history that a public sector company known as the Maharaja should today be in rags, going around with a begging bowl. Since 1978 when J.R.D. Tata left its Chairmanship, Air India has been on the decline, primarily because a commercial enterprise had been converted into a government department, functionally. Successive political heads, supported by the bureaucracy, treated it as their prized property. Decision-making shifted from the Board of Directors to the Civil Aviation Ministry.

The first victim was Air Chief Marshal P.C. Lal himself. The Ministry directed that its permission would be mandatory for the Chairman and Managing Director to travel abroad. P.C. Lal refused to accept the diktat and resigned within a year of his appointment. I took over as C.M.D. from him. My own story is narrated in the earlier Chapter. One need not go into subsequent events which have led to the present turbulence. Gross misuse of Air India and its facilities devalued its leadership. The centre of gravity shifted to Delhi in the Ministry of Civil Aviation, with the Board of Directors of Air India and Indian Airlines being reduced to non-entities. Even a person like Ratan Tata was not allowed to function effectively as the Chairman. He too quit.

Interestingly, when Mrs. Gandhi came back to power in 1980, J.R.D. Tata was called by the then Civil Aviation Minister, J.B. Patnaik, and requested to give suggestions for a complete restructuring of Air India as desired by the Prime Minister. He gave a comprehensive report covering all aspects of the company's functioning. Annexure I gives his recommendations. He noted the abuse of power and suggested remedial measures. His suggestions included setting up of an all-powerful Board, and the appointment of Directors based on eminence and industry experience. He gave specific names of people who would be an asset as Directors. He supported his views by quoting the functional philosophy of the management of leading companies abroad, where commercial power was exercised by the Boards. Sadly, none of these recommendations were accepted or implemented. It was the beginning of blatant misuse of Air India.

What Air India is witnessing today is a consequence of deliberate inaction. Even the Naresh Chandra committee set up to go into functional issues pertaining to civil aviation did not succeed in making any major changes in the Airline's culture. The issue of merger of Air India and Indian Airlines was a subject of study since the Eighties. J.R.D. Tata, in one of his committee reports, had opposed the merger of the two airlines, stating that domestic operations should continue to be handled by Indian Airlines. The nature of aircraft, their maintenance, and other services in domestic operations, apart from trade union problems, needed a different perspective, according to J.R.D. His most practical idea, of having a holding Company of the two airlines with independent functional responsibilities, was turned down by the government. (Refer to Annexure I)

Misuse of power led to corruption. Lucrative routes and bilaterals were bartered off to some private carriers. When the two airlines wanted to raise finances for purchasing new aircraft to replace the old, and adding to the fleet strength to meet increase in air traffic, private carriers were allowed freedom to do so, but it was denied to the national carriers till very late in the day. By the time permission came, the national air traffic had been taken over by the private airlines. Both airlines were deliberately weakened by a nexus

of politicians and bureaucrats. Misuse of facilities, irresponsible appointments, and blatant corruption reduced the national carrier to a non-entity. If one were to go into Air India's non-auditable black books, of misuse of aircraft for VIP travels, or of diversion of routes of Air India and Indian Airlines to the private sector, one would be aghast at the shamelessness of decisions taken. The worst came when the incentive-based performance bonus was introduced. Even the top management carved out a share for itself without any rationale. Whether it was an MD who was a pilot earlier, or a bureaucrat on deputation, the misuse was blatant.

Let me narrate a major episode of misuse of powers by the Ministers and the CMD/MD drawn from the cadre of deputationists. J.R.D. Tata was a non-executive Chairman of Air India. He was denied free travel by the Board of Air India when he retired. Under the rules, only a regular employee, with a minimum of 25 years of service was entitled to a free pass. J.R.D. Tata, once the owner of the airline, was not provided this facility! I had discussed this with Mr. Tata who pulled me up for raising this issue. He did not want any rules of Air India to be vitiated or violated. Directors of Air India Board had suggested giving him VIP travel facilities. He had once owned the airlines and became its Chairman after the formation of Air India. When I put up the issue before the Board in 1979, the Board suggested treating JRD Tata as a CIP (Commercially Important Person) providing him travel facilities as given to other VIPs. To my knowledge, he hardly ever used this facility for himself. Later, so many M.Ds and C.M.Ds forced the issue to their advantage, violating the service rules of Air India. P.C. Sen, a very senior IAS officer, heading the Indian Airlines, who went to Court, was denied this privilege. The misuse of free passes in recent years would be a story by itself, involving crores of rupees. This is only a small aspect illustrating the exercise of powers for personal gain. There are several other grey areas which, if investigated, could open a Pandora's box.

Since many years, ex-Air India persons occupying high positions, including the C.M.D. and M.Ds, and coming from all over the world, have been meeting once a year. Seeing the impending collapse of the two national carriers, they asked me to

seek Ratan Tata's advice and help in putting pressure on the government to restructure their functioning. I was asked to do this, having been a former Chairman of Air India, and now a person of some credibility in the industrial world. I wrote to Mr. Tata, seeking his advice to prevent Air India's disintegration and demise. I received a very crisp and interesting reply expressing his total frustration. His letter reads as follows:

> *"While I appreciate your desire to meet me in connection with your concerns on Air India, I honestly believe that I have no role to play. My own exposure to Air India over twenty years ago left me with an everlasting impression that Air India was being run by the Civil Aviation Ministry and various interested politicians – the management playing a secondary role. My perception from the outside is that this situation has become even more so the case. Therefore, while I do appreciate your concern and desire to help, I believe your interaction would probably be better directed with the Minister or Ministry. I hope you will understand".*

What could be more explicit, and that too from a person of such eminence? Earlier, I had written to the current Aviation Minister, Praful Patel, enclosing J.R.D Tata's report of 1980 covering some of the major points of today's malady. I never received a reply.

An entire book could be written on the collapse of Air India and Indian Airlines. These few lines of mine are only drops in the ocean. The two airlines will vanish sooner or later, collapsing through mismanagement and misuse. It will be a blot on the annals of aviation history which I doubt will ever be wiped away. Even now the situation could be retrieved through a professional review under a non-political person of eminence.

The very first step would be to revert to the earlier separate functioning, with their independent Boards. A holding company concept for the national carriers could be considered in terms of laying down the framework of policies. Considerable pruning would be needed, and the performance scheme modified to cut down the costs, starting with a voluntary cut of 10% by all beneficiaries.

Air India has some of the best technical and non-technical staff even today. Leadership is the only thing it lacks. If Singapore Airlines could be built up with ex-Air India personnel, or if Jet Airways could become a leader with ex-Air India executives like Datta and Baliga, there is no reason why Air India cannot breathe again. The same applies to Indian Airlines. Political leaders and serving bureaucrats will have to be kept away to enable a commercial and professional culture to re-emerge. If the government is unable to take this decision, it will be better to disinvest the airlines to the private sector.

TWENTY ONE

A Fresh Turn—Buddhism

ENTERING THE PRIVATE SECTOR WITH A group like Dalmias, was not a happy experience initially. Amongst numerous other changes and adjustments, I also faced discomfort in practical aspects. I had a ramshackle office room with no staff. I was asked to recruit my own secretary and buy a car. Sanjay Dalmia had waited six months for me to accept his offer. Yet, there were no decent facilities of a good business house. I would sit quietly looking at the broken windows of my small room. My salary was not much higher than when I was with the government. The working environment was typically that of a small time business house. Where had I landed? This was my constant thought. I could not forgive myself, and would often sit in seclusion, feeling miserable.

