

# Kashmir Under 370

## Praise for the Book

*'Kashmir Under 370* by Shri Mahendra Sabharwal is a first-hand account of some interesting twists and turns that Jammu and Kashmir witnessed during its tumultuous history. Written in a lucid anecdotal style, it touches upon the interplay of internal political forces, Pakistan's multi-faceted offensive, international intrigues, and the vagaries of changing public mood and temper. Most importantly, it brings into sharp focus the compulsive hostility of Pakistan, which subverts the loyalties of the Kashmiri people – by exploiting the religious card and unleashing a virulent form of terrorism. J&K Police has had to bear the brunt of this offensive and Shri Sabharwal has dealt with it at various levels. The abrogation of Article 370 had become a necessity to save Kashmir from the agony caused, by the inimical forces, both within and outside. The book provides a new perspective to some events of the Kashmir story that will help both scholars and practitioners to understand Kashmir better.' – **Ajit Doval, national security advisor**

'An important and reflective account from the corridors of power of a crucial slice of Jammu and Kashmir's recent history – in its most turbulent and violent decades' – **Srinath Raghavan, author of *The Most Dangerous Place: A History of the United States in South Asia***

'Mahendra Sabharwal, the first IPS officer allotted to Jammu and Kashmir in 1964, is a senior police officer with multiple ties to Jammu and Kashmir. In this book he has given us an interesting overview of the politics and the problems of terrorism that have afflicted the state. A refreshing analysis of the Article 370 situation makes this a readable book of contemporary interest.' – **Karan Singh, former Sadr-i-Riyasat and first governor of J&K**

# Kashmir Under 370

A Personal History by J&K's Former  
Director General of Police

Mahendra Sabharwal

*with*

Manish Sabharwal

 juggernaut

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*Dedicated to*  
*My late wife Vina – I would have retired as a junior police officer without*  
*her optimism, wisdom and balance,*  
*and*  
*the police, civil servants, CRPF and Indian Army in J&K, whose*  
*strength and sacrifices have upheld India's constitutional sovereignty*  
*despite the dangerous designs of Pakistan and its terrorists*



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# Preface

*Poetim mashraav, bronh kun nazzar thaav*

(Forget the past, look to the future)

– Kashmiri proverb

The abrogation of Article 370 is what triggered the writing of this book. In 1964, destiny decided I would be the first Indian Police Service (IPS) probationer directly assigned to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). But unlike my batchmates from the civil services who mostly retired in their cadre states, my retirement years since 2001 haven't been spent there because Article 370 designated my wife Vina and me 'outsiders' and prohibited us from buying a house in our adopted madre watan (motherland). We both related to Bahadur Shah Zafar's lament 'Kitnā hain bad-nasīb zafar dafn ke liye do gaz zamīn bhī na milī kū-e-yār meñ.' (How wretched is your fate that for your final resting place, you couldn't get two yards of earth in your beloved land.)

This book's thesis is simple: there would be no terrorism in J&K without Pakistan's terror factory. Despite this, I am optimistic about its future because the game has changed in five important ways. One, the abrogation of Article 370 ends the use of soft separatism as a profitable local political strategy. Two, cross-border military strikes have created conventional military consequences for Pakistan's terror factory, and continue to do so. Three, India's rising economic strengths constantly improve our geopolitical position.

Four, Pakistan's growing weaknesses undermine its garrison state. And five, radical Islamic terrorism sponsored by Pakistan is now accepted as a global problem. But I get ahead of myself.

Kashmir became the vessel for Pakistan's anger at itself because its founding idea – the two-nation theory that Hindus and Muslims can't live together – died at birth, with a majority of Muslims staying back in India during Partition. This anger was fuelled by Maharaja Hari Singh's dithering. Had he signed the merger agreement with India a hundred days before he did, Pakistan wouldn't exist. Since 1947, the state hasn't just created the pain, tears and blood in J&K; it has harnessed radical Islam, Cold War geopolitics, fraught federalism and separatist politics in which it is the protagonist.

During my time as J&K police chief, all five Indian forces came together during two sieges at the Hazratbal Shrine. My first day on the job in 1993 was interrupted by a wireless message about terrorists entering Hazratbal. This siege ended in thirty-three days, with thirty-two militants surrendering with arms. The second siege in 1996 ended in five days, with twenty-two militants killed by the Special Operations Group (SOG) of the J&K Police. Both sieges had common roots: planning in Pakistan, orders from Pakistan and terrorists trained in Pakistan. While security forces can shorten the lives of terrorists, ending terrorism requires changing the game rather than playing the old one better. This has now happened.

Cynics suggest my new J&K domicile certificate is merely a piece of paper. But so is our constitution, and both are sacred and invaluable to me. Due to Article 370, which granted J&K special status in India, J&K wasn't fully integrated into the national structure. This lack of integration soon became clear, and personal, as my allocation to the state cadre triggered academy batchmates to joke about my transfer to the Indian Police 'Foreign' Service. In fact, on my first day in the state, I had Rajput and Muslim policemen asking me when I was returning to India. My first day as a district police chief involved the infuriating insanity of

Article 370 legitimizing a tehsildar's refusal to register a telephone exchange property that had been bought in the name of a 'non-state subject', the president of India (all central government property is held in that name). The state home minister Ali Mohammed Sagar not only described the Rajatarangini Cooperative Society legally set up to buy houses locally for All India Service (IAS and IPS) officers like me as 'the East India Company', but he forced it to be liquidated and proposed punishment for officers involved.

