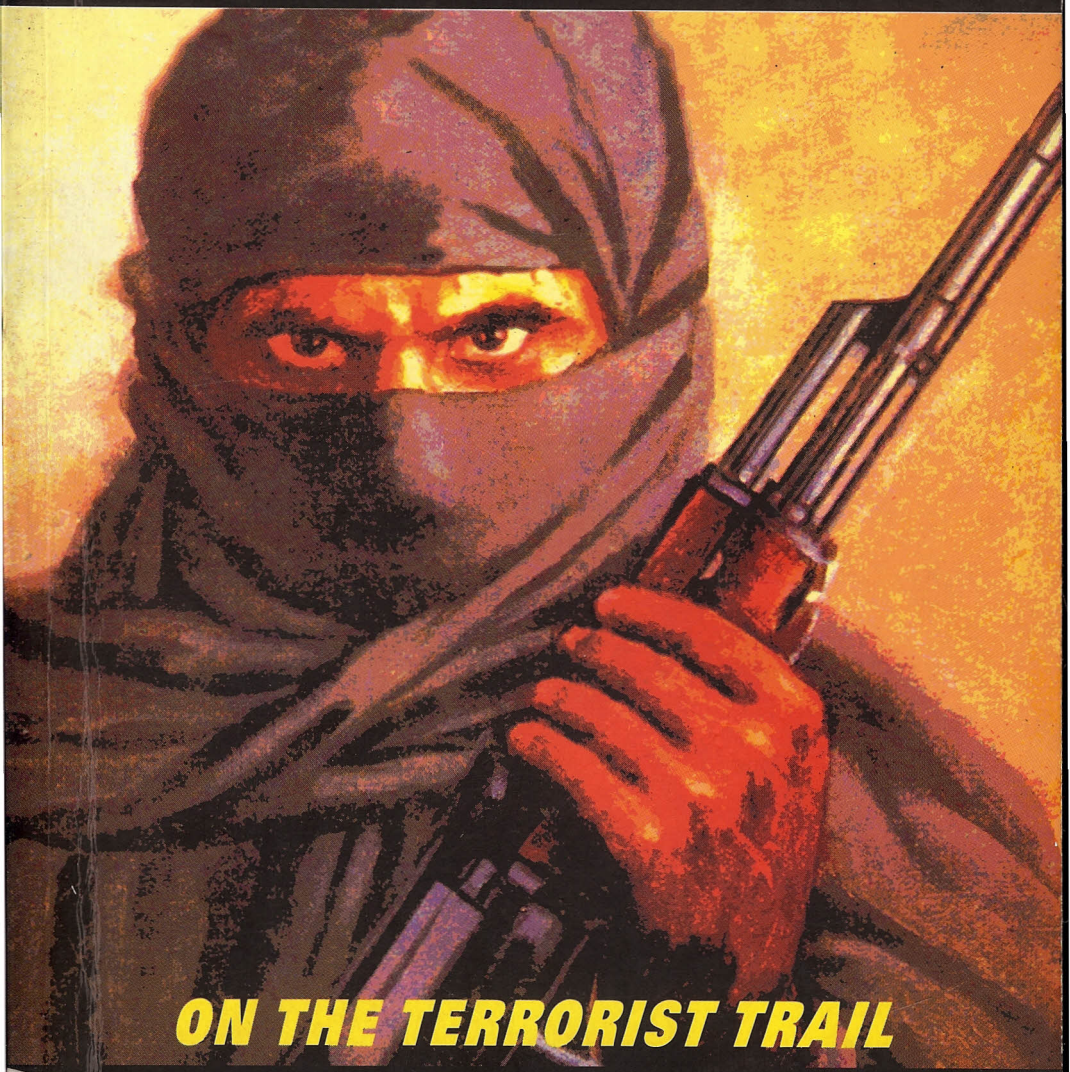
Kohima to Kashmir



ON THE TERRORIST TRAIL

PRAKASH SINGH

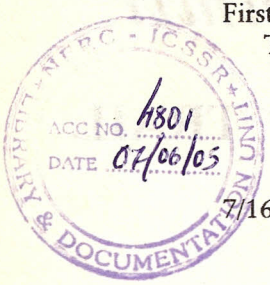
Kohima to Kashmir

ON THE TERRORIST TRAIL

PRAKASH SINGH
Padmashri

Rupa . Co

First in Rupa Paperback 2001
Third impression 2002



Published by
Rupa . Co
7/16, Ansari Road, Daryaganj,
New Delhi 110 002

Offices at:
15 Bankim Chatterjee Street, Kolkata 700 073
135 South Malaka, Allahabad 211 001
PG Solanki Path, Lamington Road, Mumbai 400 007
36, Kutty Street, Nungambakkam, Chennai 600 034
Surya Shree, B-6, New 66, Shankara Park,
Basavangudi, Bangalore 560 004
3-5-612, Himayat Nagar, Hyderabad 500 029

ISBN 81-7167-521-2

Typeset by
Nikita Overseas Pvt Ltd, 1410 Chiranjiv Tower,
43 Nehru Place, New Delhi-110 019

Printed in India by
Gopsons Papers Ltd.
A-14 Sector 60
Noida 201 301

Dedicated to

all the police, paramilitary and army personnel
who sacrificed their lives,
fighting for the territorial integrity of the country
in its turbulent theatres.

You are not born, nor do you die.
You did not come from anything else,
Nor were made out of something other than yourself.
You are unborn, eternal, everlasting and always existed.
You are not extinguished, though the body is slain.

– Kathopanishad

Contents

Preamble

Terrorism in some form or the other has spread its wings over considerably large parts of the world. In some countries like Algeria, Sri Lanka and India, the terrorist or insurgent groups have acquired enough firepower to challenge the might of the state. The so-called great powers have their own share of terrorist problems. The United States is not immune to it. UK, France, Russia and China are also beset with it. Experts visualise that terrorism will assume even more horrendous dimensions in the new millennium. 'The conjunction of technology and terrorism,' as observed by Walter Laqueur, 'makes for an uncertain and frightening future.'

India has already suffered grievously from terrorism of different shades — terrorism by the tribals in the Northeast, terrorism by the Marxist-Leninists, terrorism by the Sikh separatists, and terrorism by the Kashmiri militants. There were genuine grievances no doubt, but the fact remains that fuel was added to fire by countries inimical to us from across the borders. It is estimated that about forty thousand lives have already been lost as a result of terrorist violence in different parts of the country. We lost a former prime minister

(Indira Gandhi), an ex-prime minister (Rajiv Gandhi) and a former army chief (General Vaidya).