It was my honesty over the years, while in government service, that made me pay a heavy price. I had no material comforts and was literally a pauper, with no roots anywhere. All I had was the goodwill of some relatives. But, even they would not believe my tragic circumstances, or understand my decision of starting a new career with nothing in hand. I was so depressed and defeated, that the thought of calling it a day from this world sometimes crossed my mind. It was a terrifying experience for me, to first lose four years of my service in humiliation, and then start all over again, in a new kind of career with very meagre resources. The worst part was the

way, people interacted with me during those fourteen months of being jobless.

When I joined the Dalmias, I had no personal staff, such as a personal secretary. There were no computers then, so a secretary was a must. One day, a very simple and ordinary girl, barely 20 years of age, was brought to me for an interview. She was Neelam, a shorthand typist with even less than a year's experience. Personality-wise she gave the impression of having just walked out of school. She could barely type a page correctly. But, I had no choice, and employed her as my assistant. I would often show her my temper and send her off on difficult errands. She bore it all, but her tears would give her plight away on all these occasions.

Neelam would sometimes see me sitting silently, in deep depression. At such times, she would prepare me a cup of tea, and quietly leave it at my table without a word. Having been used to a team of highly educated and polished personnel in the Embassies and various Public Undertakings, I cursed my fate whenever I saw her. What had I done to deserve a job with the Dalmias, and an almost non-functional Personal Secretary? I could find no answers to my misfortune. The more I got into this frame of mind, the more desperate I became to seek alternative opportunities. But there were none.

Then one incident changed my life. On a particular day, I was in a highly disturbed mood, and decided to jump down from my fifth floor office, leaving a suicide note. As I stood on the window sill, a hand tried to pull me back. It was my new secretary, Neelam, struggling to save me. She pleaded, "Please come down. Do not do this. Please do not commit such a sin".

I came down and saw tears in her eyes. I could not comprehend a stranger trying to save my life. Poor to the core, with a salary of Rs. 650, she had to pay for her food, her daily needs, travel and other expenses. She did not have a bank account or any money. Yet, she herself struggled to face life under the most trying circumstances. She had never even seen a movie. Once she herself had tried to commit suicide in her student days, being falsely accused of pilfering some money. Shifted to hospital, she was harassed by the

police. Her friends and family began to look down upon her. She was all alone in this world, what with even her parents ignoring her. On recovering from the attempt, she realized that she had to stand up and fight. As she had no money to continue her education, she took up a typist's course to start earning. That is how she was standing before me, she explained.

Neelam turned into a friend, philosopher, and guide to me in due course of time, and continues to be so even today. She never fails to encourage me through mails and calls. Practicing Buddhism to overcome problems, and to create a new and meaningful life, she introduced me to the Buddhist practice, which changed my life the way, it did hers. Her looking after me as long as she worked with me, was the most unique experience I have had. When I was struck by a heart attack in 1990 and was almost given up for dead, she prayed continuously for seven nights for my recovery. She would come to the hospital and nurture me like a mother. Sometimes she would say, "I will not let you die, come what may. You have been my support all these years. I have to repay my debt of gratitude through my prayers, which is all that I have".

Neelam remained with me till I worked for the Dalmias. Her progress was phenomenal. Becoming a Project Manager, she contributed a lot to the company. People began looking up to her. When I decided to leave, she forced me to register my own company along with my son. Today, I head this very successful family company, Fairwood Consultants. Between me and my son, we have grown into a credible and respected Group, enjoying success that we never visualized. Neelam, in a sense, was the creator of this stupendous value in my life. She got married and migrated to the USA, where she works with the World Bank, and puts into use all that she had learnt here.

How strangers come into one's life and shape the future, is what our philosophy of *karmic* linkage in Buddhism teaches us. These strangers are called Buddhist Gods, who become the support system so vital to a happy existence. But for this practice, I could not have survived. Even the doctors conceded that this spiritual struggle enabled me to fight for life, and helped the doctors to treat me. At

Escorts Hospital, I was presented before the heart patients when being discharged. Dr. Ashok Seth, my cardiac consultant, requested me to speak to the patients and encourage them, and thus be of some value to the sufferers. This exposure to Buddhism was the biggest gift I received from Neelam, a very sincere and true friend indeed.

TWENTY TWO

The Dalmias

As mentioned earlier, my experience with the private sector, which I now entered, was not a comfortable one at the start. To come down from the heady heights of Air India, and the Government in general, to a contrasting culture of a traditional business house, was depressing, to say the least. One's very approach to life had to undergo a change, and one had to show a peculiar kind of allegiance to the owner. Decision-making was not an independent function. There were wheels within wheels in the family, with select confidantes manning the important posts, and this precluded any initiative. Fortunately, I had laid down two conditions before joining, one that I would report only to Sanjay Dalmia himself, and two that I would not do any liason work with the Government. Both these conditions were accepted, and I greatly admire Sanjay for honoring them throughout the entire decade I worked with him.

Sanjay Dalmia was the grandson of a renowned figure, R.K. Dalmia, who headed one of the oldest segments of Indian industry, and became highly controversial in the early days of India's independence. His son, Hari Krishna Dalmia, owned Dalmia Cements but, belonging to the old order, did not see eye to eye with his son Sanjay, the owner of Golden Tobacco and Dalmia Dairy Industries. They, thus, went their separate ways.

When I met Sanjay on taking over as Project Adviser in 1981, he explained his ambition of becoming a top Business House of India. Young, brash, and highly arrogant, he joined hands with his younger brother to set up a new empire. I was given the task of planning out a diversification programme which would give them a place in the Indian economic upsurge. It took me two years to settle down to the Dalmia culture, of family rule full of dissensions. To the credit of Sanjay, he never involved me in any dubious deals.

Within the next three years, I was able to set up a new format, with this Group expanding into seven companies covering new areas like hydro-carbon, food processing, aromatics, chemicals, information technology, and medicine. Collaboration with a leading German company enabled an export-oriented dialysis equipment factory to be set up in the Greater Noida Export Zone. An information-oriented new technology unit, manufacturing communications equipment, was set up by British Telecom at Dehradun. An agro-petroleum aromatics tie-up was arranged with an American company. The largest venture was Gujarat Heavy Chemicals, set up in partnership with the Gujarat government. Golden Tobacco, the third largest cigarette manufacturing company, expanded its production, with factories in Sikkim and Assam. Venturing into tourism-related facilities, Dalmia Resorts was set up with considerable fanfare, Goa coming up as the first place with these beautiful resorts.

Sanjay Dalmia began to be in the news. I became not only the Chairman of the selection committee of all top executives, but also the acting Chairman of Dalmia Brothers, the holding company of the family. I began to enjoy my work, and Sanjay appreciated my role in projecting his image. I travelled a lot to South East Asia, the UK, the USA, Germany and even distant places like the Carribbean countries. We were received warmly by large Houses abroad, such as British Telecom, Dupont, United Petroleum Organization and several others. A number of MoUs were signed. An American delegation of businessmen visited India as Dalmia guests. A lot of publicity was received by Sanjay and his brother Anurag, and I began to be counted in this rapidly expanding set-up. Sanjay was quoted as a new young emerging business giant with modern ideas.

A number of new people, full of ideas, joined the Group. The Projects Division was allocated two General Managers with staff, and some of the CEOs of newly established companies were placed with me. I found decision-making quicker there, as it was merely a single person, Sanjay, to take those decisions. When he and I, along with a petrochemical team, went to Trinidad for setting up a joint venture, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and his cabinet accorded us a big welcome. The national TV covered our visit, making us feel like celebrities. I felt very encouraged and secure, and got involved in major ventures and discussions with some leading MNCs like British Telecom and others.

But, unfortunately, like a typical Indian industrial house of the old times, things were happening behind the scenes which were not conducive to ethical conduct. Money became the major determinant in taking decisions. Family disputes began to erupt. Huge amounts of financial commitments were not honoured. A number of foreign companies had considered me as an adequate credential on the basis of my past positions. But, when commitments began to be ignored, I found myself in a difficult situation.