It seems to me that people read about Kashmir with hope and curiosity. Hope to understand the present, interpret the pain and anchor our dreams for peace. Curiosity about what happened, why it happened and who did what. I hope this bifocal lens of history – if the *past as past* and the *past as present* – comes through in the pages ahead because peace in J&K was undermined by five interconnected forces:

**Troubled Pakistan:** No prime minister in Pakistan has completed a full term because Pakistan's 'garrison state' uses the false threat of India to establish its supremacy over both state and society. But the military's incompetence – losing every war it has fought and destroying its economy – is now empowered by its partnership with religion. The military peddled propaganda about a conspiracy to destroy the Pakistani *quam* (nation) by Hanud-Yahud-Nasara (Hindus, Jews and Christians) is military self-interest masquerading as national interest. The narrative of 'Pakistan Islam ka qila hain' (Pakistan is the fortress of Islam) justified the financing of their 'Islamic' nuclear bomb terror factory for Kashmir. Pakistan's military believed that nuclear capability deterred India from conventional warfare and sensed the short-term advantages in Cold War partnerships and exporting radical Islamic terrorism. In 1995, we had received direct intelligence from captured terrorists that Western countries were likely to be the next target of radical Islam sponsored by Pakistan. I wish the FBI officer deputed to

Kashmir to help with negotiations with the kidnappers of two Americans had acted on it instead of dismissing me as trying to 'internationalize a Hindu–Muslim and India–Pakistan conflict'. And so, it was no surprise to me when the US killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad in May 2011, fifty-four kilometres from the J&K Police post in Teetwal.

**Cold War geopolitics:** Kashmir became a pawn in the Cold War chessboard after India asked for intervention on 1 January 1948, with thirteen UN resolutions being passed over the next decade in favour of Pakistan. Nehru regretted his mistake within a month. Unlike India, which refused to compromise its sovereignty and provide military bases, Pakistan embraced the US. The U-2 spy aircraft shot down by Russia in 1960 took off from Rawalpindi, and Henry Kissinger used a Pakistan Air Force plane for the secret meeting for rapprochement with China arranged by Yahya Khan in 1971. Americans believe radical Islamic terrorism began in 2001. However, the J&K Police recovered a Kalashnikov for the first time in 1988 after Pakistan had generated resources for Kashmir by over-invoicing Americans for their proxy war in Afghanistan; after the US had abandoned Afghan Mujahideen, once arming them with weapons and jihad; and General Zia-ul-Haq had Islamized his military.

**Radical Islam:** India is home to more Muslims than Pakistan; many non-Muslims live in J&K. In addition, the practically Sufi Ahle-et-Quad Islam sect of Kashmir, the sect most Kashmiris belonged to, has nothing in common with the Wahhabis. Kashmiri Islam practices of the veneration of ziarats (shrines) and relics are considered budh parasti (idol worship) by the Wahhabis. Sheikh Abdullah, whose grandfather was Hindu, suggested that the Kashmiri Muslims' religion was a mixture of rishi worship, Buddhism, Shaivism and Sufism with a veneer of orthodox Islam.

Yet, Pakistan's claims on Kashmir have religious roots, arising from the eternal conflict between dar-ul-Islam (the house of Islam) and dar-ul-Harb (the house of the infidels). Kashmiri syncretism has its origins in literary works like *Rajatarangini* and historical figures like Shah Hamdan, Nooruddin Noorani, Lal Ded and Habba Khatun. I was sad that Kashmiriyat, a term hard to define but which reflected a very real mix of culture, religion and tolerance, didn't prevent the ethnic cleansing of the Valley's Hindus, but Kashmiriyat is authentic, and radical Islam's tools of terror, guns and religious conservatism are alien.

**Fraught federalism:** Many Delhi pillars of power – prime ministers, governors, the home ministry, defence ministry, foreign ministry, finance ministry, etc. – keep a watchful, engaged eye on J&K because of Pakistan's attack on Kashmir in 1947, our mistaken United Nations (UN) reference in 1948, the implementation of Article 370 in 1950, three wars with Pakistan and three Delhi Accords (1952, 1975 and 1987). Most other state governments only deal with Delhi obliquely, remotely and infrequently, but J&K has found it more challenging to find the madhyam marg (middle path) between centrifugal and centripetal power. Every Indian prime minister has been a constant political and administrative presence in J&K. Unfortunately, most chose incrementalism or firefighting when lasting peace required two decisions only Delhi could make: abrogating Article 370 and cross-border military strikes.