During my nearly thirty-five years as a police officer, I had the opportunity to serve in almost all the troubled theatres of India. I found myself on the terrorist trail at a very early stage of my career, when I was posted to Kohima in 1965. In due course, while serving under the Government of India, I was called upon to monitor the Naxalite movement in the country. This was followed, after a lapse of several years, with a posting in Punjab when terrorism was at its peak in the state. Destiny thereafter took me again to the Northeast in Assam. In UP, where I was subsequently posted as the police chief, I had to grapple, among others, with the problem of terrorism in the Terai region. Later, as director general of the Border Security Force, Kashmir took a major portion of my time and energy. The journey from Kohima to Kashmir was eventful. There was a sense of fulfilment, there were moments of frustration; there were spells of hope, and there were periods of despair. The experience, in any case, was unforgettable.

This book is an attempt to sum up my experience in areas which witnessed terrorism of the most brutal kind. It is a humble effort to throw light on the terrorist and insurgent movements in the Northeast, in the states affected by Naxalite violence, and in Punjab and Kashmir. The period during which I served in those areas have been covered in some detail. I have, nevertheless, tried to present an integrated picture. The earlier history, which traces the genesis of terrorist trouble, has been briefly encapsuled, and I have also tried to capture the events subsequent to my departure from the scene. The effort, essentially, has been to present a complete picture to the reader.

Interaction with politicians was an unavoidable professional hazard throughout. On critical occasions, I somehow found myself on their wrong side. Maintaining good relations with the political masters and at the same time upholding the

rule of law was like skating on thin ice. I slipped more than once and on three occasions came crashing down. As a middle-level officer, I had to face the wrath of the home minister of India for no fault of mine, leading to my humiliation and disgrace. Later, as police chief of Assam, I ran into rough political weather and had to quit. Again, as police chief of UP, I had serious differences with the political leadership and was given marching orders, though I was subsequently rehabilitated. The incidents throw light on the difficulties, which a police officer faces in his equation with the political masters and the price he has to pay. These difficulties have, over the years, become aggravated. The chapters on *Police-Politician Interface* and *Uttar Pradesh,* which have been grouped separately, are an attempt to throw some light on these problems.