I was travelling abroad extensively now, which tired me out. In 1990, while returning from a trip to three continents, I got a serious heart attack. Confined to hospital for a month, I was discharged with advice to take complete rest for the next three months. Sanjay Dalmia no longer found me of high value to him. Hardly had I recovered, when I was back in the hospital in 1991 for angioplasty, and then again a few months later for an open-heart surgery. Thus, almost a year went by in trips to the hospital. The crunch came when Sanjay in his own style said to me, "Sometimes work can be done better from home". I had no desire to continue, but I had to give six months notice to quit. I had built a comfortable house by this time, but had no financial reserves.

Then followed the Fairwood chapter. As usual, Neelam, my secretary, gave me the best advice; it paved the way for my future in a very interesting way. She registered a private company called Fairwood Consultants in my name, with my son, still in Nigeria, as

my partner. She resigned her job with Dalmias and began to look after this new company.

At last, I found something which belonged to me. I set up Fairwood in 1991 before even leaving the Dalmias. The name Fairwood Consultants was suggested, as it was the name of my son's company in London. He himself joined me in 1995 and we now have a running family enterprise.

Perhaps, setting up Fairwood was another 'wandering' in a very challenging sense. Back in 1970, a colleague, Chibber, showed my horoscope to his revered astrologer. The 'Guru' predicted that on retirement, I would set up my own business, and would work till my last days. He added that most of my success would come then. I naturally laughed this off, as business and I were poles apart. Yet this came true 22 years later.

Though initially this company was just a small consultancy group, big surprises awaited me. I started with a select few persons, such as Neelam, as also my daughter Nandini acting as managers. Another relative, Vijay Sheel Bhatnagar, joined us, leaving his Railway job. All these persons accepted meagre salaries. We had very little money and Consultancy business was at a very low threshold. Yet, the dedication and togetherness kept us going.

As we went along, a British friend of Ranu's offered us some study assignments in the energy sector, especially in petroleum. This was a new area, yet we accepted the challenge and were asked by British Petroleum to study the potential of setting up an LPG plant, and to develop a dedicated port for use of tankers. This friend, Fred Jones, has moved on. Though no longer a business partner, he still remains a very dear friend. It is he, in fact, who put Fairwood on a track which not only sustained us, but brought us onto a platform, we had never anticipated.

Ranu returned from Nigeria and joined us as the Chief Executive Officer in 1995. His overwhelming dedication to work, and desire to explore new avenues made Fairwood grow into a very well designed infrastructural company. It graduated from a small three-man firm dealing only with personnel, to a large company of

nearly 200 people, mostly technical experts in designing and planning, and dealing in schemes of urban development all over India. It now has ten subsidiary companies, including some abroad.

All this has been unbelievable. I realize from where to where my 'wanderings' have taken me! Presiding over the company as the Chairman, with my son Ranbir as the Managing Director, we are now entrepreneurs in our own right, enjoying a degree of dignity and financial comfort never experienced by us before.

TWENTY THREE

Onwards

EVEN WHEN I BADE FAREWELL TO a regular career and chose to do something on my own, the wanderings did not cease. In fact, this phase became the most challenging lap of my life, and continues to be so even today.

The icon that I have been searching for, escapes me. My country inspired me to do many and varied things in life. But, its iconic content began to fade on account of inexplicable contradictions. Perhaps it was my running away from reality. Nothing was constant. Yet, the changes disturbed me. India came to me through the iconic images of Gandhi and Nehru and through its heritage. These got devalued, by the nature of the new class that emerged, and which affected the polity and social fabric of the nation. I began seeking an answer to my existence, and assessing my worthiness and value in the new emerging era.

Perhaps one answer came through a young British girl visiting India. She was pursuing her Ph.D. in Cambridge University, covering the subject, "Indian Diaspora". She was referred to me to collect and analyze information through primary research, and she also met various segments of Indian society. When I asked her the reasons for conducting such a survey, her answer was very interesting. "I find a great amount of confusion and contradiction in

your society. Yet, there is so much of color and vividness in the people that it thrills me. Nowhere in the world does such variety and richness exist. What surprises me is that, in spite of all this, the Indian diaspora has a unique character of inherent togetherness, irrespective of religions and other social diversities. It is absolutely amazing that the roots should be so strong."

This was a very perceptive observation indeed, and it helped me to understand the significance of India.

Many other exposures helped me in re-focusing my life in a direction which added value. I was invited by the Jawaharlal Lal Nehru University to be a visiting Professor at the School of International Studies, for which I felt greatly honored. It brought me in contact with various faculties dealing with different aspects of life and work. Of greater satisfaction was the inter-action with bright young students who were seeking answers to some intricate issues. They were not to be found in books, but through analysis and perception of the changing world.

In a way, this was my first adventure into academics. The Director of the India International Centre, Uma Bajpai, a friend of yesteryears, invited me to join. Thus, I became part of several study circles and seminars. Here one ran into IIC's Bohemian culture, unaffected by the sophistication of the new emerging world. The entire ambience of the Centre, and Lodhi Gardens in which it was located, uplifted the sense of being.

Soon Dr. K.B. Lal, a revered and eminent civil servant, invited me to become a founder member of ICRIER (Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations). It was a unique honor for a non-economist like me. My friend K. Subrahmanyam, a defence strategist of international standing, made me a founder member of the Institute of Defence Studies & Analysis (IDSA) involving me in some interesting studies. The broad spectrum of personalities with whom I got an opportunity to interact, brought me somewhat nearer to my perception of India's iconic image. It was an eye opener. When I joined the Association of Indian Diplomats, a body of retired Ambassadors, and became involved with some of India's top diplomats like Badruddin Tyabji, S.K. Banerjee, C.S. Jha

and, subsequently, a string of former Foreign Secretaries, it was a unique experience.

Academics took me through some interesting forays. I became a part of some serious studies and publications brought out by the JNU and the IIC. I was appointed a Ph.D. examiner in JNU for some specialized subjects. I also authored two books of my own, *Sikkim Saga* and *Mission to Bhutan*. These were well-received, and several revised editions were brought out. Of course, I could never match the intellectual calibre of the professional scholars. But, to be counted as having some academic value, was creditable in itself, and a benefit I had never expected.

The biggest surprise came very recently. A souvenir was brought out by the Government of Bhutan to celebrate the Coronation of Jigme Kesar Wangchuk, the fifth King. It covered Bhutan's history of a century, from 1907 to 2008, and contained the list of Trail Blazers. I found my name on that list, which included just five foreigners—Sir Claude White, the first Political Officer, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, myself, a Japanese agronomist and a Jesuit priest, an educationist. A foreign country recognizing my contribution towards its relations with India, and mentioning me alongside Nehru was a unique honor indeed. Even at the cost of being dubbed an egoist, I feel this was a major step towards my self-realization.

One could recount several such episodes of the period when I had done working for others, and had embarked on this new journey. The wanderings became a journey of self-discovery. I could not have covered these laps of meanderings and wanderings in a more beautiful manner, or by deriving more satisfaction than I did.

TWENTY FOUR

Resurrection

A BIG SURPRISE AWAITED ME IN 1998. I got a call from an erstwhile IPS colleague, Raj Kapoor, former Director, Intelligence Bureau that he and a junior colleague, J.P. Sharma wanted to come and see me. Welcoming them I expressed my surprise. I had lost all contact with the Police Service after the sixties. What Raj told me was a big surprise. They had formed an Association of India's senior-most retired IPS officers, and Mr. A.K. Dave, an IP officer, one of the four remaining in the British established service called the Indian Police (IP) had been made its President. The Association requested me to be the Senior Vice President.