**Separatist politics:** B. R. Ambedkar refused to give inputs for Article 370 because he believed it would create sovereignty within sovereign India. Syama Prasad Mookerjee wrote to Sheikh Abdullah, saying, 'There cannot be a republic within a republic. India has been torn into two by the two-nation theory. You are now developing a three-nation theory . . . this cannot be good for your state or India.' History suggests both leaders were right. Article

370 made soft separatism a profitable local political strategy, and Kashmiris use the phrase 'nazer tchott assin' (short-sightedness) to describe their politicians who reaped a harvest of fear, wealth and dynastic politics. The Gupkar People's Alliance delusion of representing Kashmiri people echoes the maharani of Jaipur Gayatri Devi's quip three decades after we adopted our constitution: 'We [the princely states] are the real India.' India has created the world's largest democracy on the infertile soil of the world's most hierarchical society because our competitive politics breed ideas, realism and compromise. Politicians in the rest of India were not less corrupt, self-centred or myopic. But first-generation regional politicians like Lalu Prasad Yadav in Bihar, M. Karunanidhi in Tamil Nadu, Sharad Pawar in Maharashtra and Jyoti Basu in West Bengal changed the status quo of power, caste and class. In contrast, J&K suffered 'elite capture' and became a closed society, economy and polity.

Pakistan had a two-instalment strategy for Kashmir: independence followed by annexation. This started with acts of assassination in the 1980s: Inspector Saiddullah in Maisuma (who was the police officer known for arresting Pakistan-returned militants), Tika Lal Taploo in Habbakadal (who as the head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh [RSS] in the Valley was vocally against Pakistan), Neelkanth Ganjoo in Hari Singh High Street (who as sessions judge had delivered the death sentence to the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front [JKLF] leader Maqbool Bhat) and Mohammed Din in Tangmarg (who received the Padma Shri for alerting the Indian army to Pakistan's invasion of Rajouri in 1965). In the 1990s, Pakistan began diverting their support from the pro-independence JKLF to the pro-Pakistan groups like Hizbul Mujahideen.

The ideologies of Pakistan-supported terrorists like the Jaish-e-Mohammad's Masood Azhar and Lashkar-e-Taiba's Hafiz Sayeed later found a mirror in Osama bin Laden's beliefs. Yet, until 9/11,

the US refused to believe the radical Islam targeting India would turn its attention to them. Terrorists everywhere are similar – they ignore the laws of war by removing the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, peddling falsehoods about their religion, legitimizing mass murder. Those who kidnap, assassinate, bomb and maim children, women and men in the name of Islam do not represent Islam or all Muslims and find it hard to thrive in real democracies.

Every eighty-five-year-old knows it is impossible to tell whether luck, skill or choices matter more in determining professional outcomes. My own career path was very exciting: as Jammu police chief, I administered Pakistani territory after 1971 and met Asian sprint champion (and now surrendered soldier) Abdul Khaliq. When I was chief of police in the Anantnag district, a mob convinced that India was behind Zulfikar Bhutto's hanging in Pakistan once came to burn down my house. As Kashmir police chief, I broke my baton on separatists trying to dig up the pitch in a cricket match between India and West Indies. As the state intelligence chief, I once split a single work day between meetings with an elected chief minister and the governor selected to dismiss him. A year before becoming police chief, our success in dispersing a mob carrying four terrorist dead bodies meant the only arrest was one of the 'dead' bodies that tried to run away. Five months before becoming police chief, I was held hostage in the Control Room by police officers angry with the army. My years as the J&K police chief also involved getting the force back in the fight against terrorism by forming special operations groups, an unscheduled helicopter trip that rescued a kidnapped American and a bomb technician telling me not to worry about a grenade that bounced off me but didn't explode because it was Chinese-made. My subsequent stints in Delhi as special director of the Intelligence Bureau, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) chief and secretary (Security) gave me a deeper insight into Pakistan's terror factory.

I pray that the Kashmiris now see Pakistan's activities in their phrase 'lookan hoon dh khoon lookini muth' (smearing the blood of the people on their faces). After Operation Searchlight – the genocide conducted by the Pakistani army in Bangladesh – the terrorist Maqbool Bhat thoughtfully wrote to his niece, 'Rulers who declare war against their people cannot offer anything to anyone else but injustice.' Pakistan inspired its terrorist proxies with tales of Russia's defeat in Afghanistan, the US's defeat in Vietnam and the fall of the Berlin Wall. But those comparisons are flawed – those superpowers ventured far from home while India fights terrorism on its territory with our institutions intact. I am optimistic about peace and prosperity in my adopted motherland because the world has changed for murderous Pakistani actors, calculations and proxies. I paraphrase medieval warrior Saladin to remind them: you have the watches, we have the time.

During my decades of service in J&K, thousands of Kashmiris bade me farewell saying, 'Ghaste kormukh Khodayes havele.' (Go, I have handed you over to God.) I offer this precious blessing to the next generation of politicians, civil servants and police officers in J&K. Better days lie ahead, and always remember, khidmat chheh azmat (service is honour).

**Mahendra Sabharwal**  
Kanpur, June 2024



# Introduction

*Jaki rahi bhavna jaisi, prabhu moorat dekhi tin taisi.*

(You see who you are and what you believe in.)