I would like to place on record my deep sense of gratitude to all those but for whose assistance and cooperation I would not have been able to complete the journey from Kohima to Kashmir. The names are far too many to be enumerated and I can possibly mention only a few of them: Lakhendra Singh, J.B. Murthy and Chandrika Singh in Nagaland; E.N. Rammohan and H.K. Deka in Assam; K.N. Prasad, V.K. Kaul and Sardari Lal at the IB headquarters; A.S. Mangat and Sain Dass in Punjab; Udai Bir Singh and B.S. Tyagi in Kashmir; and Shariq Alavi, V.K. Singh and S.K. Mishra in UP. Arvind Kandpal painstakingly typed the script. And Savitri, my wife, who stood by me patiently through the trials and tribulations all along the journey.

I sincerely hope the book inspires the present generation of officers to accept challenging assignments in any part of the country. It is also my fervent hope and prayer that the policy makers rectify the mistakes of the past and break new ground for the future so as to usher in an era of peace and harmony in areas which have seen so much of blood-letting.

8 September 2000 Prakash Singh

1

Introduction: The Beginnings

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past.

– Shakespeare

'There is a divinity that shapes our ends,' said the Bard of Avon. Looking back at the events of the past nearly four decades, I feel that there is certainly a divinity that influences, if it does not entirely shape, the course of events in a person's life. Those who saw me as a child would never have imagined that I would join the police service and — without being immodest about it — make a success of it. Not that I harboured any ambitions of becoming a police officer either. I was rather reserved in my youth, devoted entirely to my studies. I took part in outdoor games only up to the tenth standard, and though I was captain of the high school football

team and later, the college hockey team, I gradually withdrew from games as the pressure of studies increased. Science and mathematics being my subjects at the intermediate level, I felt I had to pay more attention to my studies.

My father, (late) Suraj Nath Singh, however, always impressed upon me the great importance of physical fitness. Through his inspiration, I learnt yoga at a very young age from a *swamiji*. Actually, *sadhus* and *yogis* were frequent visitors to our home in Allahabad, my father being a deeply religious man. Daily exercises, of which yoga formed a part, became an integral part of my regimen.

I was born in Azamgarh district of UP and brought up in Allahabad. My father, who was a lawyer, decided in 1944 when I was hardly eight years old, to shift to Allahabad to practice in the Allahabad High Court. I graduated from the University of Allahabad in 1955 with English literature, economics and mathematics as my subjects. By this time, I had made up my mind to appear for the Civil Services examination. History was considered a scoring subject in those days. I therefore switched over to history for my master's degree. Later, as I had done well at the MA level, I was taken on the staff of the university as assistant professor of history in a part-time vacancy in August 1958. I liked the assignment and, at one stage, conveyed to the authorities that if they could absorb me in the university, I would not sit for the competitive examinations. But there was no response. I had no option, therefore, but to take my chance at the All India Civil Services examination. Allahabad University had an excellent academic atmosphere in those days and its students invariably did well in any competitive examination.

My selection in the Indian Police Service had all the trappings of a providential arrangement. Those days, one had to take two optional papers for the IPS, three for the central services, and another two advanced papers for the

Indian Administrative Service. I had prepared for all the five papers, but something rather unexpected happened after I had appeared for the two optional papers of Indian history and British history for the IPS. I was feeling very exhausted, having had very little sleep for the past few nights. I told my mother that my eyes were showing signs of strain and that I wanted to sleep for some time. It was sometime in the afternoon and there was a gap of two days before the next examination on international law.