A little background to this is necessary. A.K. Dave was Addl. Director in the Intelligence Bureau when he decided to quit the police service several years ago. So did I leave the IPS when I diverted to the public sector. For all practical purposes, I had no linkage to police service since 1961 when I joined the Ministry of External Affairs. Both Mr. Dave and I diverted to industry and academics. Our perceptions expanded beyond the police, loosening our linkages to related issues. Several years had gone by and, therefore, the invitation to join the new Association came as a big surprise. The new founding members, who all retired as Inspectors General and above, discussed amongst themselves and felt that Dave and I had occupied top positions in the public and private sectors, besides

being involved with major institutions in the areas of research and development related to national and international issues.

The very fact that the top police personnel of IP and IPS considered seniors like us who had left the service to head the new organization was a big honor, and we both agreed. The new body was called the Association of Retired Senior IPS officers (ARSIPSO) and registered, with a role as a Think Tank providing services on matters related to national security and strategic perceptions. It was formed in the year 2000 with Mr. A.K. Dave as its first President, and me as the Senior Vice-President. We had as colleagues and members in the new body several well-known IPS officers who had held positions as Governors of States, DGs of para-military forces, Directors of Intelligence Bureau, Secretary RAW, and others.

For me, it was a full circle in terms of being given an honor as an ex-police officer with a varied background which few IPS colleagues had ever enjoyed. To be honored with such a role and trust brought me back to my roots from which I had always wanted to escape. Raj Kapoor, the former DIB, called me a 'role model' for other IPS officers to emulate. All past sense of escaping from the police left me. It was wonderful to have been made aware of the experiences I had acquired, and brought dignity and respect to the service which I was running away from.

It was an amazing experience. I met many IPS colleagues in my eight years stint as Sr. Vice President, and then as President, succeeding Mr. Dave. I would have had no interaction with them but for this Association. The respect I got was far beyond what I ever got anywhere else. Being an association of India's top cops having held senior-most positions in India, I was on a mission of re-discovery of their role and contribution to India's stability as the world's largest democracy. For me, it was an eye opener. The part played by M.K. Narayanan, National Security Adviser in the most difficult period of a coalition government was outstanding, whatever may be the impressions of some critics, who judge on extraneous issues. ARSIPSO provided a forum for me to understand and appreciate the role of IPS officers in the national context.

A.K. Dave was a brilliant officer in terms of his intellectual capabilities. Few understood Communism as a weapon of political leverage as he did. Dave had a vast knowledge of the Chinese approach to world events, of using ideology as a base for national integration. Every month he organized brain storming sessions at his house inviting experts dealing with issues like the Indian navy's blue water role, or Iran's emerging political clout with its nuclear ambitions, and how Indian interests were involved, apart from the usual issues related to Pakistan and others. Apart from usual seminars, this was a unique way of nurturing small groups to emerge as serious Think Tanks.

We had speakers of eminence like L.K. Advani, P.C. Chidambaram, Arun Shourie, Jairam Ramesh, K. Subrahmanyam, former Chief Justice of India, J.S. Verma and others who expanded the parameters of the discussions far beyond police matters. India International Centre joined hands with ARSIPSO in organizing important seminars connected to national governance and threat to security with contributors from the academic galaxy, and eminent scholars from defence, diplomacy and politics.

The heads of central police organizations discussed the current scenario and the growing role of India in the neighboring countries, and how their organizations were involved in protecting the country's interests. ARSIPSO members' involvement in various facets of India's governance and its international interests came out strongly in these seminars and interactions. One should say, for the first time, an organization of such experience emerged in the country. These activities continue in different formats.

For me, it was a period of learning. When we called on the former President of India, Dr. Abdul Kalam, he said, "You gentlemen represent the elite of India's security system. You can contribute a lot as an association of such experienced members. I would like to know from you how things can be changed at the governance level to elevate India's image. I hope you will examine all important issues. Please keep in touch with me and feel free to discuss".

I felt fulfilled as a former IPS officer. As the President of ARSIPSO, I could really get educated on vital issues with such interactions at various levels. Earlier, I was groping to establish my identity through my various wanderings. Now, I realised how satisfying it was to have belonged to a Service which plays such a key role in the emerging new India. I also realized that I could understand the sensitivities and nuances in their role only because I took a long, wandering route, very exciting and full of new experiences.

PART II

PERCEPTIONS

TWENTY FIVE

Emerging India

IN THE EYES OF OUTSIDERS, INDIA has been an enigma in many ways. Finding color in its confusion, many come here to taste it, feel it, live it. How does this country, of over a billion people, with a diversity not seen anywhere else, connect to each aspect? Its changing socio-economic dynamics baffles even the Indians themselves. Be it any religion, its local customs fit into the roots of the diverse spread of people and languages. And so, India survives. The fundamentalists are an aberration to our ancient heritage. Any attempt to define an emerging India in a well modulated format would be a folly. It cannot exist without its varied confusion. They form its basic design and pattern. Yet, in the fast changing global context, it can be described as a newly emerging unity.

Several factors go into this change. With its enormous pool of young talent contributing to economic growth, and its large and expanding domestic market being served without the adverse effects of major upheavals in the international economic system, India stands on its own feet. Her economic growth rate compared to that of others like China has a limited significance. Gradual urbanization, projected at 50 percent by 2035, is taking place in a manner which will not throw up a social Tsunami, as India maintains a manageable balance in its changing socio-economic structure. The "argumentative Indians" as Nobel Laureate Amartya

Sen calls us, if seen in the emerging scenario, are like the steam of a pressure cooker. Elsewhere, particularly in China, the movement of economically diverse populations is throwing up social contradictions which will be difficult to manage, what with an increasingly aging population and an overheated economy. China will be unable to keep pace with emerging urban issues, and it will be interesting to see if the consequences can be controlled. But, luckily in India, the contradictions are maintained within their primary roots.

However, it is not as simple as it appears. Our country is facing difficult problems, both internal and external, which inhibit its progress towards becoming a key power in Asia. These are serious issues which need to be addressed.

Internally, our democratic process, which was our strength till now, is under severe stress. The institutional framework under the Constitution is weakening. Centre–State relations in our federal system are getting devalued, with local or parochial issues overriding the national interests. This is how I perceive things as an Indian.

But this is not the perception of outsiders. They view India as a vibrant society, a democratic country with its own uniqueness. For them, the fact that a billion people with diverse parameters of caste, creed, religion, and language can live in such harmony as they do, is astonishing. They consider it remarkable that India is emerging as an economic power despite its controls and contradictions. How can a country of this size, with the second largest Muslim population in the world, overcome the effects of terrorism, with life coming back to normalcy in record time? What is it that makes India move on and on, despite the wars with China and Pakistan, without any political turbulence? How is it that the successors of Nehru, Shastri and Indira Gandhi could carry on the political burdens of a giant with hardly any political sagacity, and with little upheaval?

The conclusion that all outsiders come to is the same. It is that the character and psyche of the people sustains a democratic system unseen elsewhere. This conclusion has been proved, beyond doubt, as correct. An amazing phenomenon of this psyche has been the growth of industry, competing at the international level. The so-

called control of governmental rules and regulations has not affected the infrastructural or IT sectors. They have moved on their own steam. Even our financial sector has successfully maintained stability with growth, perhaps due to our innate conservatism which has acted as a safety factor during the earlier South-east Asian meltdown, and the current global recession. There are several grey areas in the economic and political sectors, but they are all manageable. Resilience is India's secret strength. Unless some unforeseen events destroy this capability, no one cannot prevent India's emergence as a power of economic and political consequence.

There are several issues confronting the country which need to be placed in the correct perspective. I have tried to touch upon them in the succeeding chapter.