– *Ramacharitmanas*, Tulsidas

*The impossibility of immaculate perception*

– *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche

Age has given me a deeper appreciation of the concept of *anekantavada*, the multiple versions of truth. Where you stand on an issue depends on where you sit. People may be central to historical narratives but understanding them requires accounting for the totality of their influences because any recounting is inevitably distorted by family, experiences, ambitions and memory. Thus, this chapter attempts to give you a sense of who I am.

It is every police officer's dream to become police chief in their state, and my dream came true in October 1993. However, the seeds of public service were planted in my mind in my birthplace Kanpur – an important centre during the independence movement – which infected me with the idealism of a newly born democratic nation. I remember looking at and detesting the British police officers on horseback enforcing curfew, unaware that God's sense of humour would ensure I would repeatedly use this tool in Kashmir. My National Cadet Corps (NCC) 'C' certificate and attending half-a-dozen NCC camps stoked my attraction to uniform. My father,

Hridaya Narain Sabharwal, was a professor of political science at the universities of Agra and Kanpur and had written five books on statecraft. Finally, my law degree from Allahabad University and preparation for the civil services exams at Muir Hostel (now A.N. Jha Hostel) expanded my political and historical horizons. I lived in a joint family headed by my dadi (paternal grandmother) and was homeschooled until the fifth standard – the streets and grounds of my neighbourhood were my sports curriculum. A prized possession was the Hercules bicycle my father gifted me for being the only person to achieve a first division in my matriculation exams.

My early love of sports – representing my college in football, hockey and cricket, and captaining the Allahabad University hockey team – set the stage for my first encounter with J&K in 1959. I travelled to play football for Agra University at S.P. College, Srinagar. The journey from Kanpur to Pathankot via Delhi, followed by a two-day bus journey with a night halt en route (the Banihal Tunnel was under construction at the time), was exhausting. However, the challenges of crossing the Pir Panjal mountain range were more than amply compensated for by the spectacularly scenic last hundred kilometres' drive to Srinagar. We stayed at the Tourist Reception Centre, and little did I know that I would later spend years living in houses a few kilometres away. Football was, and is, a popular game in Kashmir, and our matches attracted large crowds, but we lost in the quarter-finals. When people in Kanpur asked about my visit, I described the beauty while wistfully reflecting that I would never go back to this distant place. Clearly, humans plan, and God laughs!

Sports helped my career; my appointment as the district police chief in Jammu was hastened by playing for their hockey and football teams and by my tenure as the co-chairperson of the university's youth welfare and sports board. In later years, politician Prem Nath Dogra nominated me to succeed him as the head of the Jammu Olympic Association, and the Abdullahs co-opted

me for the state cricket, football and hockey associations. After Sheikh Abdullah passed away, it was my honour to be part of the organizing committee for a fortnight-long football tournament in his memory in the autumn of 1983. Sports, a universal language, created valuable local connections, deepened my understanding of the community and helped me be accepted quickly.

At the time, I didn't realize our lengthy and loud debates in the university hostel about my friend K.K. Mishra's PhD thesis titled 'Kashmir and India's Foreign Policy' were excellent prep for my career. Mishra soon joined the university's political science department and maintained until his death that any solution would involve legitimizing the 1949 ceasefire line. These debates prepared me for my UPSC exams and interviews. The most torturous time for aspiring civil servants is waiting for the results; I found solace in a temporary appointment as a lecturer for English literature at my college, where I brushed up on Browning, Shaw and Shelley. My joy at passing the UPSC successfully in May 1964 was blunted with the news of the passing of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who was an icon for our generation. In 1962, I had cycled many hours with hostel mates to an election rally in his Phulpur constituency. However, he didn't show up, and we realized then that he won elections with almost no campaigning. I must confess the four hours of cycling were also motivated by the rumour that many Kashmiri girls were part of his campaign team!

Many who join the civil services are inspired by a desire to undertake public service and the ideal of *yogah karmasu kausalam* (*yoga* is perfection in action) enshrined in the *Bhagavad Gita*. However, we are not really ready when we start our jobs. The joint foundation course for IPS, IAS and IFS officers at the National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie (later renamed after Lal Bahadur Shastri) marks the beginning of their careers. I shared a room in Happy Valley Hut with M.K. Kaw, a Kashmiri Pandit in the IAS, and C.R. Bala Chandra from Karnataka in the IFS,

showcasing India's rich cultural diversity. Our neighbours included Naresh Dayal from the IFS and Kevi Chausa from Nagaland in the IPS. This period fostered enduring cross-service friendships, expanded our knowledge and built essential social capital. Weekly mess nights introduced us to formal dining, where, despite an introduction to liquor, I chose to remain a teetotaler. After a rewarding six months, we received ten days of home leave before progressing to specialized training at the Central Police Training College in Mount Abu. The memories of these formative times were rekindled during our golden jubilee reunion in 2014, where my wife Vina finally met my batchmates and saw the campus. An academy plaque now reads 'Sheelam param bhushanam' from *Bhartrhari Nitisatakam*, which means 'Character is the supreme embellishment'. I couldn't agree more: all my batchmates who had illustrious careers distinguished themselves not only with their intelligence but also their character.