In our family, we have great faith in nature cure remedies. Simple ailments were treated by the application of water or mud. My mother prepared a paste of mud in cold water, wrapped it in a piece of cloth, and placed the mudpack over my eyes. It was very soothing and I fell asleep. But when I got up, I felt some tension in my optical nerves. I looked into the mirror and found that my eyes were blood-red. I could not understand as to what had gone wrong. I splashed water over my eyes, hoping that the redness would go away. But that was not to be. Actually, nature cure treatments produce what is called a 'healing crisis.' Any dormant disease reappears though, with careful follow-up treatment, it finally leaves the system. I had suffered from trachoma earlier. It had subsided, but the nature cure application led to its eruption in an aggravated form. I went to an eye specialist, one Dr B.B. Chandra, who was renowned in his field in Allahabad. He gave me some medicines but the problem persisted and I found that I was not able to read or write for more than five minutes. My eyes would start watering. The result was that I could not sit for the remaining part of the Civil Services examination. I had appeared in only two optional papers and these were evaluated for my eligibility to the IPS. As luck would have it, I was selected. In fact, excluding those who were selected for the IAS and the IFS, I had topped the list of successful candidates who joined the Indian Police Service

in 1959. Subsequently, I found that my performance in the *viva voce*, where I had scored 250 out of 300, had largely contributed to my obtaining the highest position.

I did not do that well during training at the Central Police Training College in Mount Abu (now, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy at Hyderabad). Normally, one would expect the topper of the batch to win a couple of prizes by the end of the training period. I did not win any. Thirty years later, my son, Pankaj Kumar Singh, who also joined the IPS, did me proud by winning no less than six trophies. I was nevertheless steady and my overall performance was well above average. In the all-India ranking, however, I slipped from the number one to the number two position, having been edged out by Jackson Jacob, a very hard working officer who believed in all work and no play. One thing which I really enjoyed at Mt. Abu was riding. The fastest mare of the Institute, Kumari, was the one I chose to ride. The other probationers avoided riding her because she was difficult to control, and the joke was that she might gallop from Mt. Abu to Abu Road — a distance of about 28 kms. I thought I deserved the equitation cup, but the commandant showed predilection for another officer with a princely background. And so I missed the only prize I thought I deserved.

I started my career in the police as assistant superintendent of police (ASP), Kanpur. Later, I was posted as deputy assistant to the inspector general of police (IGP was the police chief of the state then). It was during this period that orders for my deputation to the Intelligence Bureau (IB) were received. The IB had formulated an 'earmarking scheme' under which the best officers of the batch were earmarked for deputation to the Intelligence Bureau. It was the brainchild of B.N. Mullick, then director, Intelligence Bureau. Mullick was some kind of a colossus, held in great awe and esteem by police officers all over the country. He had tremendous clout in the

government. The general impression was that even ministers were scared of him and that the then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru had great faith in him.

Selection to the IB meant selection by Mullick himself. The IGP, UP, at the time was Shanti Prasad, another very competent police officer with a forceful personality. He had developed a liking for me and was not inclined to spare me for deputation to the centre. He, therefore, wrote to the IB stating that they could select any other officer of the 1959 batch if Prakash Singh could be spared for the state. It was, however, not possible for any state police chief to defy the IB in those days. The centre insisted on my services, and so I was released for deputation to the Intelligence Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs in December 1963.

It would be interesting to recall an interface I had as an IPS probationer with B.N. Mullick, director, Intelligence Bureau, in the Police Training College, Moradabad on 1 December 1960. It so happened that the seven IPS probationers undergoing training had been taken to a scene of dacoity in the countryside. Here we were told by the instructor that the dacoits always appeared with their faces covered so that they could not be identified. However, this fact was never mentioned as such in the first information report (FIR). On the contrary, it was always recorded by the police in the FIR that the villagers saw the criminals and identified them in the moonlight or in the light caused by burning the haystack. Actually, the haystack used to be burnt after the incident in order to make the police story plausible. This fudging, we were told, was necessary to meet the requirement of law. If the truth of dacoits coming with their faces masked was mentioned in the FIR, the criminals would almost certainly get away. What was laid down in theory and what was done in actual practice, greatly agitated our young minds. We knew it was wrong but we also knew that stating the

truth would mean a much lesser chance of the criminals being convicted. 'Law is an ass,' we thought, but did not voice it.