TWENTY SIX

Indo-Pak Relations

FINALLY, HERE I AM, TOWARDS THE end of my book, and perhaps, towards the end of my wanderings too. I know I have still some way to go, and some more to learn and understand about this enigma called India. But, at this stage, I have a few perceptions of my own about the nation, its strategy, and its future, all emanating from a collection of my manifold and rich experiences. To cap it all, I will endeavour to enunciate my dream. I venture into this analysis as a layman; whether my perceptions are correct, only time will show. Having participated in several discussions at various fora, I have tried to highlight some of the issues concerning our country, through my own assessment.

India faces a difficult situation in the emerging scenario, since Indo-Pakistan relations, and India's future role are complicated subjects. It is incorrect to think that the Kashmir Valley is the core issue in our relations with Pakistan. It is no doubt a major irritant. But, even if the state of Jammu and Kashmir had acceded to Pakistan, the fundamentals of bilateral relations would not have changed. This has become clearly apparent now.

At the time of partition, Mohammed Ali Jinnah founded Pakistan with a vision of creating a democratic Islamic nation. But Pakistan failed to establish its own identity. Soon after Jinnah's

death, the country got bogged down in a serious political crisis. This was especially because of a conflict of political, economic and cultural interests between its Eastern and Western wings, separated not only by considerable distance, but even more so by their totally incompatible cultures. Inheriting a weak political system with little leadership of consequence, its institutional system could not sustain the burdens of its inner contradictions. While India had a very strong political party system in the Congress, with leadership of the stature of Nehru, Gandhi and Sardar Patel, Jinnah's death left a wide gulf in Pakistan's governance. The Indian Muslim League, which basically was an instrument of the pro-Pakistan movement located in certain parts of India, could not transform itself into a credible political movement in Pakistan. The balance of power in the newly formed country shifted to its west with its local ethnic constituents like the Punjabis, the Baluchis, the Pashtuns and the Sindhis, in contrast to a distinct ethnic, Bengali constituent in the east, much to the detriment of the latter. They could not connect on a national basis except through religion. But, Islam had already existed in this region in a restricted manner, as an exercise of political power by vested groups, instead of on a national level. Cultural and ethnic diversity created major chasms in the absence of a well defined political system.

Most unfortunately, the accession of Jammu and Kashmir, so poorly managed by India, gave a handle to Pakistan to define India as the prime enemy. The Kashmir Valley was not the cause of conflict. In fact, it was the overwhelming primacy of India as a key power in the sub-continent that was perceived as a threat. Pakistan evolved its identity as a competing power to India. That is to say, successive governments and political elements in Pakistan focused on India as the enemy. All events affecting Indo-Pak relations were a consequence of this paranoia. In the bargain, Pakistan's rulers could not establish their country's separate identity as a major player in this region, whichever breed they may have been of.

Since Pakistan depended on Western hostility towards India for reasons other than Jammu and Kashmir, it lost its leverage as an independent functional power of consequence. Islam could not give it the character of a key Muslim power which others could take

serious note of. What is more, the fact that India had a larger Muslim population than Pakistan, was a thorn in that country's flesh. The only way to establish its position was to weaken India and destabilize it, starting from Jammu and Kashmir, a Muslim-majority area. Friendship with China, to counter India's power, flowed primarily from these fears and animosity.

Pakistan's misadventures through three wars with India, and its convincing defeat in 1971, were a consequence of such faulty policy. It led to the splitting of the nation into two. Further, an ill-conceived and badly designed plan of involving itself in the Afghanistan war against the Soviets, and the consequential effects so visible now, made it turn the table on itself.

The most unfortunate part of Pakistan's history of six decades has been the role of its army. The Pakistan military created its own state within the state. For the army, the state of Pakistan came second to itself. So, what can be the future for this country now? Collapse of its national system, and emergence of Islamic fundamentalists like the Taliban, pose the biggest threat to Pakistani's own integrity and stability. With nuclear weapons in hand, self-destruction could be the worst-case scenario. That would indeed be a pity for a country like Pakistan which, at its creation, had all the ingredients of history and culture, and a robust content in its people.

India faces a serious threat in light of these developments. The civilian government appears unable to control the emerging situation; nor can this be done by outside powers. Pakistan can be saved only by joint efforts on the part of both India and itself, to put it back on the path of stability, and make it an effective player in the region. Reverting to military rule will be disastrous, as that would be the surest way for fundamentalist elements like the Taliban taking over the country. Pakistan would split into three or four regions, based on ethnic and cultural groups. These would be Pakhtoons, Baluchis, Sindhis and Punjabis, dominated by the clergy; the army could be reduced to an inconsequential role in due course of time. Can India afford the emergence of such a scenario? It certainly cannot, primarily because of its own security concerns.

I repeat what I mentioned earlier, that no amount of American or NATO support can save Pakistan. These groups would gradually walk away. In other words, the agony would be a very long drawn out one for the people of Pakistan. Only India and Pakistan can jointly work out a strategy for Pakistan's survival as a nation of consequence. And this serves India's interests equally. Obama's enunciation of Pak-Afghan policy, with a rider of U.S. troops starting their withdrawal in 2011 is a pointer to the trend. It is unfortunate that Pakistan's army, the only stabilizing force, does not understand that without India's friendship and support, it can never lead the country. India has to be a partner, and not an enemy.

There are three scenarios to be considered in this approach to the problem. The first is of India applying diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to take note of our concern, even before we make the first move of reconciliation through resumption of talks. The question arises as to whom in Pakistan to put pressure on! The present government there is non-functional, and is not in a position to respond with positive action. We have adequately covered the outside powers, but they too are finding it very difficult to get through; indeed, they are seeking a role for India in their policy formulation in this region.

The second scenario is the one of the army to take over power once more. This may, at the most, provide a breathing space. But, the danger is that the Pakistan Army, for its own effective control, may join hands with the Taliban. The latter would then divide their respective interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In other words, a Taliban control in the North-West Frontier area, and in the region of Afghanistan, would emerge. Thus, the Army would get 'Talibanized', or marginalized, which would limit its role within and outside Pakistan.

The third option, albeit a difficult one, would be for India to give full support to an elected government, for the lasting stability of Pakistan. It would also prevent the Talibanization of the country under the fundamentalist clerical order. This cannot be achieved without international support and a considerably pro-active role for India to play. It would be a very gradual process, but greatly

required, not only for Pakistan's long-term stability, but also for ensuring India's security. If the cards are played well, with overt diplomacy taking a back seat, and the players on both sides working out a strategy behind the scenes, the problem could be solved successfully. In this, the role of the people of Pakistan would be invaluable. If a military dictator like Musharraf could be thrown out of power, if an election as fair as the one that took place could be held, and if a civilian government, however weak, could hold on to power, there is no reason why these forces and agencies could not be strengthened with a pro-active effort on the part of India. In fact, the Afghan-Pak policy of the USA cannot succeed without this approach. Even China, which has revelled in India's weakness till now, has realized the dangers of a failed Pakistan.

As for the Pakistan Army and the ISI, they can be carefully handled, and be convinced about the inevitability of such changes for the good of their nation. In this framework, the Indian forces would be complementary assets, and not an enemy. India and Pakistan can emerge in the next decade as a formidable political force, to play an international role matching the most powerful in this part of the world. Economically and militarily too, we would be the key players spread across from west to east. We would also be the largest and the strongest Islamic power in the world. Another fallout would be that the issue of Jammu and Kashmir would be easier to discuss and resolve, in the totality of the new relationship.

Does this appear to be an idealistic dream? I do not think so. It can, and must be achieved, not only for peace in the sub-continent, but also for peace and progress in the new global order. Of course within India itself, we would need to take some hard decisions, however unpleasant they may be.

This path would not be easy. Many disturbing episodes would occur in the coming decade. But, the reality would dawn on us eventually, whatever be the interim trauma. There is no other direction for Indo-Pak relations to steer towards.