The next phase of training at Mount Abu was different from Mussoorie, with increased discipline, physical demands and rigour. Our instructors, T. B. Spedigum, M. K. Menon and Rajinder Singh, were hardly popular for their harsh commands, such as 'Don't walk like a pregnant duck!' Looking back, however, their strictness was instrumental in preparing us for the challenges of a police career. Despite my high rank in the batch, I was initially dismayed to find myself assigned to J&K, a result of my oversight in submitting my preferences. My initial reaction was to consider retaking the exam, and I even voiced my discontent with the director. However, fate had its way, and the realities of the 1965 Indo-Pak War – night patrolling, air raid drills and blackout protocols – quickly overshadowed my concerns about J&K's special constitutional status and its distance from home. Missing a week of training for my sister's wedding adversely affected my standing with the instructors, but I doubled my efforts, compensated for the lost time, and graduated near the top of my class. Unlike my batchmates, who enjoyed four weeks of leave

after our passing-out parade, the impact of the war required me to report immediately for duty. This, however, wasn't my last encounter with shortened leave. My leave for my wedding was approved so late that I arrived in Kanpur just a day before the ceremony, only to be called back early for the state's first parliamentary elections.

Arriving in Pathankot by train, I found my way to the Jammu police headquarters at Kacchi Chawni, taking a cycle rickshaw, bus and auto rickshaw. As an IPS probationer – a new species since I was the first officer allocated to the state from the civil services academy – I didn't have a house, office or clear posting. My presence puzzled senior officers, who often inquired when I planned to 'return to India'. A storeroom with no bathroom and containing condemned office files was cleared for me to sleep in at the police headquarters. But things soon stabilized, and I dropped my plans to retake the civil services exam.

In 1967, my parents arranged for me to marry Vina (Khanna), whose family lived not far from us in Kanpur. I was surprised she came from a business family and a different world from ours. I guess her educationist grandfather, who had hidden Chandra Shekhar Azad from the British in his house, and parents, who funded charitable schools, gave my parents comfort. Vina finished her final exams for her masters in English Literature, before making her way to Jammu a few months later with a dramatic entry. With no official transport, I drove to Pathankot station on the Rajdoot motorcycle I had brought from Kanpur to pick her and my mother up. My mother took a public transport bus, while Vina and I headed off on the Rajdoot. We had barely entered J&K state lines when a herd of running cows crashed into our motorcycle. Vina was thrown off the bike, landed on her head and began to bleed profusely. I landed on the opposite side, and the bike caught fire. Providence kindly ensured that an ambulance equipped with a doctor was returning to Pathankot from Jammu, and it took us to a nearby medical centre where Vina was treated. After receiving stitches, we were driven to

our official residence, beginning our life together with Vina's head bandaged but spirits undeterred.

My probation was an early indication of how my career would differ from my that of batchmates. My compulsory military attachment and three-month deputation to the regional police training college at Phillaur were waived. My learning-by-doing training involved two months at the police headquarters, two months at the district police lines, one month at the armed police battalion, two months at the prosecution branch in Purani Mandi and three months each at the Sadar and Jammu city police stations. My tenure as Jammu district police chief began in 1968, and it was where I learnt the nitty-gritty details of my profession: people management, civilian relations and military liaising. The job was intimidating – I'd had five predecessors in three years, including two who had been suspended from service!

Of these, I felt sad about the professional fate of T.R. Kalra. He was technically my senior in the state IPS cadre, but he had joined directly under the refugee quota and was not a direct recruit. His Urdu was immaculate, his sense of humour delightful, but age-old vices undermined his career. Great first bosses are crucial to learning, and I received invaluable training and knowledge from M.M. Wazir, Surendra Nath, Bakshi Vishwamitra, P.R. Khurana and Sheikh Ghulam Qadir Ganderbali. During this time, Vina's ventures into police welfare work demonstrated her organizational and people-management skills. She continued this work throughout my career and never expressed any regret in walking away from the admission she had obtained to Carnegie Mellon University in the US (in my defence, though, this was much before our wedding).

In 1972, my career took an exciting turn when I was selected as first secretary to the Indian embassy in Washington. Horizontal mobility across the central services like IFS, IAS and IPS is rare because these services guard their posts, cadres and turf diligently. But this mobility shouldn't be so scarce given how much both sides

– the embassy and I – benefited. The few months of training in Delhi in their fabulous South Block building that also housed the prime minister’s office was an excellent induction to the rules and expectations of foreign service while exposing me to an informal work culture that I hadn’t seen in J&K. The ambassador T.N. Kaul was a chance Kashmir connection, and I learnt a lot from A.P. Venkateswaran, J.N. Dixit, E. Gonsalves, G.V. Ramakrishna and Satish Chandra. I witnessed Venkateswaran’s professional integrity when he refused to do Ambassador Kaul’s bidding with the retort, ‘I am a public servant and not anybody’s private servant.’ We entertained widely, and my children still remember tennis players Vijay Amritraj and Arthur Ashe, and musician Ravi Shankar visiting our home. I remember being on a cruise organized by the US State Department the evening President Nixon resigned. Our host US foreign service officers were ecstatic, and some even drove us by the White House after the cruise to celebrate their vibrant democracy together. Our family made new friends, we met diplomats from many countries and our children broadened their horizons. These friendships endured over time, and a few years ago, Colonel Cook of the US Army and his lovely wife Nell hosted a delightful lunch for us with all our North Glebe Road neighbours in Arlington. This posting upgraded all our future houses since we brought everything back from our Washington home. I still watch TV on the reclining sofa we bought for \$9 in 1976!