A few days later, Mullick arrived at Moradabad and was staying in the Police Training College Mess. We had dinner with him. At Mt. Abu, we had got into the habit of having frank and informal exchanges in the mess with our senior officers. G.K. Handoo, another celebrated police officer who was commandant of the Central Police Training College, had brought us up in that tradition. We told the DIB of our experience at the scene of dacoity and underscored the difference between the theoretical and practical aspects of police working. Mullick was an idealist and unfortunately did not appreciate our views. He insisted that police officers should be truthful irrespective of the consequences of their actions on crime or criminals. Not that we were bereft of idealism, but we found his views impractical. Perhaps, his prolonged stay in the Intelligence Bureau had detached him from the ground realities. At this stage, I committed the indiscretion of saying that we would then be, in Matthew Arnold's words, 'beautiful but ineffectual angels beating our luminous wings in the void in vain.' Having been a student of English literature, I was fond of quoting the great authors. Mullick was, however, not amused at this poetical reference. My colleague R.K. Wadehra's intervention only made matters worse. When the DIB talked of corruption in the police ranks and the failure of IPS officers to tackle it, Wadehra bluntly asked what the IP (Indian Police) officers had done to curb the evil and why they had not been successful in the matter. The conversation ended abruptly and Mullick left the mess in a huff. The next morning, he called Qamrul Hasan, principal of the Police Training College, and said that he was greatly disturbed at the way the probationers had talked to him, and was worried about the future of the Indian Police Service. He

even said that he had not been able to sleep soundly the night before. Mullick's stature being what it was, the principal was rather upset. He called us to his room and inquired what had actually transpired. We faithfully told him the entire sequence of events. Fortunately for us, he understood our point of view better, but nonetheless advised us to be more circumspect while talking to senior officers in future.

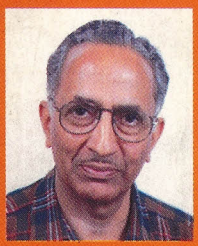
I served in the Intelligence Bureau for nearly a decade. Here I had the opportunity to work under stalwart directors like B.N. Mullick, M.M.L. Hooja, and Atma Jayaram. Mullick's was a towering personality. Two other officers who greatly impressed me by their intellectual brilliance were A.K. Dave, an expert on international communism, and K.N. Prasad, an expert on the Northeast. It was really unfortunate that neither of them could rise to the rank of DIB, though they eminently deserved to occupy the high office. In 1973 there was revolt in the UP PAC and the state insisted on getting its officers (they considered good) back. Actually, by that time I had made up my mind to go back to my parent cadre. I had already represented for my repatriation to UP. The two things, my keenness to go back to the state and the state wanting my services, clicked.

The most memorable parts of my stint in the IB were the four-year period (1965-68) I spent in the remote Northeast, in Nagaland, and the opportunity it gave me, while handling the Naxalite desk, to understand the subtle nuances of the Marxist-Leninist movement which was then sweeping across the country.

Terrorist and insurgent movements have left a bloody trail in the country. Starting from the northeast in the mid-fifties, when the Naga Hills went up in flames, these have engulfed several states. The sixties saw stirrings in the Naxalbari area, when the prairie fire gradually spread over to Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and other areas. The seventies witnessed turmoil in Assam. The eighties were overshadowed by terrorism in the Punjab. And, in the nineties, Kashmir occupied the centre stage.

Prakash Singh , the author, had the opportunity of serving in all the aforesaid turbulent areas. An officer who combines deep theoretical knowledge with enormous field experience, he has, in the present volume, given a panoramic view of the separatist and secessionist movements in Nagaland, Assam, Punjab and Kashmir, and also thrown light on the Naxalite movement. The political ineptitude and the socio-economic factors which led to people taking up arms against the government have been critically analysed.

The author has also capsulised his experiences as a police officer and highlighted the difficulties he experienced while interfacing with the politicians. The colonial police structure which remains unchanged, as brought out in the book, is not in tune with the democratic aspirations of the people and is an impediment in the enforcement of the rule of law.



Prakash Singh, a distinguished police officer of the country, had the unique distinction of serving in its most turbulent theatres. He dealt with the insurgents in Nagaland, tackled the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) rebels in Assam, fought against Sikh terrorism in the Punjab and contributed to combating militancy in Kashmir

He was the chief of the largest police force of the country, UP Police, and also commanded the largest paramilitary outfit, the Border Security Force. He was the police chief of the frontier state of Assam as well. The Government of India, in recognition of his contribution to national security, awarded him the Padma Shri in 1991.

ISBN 81-7167-521-2

9 788171 675210

Politics Rs. 195