The Kashmir Valley was never a core issue in the Indo-Pak relationship. We made a major mistake in not splitting the state of Jammu and Kashmir into three distinct States of India—a Dogra

state of Jammu for the Hindus; the state of Kashmir, with its own Islamic culture, and free from fundamentalism; and a Buddhist state of Ladakh, with its unique, centuries-old heritage. These three components of India would have projected the true diversity and the various cultures of India.

One country and many systems, as a British concept designed for India, was effectively used in order to rule such a diverse country. China followed it too, with Hongkong, and may extend it to Taiwan, and even Tibet. So long as safeguards are provided to maintain the concept of unique identities through religion, language, and culture, the conflicts can be minimized. India has just such a cultural and linguistic diversity incorporated into States like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, West Bengal, Nagaland and others. Their economic and political growth is a consequence of their unique characters. To these, if we had added Jammu with a Dogra identity, Kashmir with an Islamic one, and Ladakh the ultimate in Buddhist culture, India would have enhanced its richness and secular credentials. What is more, Article 370 of the Indian Constitution provides enough cushioning for local ambitions of a diversified system.

If this approach had been adopted in 1950, 'Jammu and Kashmir' would not have become a major issue. Conditional accession was not provided under the Instrument of Accession Act, nor was a reference to UN needed. Even though India was strong enough in 1948 to face the Pakistani intrusion, we became a mere victim of emotional linkages and British perfidy.

Even today, the ultimate solution lies in the state of Jammu and Kashmir being split into three distinct entities with certain elements of legitimate autonomy under Article 370. The state of Kashmir would best display India's secularism, in its Muslim personality. Though we have the second largest Muslim population in the world, no country comprehends our Islamic constituent. With Kashmir as an integral part of India, its Muslim profile would be understood and appreciated by everybody, especially the Kashmiris themselves. It would also have an impact on Pakistan in terms of projecting POK as a centre linked to India. Then a

well-designed, mutually agreed format could emerge over the years, wherein the development of Kashmir would be a priority for both sides.

Security threats to India will persist, and with serious consequences. India needs to strengthen its fundamentals and its capacity to meet these threats, rather than indulge in open accusations and harbor unrealistic expectations. Indo-Pak diplomacy can never rest on emotional exchanges. It will have to be a silent, restrained, and well designed strategy that will awaken a democratic government of Pakistan to perceive the advantages that will accrue to both sides. Yes, there will be more bloodshed. The Pakistan Army will continue to use India as a bait, showing that fighting against it is the only option to choose, for Pakistan's safety. But, as events now unfolding there prove, they will realize the inevitability of working together with India for peace in this region, for their own protection. Even more than that, Pakistan could play a vital role in the entire region, as an equal partner with India. Along with this neighbor, it could create a new Asian order, and thus, become a significant player in the global strategy.

I have a dream. I dream of an iconic image of India, an India that would live with, and share in the creation of a new order, along with Pakistan; both countries would be linked together through heritage and culture, which had dominated the annals of history for centuries.

What better way of ceasing my wanderings than with this hope! Today, a person like Baraek Obama can rise from inconsequence to such an exalted position, showing promise of establishing a new world order. He can extend a hand of friendship even to his worst enemies around the world, and even get a response. If this can happen, then surely even India and Pakistan can muster the political strength to avert a global disaster, and guide the destiny of a new emerging world order.

TWENTY SEVEN

Is Pakistan Crumbling

Is Pakistan crumbling? Certainly not. A big game is afoot, with dimensions beyond its borders. The Pakistan Army is the key player in this scenario, and is evolving a new strategy of working with the civil government, an elected government, without allowing it to be a competitor or a replacement. There is a duality in this plan. The army realises that it can meaningfully use the civilian face to consolidate its lasting ambition as the savior of Pakistan. In fact, that is what the USA wants, and American support is vital for the army's success. The degree of success will determine the exit of foreign forces from Afghanistan.

In Pakistan, both the civil government and the army believe that the Taliban will return to Afghanistan sooner or later, and that it will be a weaker and manageable Taliban acceptable to the USA. The recent upsurge in terrorist attacks in Pakistan is part of this game where the extremists want to take over control and dictate terms to Pakistan. Operations in Swat, and more recently in South Waziristan are a part of this struggle. Many have missed the subtle game of the Chief of the Pakistan Army, wherein Gen. Kayani extends a hand of traditional friendship to the local tribes, assuring them of a status and power previously enjoyed in the tribal belt for centuries. The General is offering a partnership in framing a new power equation. This strategy must be having the silent blessings of

the USA. That is why the Afghan-Pak policy of Obama is now undergoing a major reconsideration.

For the USA and China, Pakistan is too important a country to be allowed to disintegrate. The Kerry-Lugar Act passed by the U.S. President is a strategic device to keep Pakistan's ambitions under check. India-baiting and the Kashmir issue will not ensure the safety of Pakistan, because India's stability and role cannot be underestimated to please Pakistan. China, a very important player, has deep interests in this entire region. It plays the game of keeping India under pressure periodically, with its vital interests in Sinkiang and Tibet. One is witnessing this already.

India faces a difficult situation. Pakistan's stability is of vital importance to India. The consequences of Pakistan's disintegration would be disastrous. There is also a growing realization in Pakistan that without a stable and peaceful relationship with India, it can never emerge as an important player in its own right. It will always be subservient to the USA and China, especially the latter. China is looking forward to consolidating its gains in Afghanistan and Pakistan as part of its ambition to emerge as a super power controlling the power game.

The moderate elements in the Taliban are recognizing the emergence of these equations. The inevitability of the Taliban ruling Afghanistan, as an extension of Pakistan's strategy, is becoming increasingly obvious. Taliban cannot rule Afghanistan without being a part of this strategy. The Afghan Taliban, being closely linked to the Pakistan Army, understands this game and a move in this direction has already begun.

China understands this emerging scenario, and has evolved an economic strategy to give support to Pakistan in this region. Hence, Pakistan will be a major beneficiary in the coming years. As for India, it is to be put under pressure as part of this strategy. India may not be able to ensure its economic stretch in this game beyond a point. Indications are that the USA would come to an understanding with India in reducing the threat from Pakistan. In return, India may have to give some assurance to reduce its military presence on Pakistan's eastern front considerably, and Pakistan, as a quid pro quo,

may have to ensure a peaceful border, with the militants being brought under check. Only then can Pakistan be effectively ruled. India as a friend rather an enemy is vital for this new role of Pakistan.

The Pakistan Army cannot allow its country's disintegration. Its stakes are very high. Instability will weaken its own strength and power leverage. Its role as the only credible institution in Pakistan's governance is now accepted by all without exception, including the civil government. The general distrust of the USA and its military inroads have united various political factions in seeking a new strategy of togetherness. Without disturbing its equation with the army, the polity has realized its strength as a national asset on which a new Pakistan can be established. Its national ethos has to emerge as a progressive and modern entity. It is now being realized that neither Islam nor India-baiting can bring out Pakistan's immense potential. There is also a realization amongst thinking Pakistanis that it has been demeaned by its dependence on the USA and China. Irrespective of what China says, or whether it puts pressure on India, in order to maintain a balance between Pakistan and India, China never went beyond verbosity, in its own style. Even building up the nuclear capability of Pakistan was a design to balance India and use Pakistan as a controlled leverage for China's own game of dominance.