I returned to J&K in 1977, entering a rocky patch. Sheikh Abdullah had stopped appointing new IPS officers in the state cadre. The state government gave me a tent to work out of, but I made the most of the downtime by meeting people to get reacquainted with the state and volunteering as assistant secretary of the state unit and preparing a note for the National Police Commission (a role nobody else wanted). Things soon changed as they always do. Over the next few decades, with a few interludes in Delhi, I served as district police chief in Anantnag and Srinagar, Kashmir

division police chief, state intelligence chief, police headquarters chief, state vigilance chief and, finally, state police chief. My last few years in service were at the Intelligence Bureau, CRPF and Cabinet Secretariat in Delhi, and I lived in a nice house on Humayun Road.

A lifetime of serving my country in a police uniform didn't leave me rich or famous but it did make me happy and proud. My early angst at being allocated to the J&K cadre was misplaced because knives are sharpened on rough surfaces, and I doubt my career would have been as exciting or fulfilling had I been granted my wish for my home-state cadre of Uttar Pradesh. At the end of my career (and now as well), I have one piece of advice for young people. Be wary of wishing for familiarity. Instead, seek out risk and trust the Almighty has a plan.

After retirement, since Article 370 prohibited us from buying our own house in J&K, Vina and I moved to Kanpur in 2001. Vina energized her school education trust, reaching more than 8,000 students when she left us, and I ran a small farm that sold wholesome grains, fruits and vegetables. My son Manish lives in Bengaluru with his wife, Kavita, an educator. My daughter, Miti, lives in Delhi with her husband, Gaurav, a golf champion. My three grandchildren – Dhruv, Raghav and Noor – are endless sources of joy, affection and learning. I am confident the next generation of my family, Kashmiris and Indians, will find solutions to the problems our generation didn't.

I had three fears while writing this book. The first came from self-awareness: I am not a good writer. I don't think many civil servants are, despite our confidence in our ability to do everything. I overcame this fear by getting Manish to help. My second fear was that any book hung on memories would dance close to the poisons of ego and narcissism. I searched the text multiple times to purge the word 'I', and I still don't believe it conveys that everything was teamwork. Finally, as a practitioner not an academic, I intuitively grasp the medical wisdom that a post-mortem has a certainty that



a prescription never can. Hopefully, being physically away from J&K for two decades gives me the honesty and detachment that accompanies the long eye of time.

I overcame these fears because of Vina. Sadly, during the last stages of writing, Vina passed away and broke her promise to leave this world after me. Our children often introduced her as the reason I reached the peak of my profession, and I agree. We were married for fifty-eight years despite different interests, instincts and inclinations – or perhaps it was because of these differences. I miss her and wait to join her.

Anybody who loses a spouse knows that the motivation to do anything is torture to find. But this book was Vina's wish, so I got over my feelings and finished it. So, let us then dive into the mysteries of J&K.



# Timeline

## Five Forces Through the Years

*(See overleaf)*

Year	Radical Islam	Fraught Federalism	Separatist Politics	Troubled Pakistan	Geopolitics
1930s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two-nation theory</li> <li>Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council of Princes</li> <li>Glancy Commission recommends legislative assembly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Muslim Conference split</li> <li>Kashmir Martyr's Day</li> </ul>		
1940s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partition</li> <li>JUI formed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sheikh arrested</li> <li>Maharaja Hari Singh's accession to India</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Naya Kashmir</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1947 tribal invasion</li> <li>M.A. Jinnah dies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World War II</li> </ul>
1950s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Muslim Brotherhood expands to Sudan</li> <li>Iraqi monarchy overthrown; Sunni domination intensified</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Article 370; separate constitution for J&amp;K approved</li> <li>Syama Prasad Mookerjee's death</li> <li>14 UN references</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sheikh arrested</li> <li>Plebiscite Front formed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First Army Coup; President I.A. Mina exiled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dalai Lama seeks refuge in India</li> <li>China attacks Aksai Chin in Ladakh</li> <li>Cold War Alliances</li> </ul>

Year	Radical Islam	Fraught Federalism	Separatist Politics	Troubled Pakistan	Geopolitics
1960s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Muslim World League founded in South Africa</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• India's atomic reactor project set-up; ISRO established</li> <li>• Goa brought under India; Maharashtra and Punjab split into smaller states</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hazratbal Mosque-Muqaddas stolen and recovered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Radio Kumbhmarkund</li> <li>• Police officer Amarchand killed</li> <li>• Bank robbery</li> <li>• Operation Gibraltar-Mujahids invasion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sino-Indian conflict</li> <li>• US fighter jets arrive</li> <li>• Arab-Israel War</li> </ul>
1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Iran revolution</li> <li>• Al Fatah formed</li> <li>• JKLF formed</li> <li>• Shia reform movement launched in Saudi Arabia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delhi Accord</li> <li>• Simla Agreement</li> <li>• Nuclear power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sheikh Abdullah back as CM</li> <li>• First Governor's Rule imposed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1971 War: Birth of Bangladesh</li> <li>• Military coup; Zia</li> <li>• Bhutto hanging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• US partnership for Afghanistan</li> <li>• US loses Vietnam War</li> </ul>

Year	Radical Islam	Fraught Federalism	Separatist Politics	Troubled Pakistan	Geopolitics
1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Islamist military coup in Sudan</li> <li>• Al-Qaeda founded by Osama Bin Laden</li> <li>• Muslim Brotherhood contests elections in Egypt</li> <li>• Lashkar-e-Taiba founded by Hafiz Sayeed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income tax raid conducted on Sheikh Abdullah in Srinagar</li> <li>• Punjab terrorism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sheikh Abdullah dies; Farooq takes charge as CM</li> <li>• Rajiv-Farooq Accord</li> <li>• 1987 state election; G.M. Shah coup</li> <li>• National Opposition Accord</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operation Topac: Two instalments plan</li> <li>• Zia islamizes the army</li> <li>• Amanullah Khan exiled to Pakistan</li> <li>• Mhatre murder</li> <li>• Two blasts in Srinagar</li> <li>• First Klashnikov's recovered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USSR breakup</li> <li>• Germany reunification</li> <li>• Afghan victory in the Soviet War</li> </ul>
1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted attacks on religious shrines in J&amp;K</li> <li>• Shift from JKLF to Hizbul Mujahideen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent leadership changes in Delhi; seven PMs in ten years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kashmiri Pandit exodus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift from JKLF to pro-Pak terrorists</li> <li>• Kargil War</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taliban establishes control over Afghanistan</li> </ul>

## Hazratbal: A Tale of Two Sieges

**The siege of 1993: Thirty-two terrorists surrendered after  
thirty-three days**

*The two most powerful warriors are Time and Patience.*

– *War and Peace*, Leo Tolstoy

**The siege of 1996: Twenty-two terrorists killed  
after five days**

*Khud ko bulund kar itna, ki khuda bande se khud puche, bata teri  
raza kya hain.*

(Rise to such heights that before your destiny is written, God  
asks you what your desire is.)

– Allama Iqbal

As I raced to Hazratbal in my bulletproof Ambassador on 15 October 1993, an inner voice told me this was likely the biggest challenge of my career. It was my first day as J&K police chief and I had hastily left my predecessor's farewell function after receiving a wireless message from the police control room. Ghulam Mohammed Chisti of the Muslim Auqaf Trust was trying to reach me; heavily armed terrorists had entered the Hazratbal Shrine, broken the outer locks of the room containing the shrine's holy relic and taken civilians hostage. Thirty-three days later, this siege ended,

and I had the honour of waking Governor General K.V. Krishna Rao at 4 a.m. to inform him of the militants' surrender. My last year as police chief in 1996 also involved a siege with terrorists, and this ended in five days with twenty-two militants being killed by the Special Operations Group (SOG) of the J&K Police.

Both situations sound similar but were handled differently by the same team because, as the ancient Greek historian Heraclitus said, you can never step in the same river twice because both you and the river have changed. In 1996, the terrorists gave us another opportunity, we were ready to take bigger risks, and the J&K Police was more powerful.

Our strategy in both sieges was constrained and informed by context and memory. Years after Operation Blue Star, where the army entered the Golden Temple in Amritsar to flush out terrorists, the deep scars Punjab had sustained had yet to heal. The Hazratbal Shrine has a unique place in Kashmiri imagination, society and politics. During the first siege, the recent memory of the demolition of Babri Masjid meant India's Muslim community was still in shock, and the second was only a few months after Charar-e-Sharief had been burnt down.

Located by the Dal Lake and surrounded by the Zabarwan Mountains, the Hazratbal Mosque houses the *Moi-e-Muqaddas*, a hair from Prophet Mohammad's beard. The relic's journey, as recounted in Sheikh Abdullah's biography, began in 1635 when a Kashmiri trader bought it from one of the keepers of the holy Kaaba, but it was confiscated by Emperor Aurangzeb and placed in the dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti in Ajmer. The emperor soon had a dream in which the prophet asked him why he wanted to stop his journey to Kashmir, and the relic reached Kashmir in 1699 along with Khwaja Nur-ud-Din Ashawari. The Dargah-e-Naqshbandi in Khanyar housed the relic before it moved near the Dal Lake to a wooden prayer house. The khwaja's daughter, Inayat Begum, then became the custodian of the relic. She had married into



the Banday family, and her descendants have been the custodians of the Moi-e-Muqaddas ever since. The existing mosque structure was completed in 1979 with marble from Makrana in Rajasthan, which is also the source of marble used to build the Taj Mahal.