Where does all this lead to? Pakistan is struggling on two fronts. Its internal problem is of fighting the extremists in order to protect the country's integrity. The army realizes the threat, and its operations are geared to destroy the elements posing this threat. Irrespective of the role of the ISI, the army cannot afford to be weakened or defeated. It has to fight to win. Kashmir cannot be its prime agenda now. Why is this? Without India's assistance in economic and political terms, the army cannot sustain its operations beyond a point. Assurances by India behind the scenes, of not weakening the army's flanks, exist and have been honoured. Had this not been the case, Pakistan could not have launched such a major operation, with over 30,000 troops. The fear of extremist infiltration is forcing the army to devise its strategy of destroying the strongholds and driving out the foreign elements. It is also working silently on the strategy of a manageable Taliban taking over Afghanistan as an extension of its political reach. In all these efforts,

the Pakistan Army is getting support not only from the civil government and political parties, but also from the USA and China. If this succeeds, we may well see a new political structure emerging in the next five years. Of course, the entire process will, no doubt, witness a lot of bloodshed.

How should India respond to the developing situation? The previous chapter has outlined the parameters of a workable solution to Indo-Pak relations, including the problem of Kashmir. India has to be pro-active behind the scenes. Its silent diplomacy has to be shrewd, convincing, and persuasive, which it is surely capable of.

Another country, Iran, is emerging as a major factor in this region with its own political agenda. India, Iran and Pakistan can jointly create an effective zone of great significance, serving their common economic and political interests. This can help to stabilize this important region, where immense politico-economic opportunities exist. It is also a sound policy from the strategic angle, with such a united group balancing off the great powers. It also serves our own interests well in the larger context. Pakistan as an ally will yield long-term advantages. We have to convince our neighbor of a political role which can be shared together, guiding the course of events in West and South Asia. From being a core issue, Kashmir will then become a manageable side issue.

The combined military and economic power of Pakistan and India, together with Iran becoming a major player, will create a new global order of great significance. In this triangular edifice of power, none of the three would pose a threat to the other.

This scenario sounds too simple, and perhaps impractical, even absurd, to some strategists. Yet, the developing events in Pakistan and its periphery, and the unreliability of foreign players because of their own constraints, will force a re-look by Pakistan and India in the not-too-distant future. Our 'professional analysts' will, of course, reject the very thought of such a possibility. But a new thinking class may see this process of reconciliation and adjustment through.

Pakistan's stability is vital to India specifically, from every angle. Being geographical neighbors, and having a mutuality of interest are

facts that will not change. Discreet, pro-active diplomacy is bound to emerge. Few are aware that silent contacts and negotiations between China and the USA went on for 13 years in Warsaw in the Sixties, before a breakthrough occurred. Few knew till very recently that in spite of bitter criticism of the Soviet Union and East Germany on the Berlin Wall, some western countries were silently pleading with them not to remove this barrier, and to prevent the Germans from getting together. These countries professed to be friends of the German people in public, but were active behind the scenes to block the re-union of the two Germanys. Such is the power game which has been played by countries over centuries. There is no reason why forces of reconciliation can not emerge in India and Pakistan, carving out a new and decisive role for the two countries. Neither India nor Pakistan can survive in each other's instability. Nor can Pakistan take on India and survive. Three wars, and now the internal turmoil should be enough to give our relationship a new direction.

Rather than spitting venom on each other, or seeking help of fair-weather friends, a well designed format should emerge covering the following actions:

- As a public commitment of policy, India to announce its firm determination to maintain Pakistan's integrity, and work together to create a stable South Asia.
- Both countries to stop the verbal barrage of accusing each other of duplicity, and start the process of silent diplomacy, with a clear understanding of the ultimate objective.
- India to restructure the State of J&K as suggested in the previous Chapter, leading to a similar process in Pakistan in occupied territory, with status quo as the ultimate solution.

Within this broad framework, a new centre of power will emerge. This will also save the Islamic content, which is an important part of India's own culture and heritage.

TWENTY EIGHT

Vision of India 2050

No vision of India would be possible without taking China into account. Two of the largest countries with nearly 2.5 billion of the world's population are linked to each other by geography. The differing political systems and their effect make an impact on their role and consequent power balance. George Fernandes called China as India's Enemy Number One. Recently, Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Major of India stated that China posed the greater threat, and not Pakistan. In their way, both reflect true apprehensions.

China emerging as super power, competing with the USA as a parallel force, cannot let India emerge as a competing power in the Asian region, the base for China. Economic growth leads to political power supported by a country's armed strength. India is emerging as a competing power which is perceived as a threat by China. It will, therefore, exercise its leverage to levels which obstruct India's growing clout in the coming years. India has to be limited to a regional role in South Asia.

Historically, China exercised power by creating tributaries in its peripheries. Tibet, never an integral part of China, paid a token tribute to the Chinese Imperial Court as a tributary. Thus, China occupied a hierarchical position exercising suzerainty over Tibet through its resident representative located in Lhasa. The same

principle was extended to inner Mongolia and other peripheral powers. When the British established their Empire beyond Suez, they extended the philosophy of suzerainty to territories surrounding China. Extending political power and consequent treaties entered into with so-called Chinese littoral States was a balancing act to contain China's political and economic power. Even military force was applied through expeditions into territories, like Younghusband's expedition into Tibet in 1904 resulting in a treaty between the British and Tibet. The McMohan Agreement was a consequence of British suzerainty over these areas.

With re-assertion of its power, China cannot have a parallel competing centre sharing the super power projection. India has all the elements to emerge as a parallel power in the coming decades.

Both countries are undergoing a social revolution. China's political ideology of Communism, on which the State is based, cannot sustain this change. The Soviet Union cracked up with its inner contradictions. Communist pre-eminence in governance got eroded with diversities in language, culture and economic disparities. The coming decades will see a radical change in the entire economic and social structure in China. India is inching its way towards a well-defined, multi-structural social and economic growth without any constraints of ideology or other dividing factors.

China's efforts to weaken India through support to Pakistan, or threaten areas of India's strategic interest will delay China's emergence as a competing super power to the USA. India has no visions of being a super power per se. It is only struggling to assert its rightful role in ensuring peace and security in the concerned Asian region through a powerful economic role. Yes, it implies political pre-eminence with a strong military back-up. There is no conflict of interest with China in this.

By any yardstick, a collaborative role between these Asian giants can create a new global order ensuring peace, territorial integrity, and a very progressive economic region, removing imbalances as they exist in the long run. India is not in competition for a super power status. The world is moving in a direction where a tri-polar system is emerging, with the USA, China and India as the supportive

structure of a highly advanced and developed social order with few conflicts. One can hope to see this by 2050. It is not an idealistic hope. The world will have to move in that direction.

Chinese pragmatism is bound to adjust to Indian sensitivities. Neither's role can be subverted beyond a point. As we move into the next decade, this realization will be forced through increasing scientific challenges and environmental changes. Ideology will be replaced by pragmatism. It will then be the culmination of my dream of India becoming the icon. I will not be there, but my wanderings in spirit will reach that goal.

The present pressure tactics of China on India have to be seen in a broader perspective. Post- 1949 when the Communists took over, they started the process of consolidating their power. Apart from serious boundary problems with the Soviet Union, the ideological premise of supremacy over Lenin's Communism was Mao's key approach to China's power. The Soviet Union under Khrushchev, asserting its benign guidance to International Communism, which included China, was resented by Mao who considered the Soviets as pseudo. Soviet economic and arms assistance failed to win over China which designed its own strategy of global ideological dominance. When India inched its way closer to the Soviet Union, it was perceived a long term threat to China's interests.

China felt its flanks being weakened with American presence in Korea on one side, and Soviet–Indian collaboration, specially defence, on the other. The Sino-Indian war of 1962 was a consequence of this thinking. India was too weak and could be subdued. Also, it posed a threat to China's interest in Tibet. Historically, China had laid claims to large areas in the Himalayan belt in which India figured prominently. China capturing Aksai Chin to protect its western flank adjoining Sinkiang and Tibet was the first assertion of its power. It entered Arunachal to establish its claim but withdrew voluntarily to a line which is now called Line of Actual Control. Nothing prevented China from occupying Arunachal if it had wanted to. To claim it as part of Tibet is a bargaining strategy which China uses as a pressure point, specially in recent times.

If one were to analyze China's frequent incursions into India's north-eastern region, inclusive of Bhutan and Sikkim, these were claim lines of China, but not accepted. There are innumerable cases of Chinese intrusions, military and otherwise, in the so-called claimed territories. But, there is hardly any case where they intruded to stay. During my stay in Bhutan, there were at least 10 occasions when Chinese troops or their graziers in Tibet entered the territory for hours. But they always went back.

Most interesting and revealing is China claiming Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim as its fingers, and yet accepting Nepal's and Bhutan's status as sovereign States and members of the United Nations. Sikkim's merger was accepted. In fact, Nathula in Sikkim is now the first trading centre between China and India. There are areas of some concern in Bhutan and Sikkim still, but the political status has been accepted.

China is a pragmatic State, super in the art of dramatizing events and pressurizing India on boundary claims specially. But, it plays a game with a clear objective of making India uncomfortable. I would not be wrong in assuming that China's subtle pressures are to keep India confined to the status of a South Asian power. In this direction, China's friendship with Pakistan is an act of balancing India and preventing it from going beyond its presumed role of a regional power. The added element of this strategy is China's major apprehensions about closeness of the USA to India. It has a larger perception of India being used as a balancing power to China's emerging status as a competitor with the USA. If one views this situation objectively, India is the only country by virtue of its political, economic and defence content which could be blocking China's role.

China is facing enormous socio-economic problems in its polity, in spite of stupendous economic growth. The strains that are emerging cannot be resolved by a depleting ideology. The entire spectrum of Chinese communism, which sustained China's stability, is changing, with the common man's increasing needs and demands. The ethnic conflicts in spite of China's 90% Han content are becoming unmanageable mostly because the leverage of power and

control does not permit free expression or participation. The PLA, centre of China's ideological support power is itself undergoing major pressures of professionalism, and its emerging role as the most important vehicle of China's global role.

I for one would not be unduly perturbed by Chinese tactics of pressures on India, or friendship with Pakistan. India, as it emerges, cannot be substituted by Pakistan in China's collaborative role strategy. Poorly governed, India will still be of great strategic value to both China and the USA. Let us accept the fact that Aksai Chin will remain a part of China, in the final round of bargaining between India and China. Realities of the ground will have to be taken into account by both sides. If India is weakened by China with Pakistan's assistance, a distant possibility, it will be damaging to China's own ambition to be a super power in this region and beyond. Our efforts should be to evolve a strategy of collaboration with China, conducive to India's new role.

It does not serve China's interests to occupy Arunachal and go to war with India. Rest of the boundary is highly negotiable keeping even Pakistan's interests in mind. Future wars will not be conventional. The missile is the accepted norm of the weapon of future wars. The American experience in Iraq, and now in Afghanistan is a pointer. Kargil failed. Though we should not be complacent, India is entering a new phase of weaponry which could be devastating. China is not preparing to invade India. Its new roads, railways, airports are all part of a larger strategic plan of easy access to pressurize as well use these assets as part of its economic dominance, a weapon of greater value and effectiveness. India needs to learn this effective strategy to play a major role as a power of great significance.

As for nuclear deterrence, it is a misnomer. Mao once told the Russians that China would survive a nuclear attack because of its large population and depth. Even if 90% of its population was destroyed, the remaining 10% will emerge as victors with no country to confront, having been destroyed. A strange logic which proved only one point. A nuclear attack is self-destructive. No nation can afford to be destroyed. This is nuclear deterrence. Rajiv

Gandhi realized the significance of a non-nuclear world and worked very hard, along with other major powers, to pave an acceptable way. He failed, but is remembered for his significant contribution in highlighting 'deterrence' in the correct perspective. I myself witnessed this in 1962 in Moscow when all the threat postures in the Cuban crisis fizzled out because neither the USA nor the Soviet Union could afford such a war.

China understands this game fairly well. Apart from building its own nuclear strength to balance off in a big power game, it played a role in North Korea and Pakistan to balance off American and Indian interests in the Asian region, to its advantage in the new equations that are emerging. China's nationalistic fervor, with Han domination, is a weapon that it uses effectively. India has no such matching levers. Its tremendous diversity and spontaneous verbosity are well understood. Despite these shortcomings of India, China cannot emerge as a super power without India's effective collaborative role in this part of the world. India matters, and China knows this. It therefore plays a game of keeping India on its toes with one arm for peace, and the other for pressures.

The way the world is moving, this is the most significant transition to a new order taking shape by 2050. If India plays its cards with confidence and understanding of the emerging scenario, it will emerge as a significant global power of consequence. The prophecy of a three-pillar world order with the USA, China and India as key players is based on above assumptions.

Acknowledgements

This becomes the most difficult part, as any enunciation is inadequate.

But for my chance meeting with Dr. Ashley Tellis of Carnegie Endowment, and our staying together at the Indian High Commissioner's residence in Singapore, I would have discontinued writing this book. I have mentioned in the Preface how he encouraged me. I am deeply obliged to him for collating my thoughts on the events as I remembered them without reference to any records. We have not met since then.

The key motivator was former Ambassador A.N. Ram, who worked with me in the early days of his service when I was posted in Bhutan. An extremely modest person, he persisted in almost forcing me to complete the book. He was the first to whom I gave my draft. Both he and his charming wife, Shanti, the daughter of Shri V.V. Giri, gave me a "certificate of approval". Only then could I process it further.

Nalini, wife of Vice-Admiral P.S. Das, my nephew, has been a source of great strength. She undertook the task of going through the manuscript, editing it and giving it final shape. But for her help and very useful suggestions, it would not have been possible for me

to complete the work. It has been a real pleasure to have her associated with it. I am sincerely grateful to her.

Sangeeta Gupta, my Executive Assistant, was constantly reminding me of the deadlines I had fixed. Whenever she found me casual in pursuing this goal, she would remind me of the commitments I had made. She was aware of my earlier writings and felt I owed this book of my wanderings to posterity. Finally, I did it, and she collected all the handwritten material, translating it into legible text. I truly value her assistance.

Finally, the source of my strength has been my wife, Nirmala, who has been a witness to all these wanderings, having shared with me all the ups and downs I faced. As a partner, she was always there to hold my hand, especially through the difficult days when I had nobody to turn to. Most of all, she was an active participant in the changes that occurred in my life and adjusted herself to the changing circumstances.

Eminent persons like P.N. Haksar, T.N. Kaul, Kewal Singh, Nirmal Mukarjee, Sushital Banerjee, and some others—all were my mentors. But they are no more. They trusted me and my capability to shoulder various responsibilities. But for their confidence in me, I would never have achieved what I did. My sincere thanks to them.

About the Author

Mr. B.S. Das has had a long record of service with the Government of India and the public and private sectors for over four decades.

As a diplomat he served India's Foreign Office in various assignments in Vietnam, Soviet Union, UK, and Bhutan. He was elevated to the rank of an Ambassador and also appointed the Chief Executive of the Government of Sikkim. In 1974, he joined the public sector as Chairman, International Airports Authority of India, and went on to head Air India as its Chairman-cum-Managing Director. After retirement from Air India, he had a stint in the private sector as the head of the corporate group of one of the country's oldest and well known industrial houses.

Mr. Das was also associated with one of India's premier universities, Jawaharlal Nehru University, as a visiting Professor and Ph.D. examiner, and authored two books, *Sikkim Saga* and *Mission To Bhutan*. He was a founder member of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis and the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, as also a member and chairman of various committees set up by the Planning Commission of India. In 1972 he received the Padma Shri.

Today Mr. Das heads Fairwood Consultants, a Group of nine companies in India and abroad.