Terrorists targeted Hazratbal twice for different reasons. The obvious reason was the constraint on interventions, tactics and weaponry imposed on security forces to ensure nothing would endanger the holy relic or shrine structure. The previous crisis of December 1963, when some miscreants had stolen the holy relic, had created chaos in the Valley when agitating workers for the Plebiscite Front (supporters of Sheikh Abdullah) had set aside their differences and allied with his arch-rival Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq to whip up anti-India sentiments through the Tehreek-e-Bazyabi Moi-Muqaddas (the agitation for the recovery of the Moi-e-Muqaddas). The police recovered the relic after nine days, but the agitation had questions about the authenticity of the recovered relic. Sceptics were silenced by the rasook (influence) of the well-known spiritual leaders Syed Mirak Shah and Maulana Syed Masoodi, who had it verified by Muslim scholars and imams. The bedridden eighty-seven-year-old Masoodi was shot dead by Pakistani militants in 1990.

Second, Hazratbal symbolized political power, housing the headquarters of the affluent J&K Muslim Auqaf Trust, with Sheikh Abdullah as its lifetime chairman and trustee. After Sheikh's death, Farooq took on the lifetime position. Even Amanullah Khan of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) said, 'Whoever controls Hazratbal controls Kashmir.' Sheikh's supporters were initially assigned to the Pathar Masjid near the National Conference headquarters at Mujahid Manzil for prayers but they later moved to Hazratbal. Every Friday, everybody offering namaz heard the Sheikh give a pre-khutba (sermon). His fondness for the shrine was deep enough for him to want a final resting place a few hundred metres away. During both sieges, I remember being grateful that Sheikh

Sahib was not around to witness armed terrorists threatening to kill innocents in his favourite house of God.

Finally, Kashmiris value their shrines as a significant cultural and religious inheritance, but fundamental Islamists like the Wahhabis, Salafis and Deobandis, along with their masters in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, regarded Hazratbal as but parast (idol worship). Security forces had already foiled multiple attacks on the Mazar-e-Shoda shrine in Khanyar and Makhdoom Sahib in the Hari Parbat area, and terrorists would soon target shrines like Baba Reshi and Aishmaquam. They would sadly, however, succeed at Charar-e-Sharief on my watch.

Constant rumours about militant plans for Hazratbal meant that a strong contingent of paramilitary and army troops was permanently stationed there. The shrine had also become vulnerable because a JKLF breakaway group had abandoned its 'independence' demands, adopted a fully Islamic agenda and established operational headquarters nearby. A small contingent of the J&K Police had been guarding the outer perimeter of the shrine in uniform while providing a plain clothes inner security cover in the sanctum sanctorum. In 1993, this outer cordon shamefully collapsed without a fight but the brave plainclothes officers in the inner cordon successfully bought us time by scaring the terrorists about Khuda ka keher (the wrath of God) falling upon them if they handled the holy relic. In 1996, our outer cordon fought back, and we lost two brave policemen after they killed seven terrorists.

### **The Siege of 1993**

In 1993, the siege of Hazratbal began around noon on a cold October day when heavily armed terrorists entered the dargah to evade pursuit by paramilitary and army troops. These terrorists included JKLF intelligence chief Mohammed Idrees, divisional commander Basharat Raza and publicity chief Shabir Siddiqui.

Despite the stereotype that most Indian soldiers lose their heads in the heat of battle, these jawans made us proud by exercising commendable restraint and not entering the shrine. They created a circular cordon, blocking the outer periphery, and escalated the issue while waiting for further instructions. Our objectives were clear – ending the standoff with minimum bloodshed, without heavy arms entering the mosque and avoiding any solution that could undermine the morale of the security forces. These were vital for personal, professional and national reasons.

Hostage situations are always tricky, but concerns about the relic complicated our siege. The chairman of the Auqaf Trust, Ghulam Qadar Draboo, was unavailable, so Secretary Abdul Chishti briefed us about the multiple locks on multiple doors including the fact that the keys to the innermost lock did not fit. We could see terrorists had taken offensive and defensive positions at various points in the shrine, including on the minarets, and were wiring the dome with explosives. We decided that any direct exchange of fire between the security forces and militants at this stage would be unwise and evacuated over 5,000 people from nearby mohallas to a nearby regional engineering college complex. The army soon took over the cordon with the competent Brigadier S.P.S. Kanwar in charge on the ground, supported by Chinar Corps Commander General Padmanabhan, who was also known as Paddy. I was not surprised to learn that Paddy had later become army chief. His unique leadership abilities were an unbeatable combination of decisiveness and openness.

On the first night, a fire broke out in a building in the complex called Noor Khan, which was used for offering namaz by women. It wasn't clear whether this fire was arson or an accident, but in retrospect, it was helpful in later negotiations and reminded people how the terrorists could damage their beloved dargah. Predictably, the All Parties Hurriyat Conference's (APHC) S.A.S. Geelani suggested the police had set Noor Khan on fire to defame the

terrorists. This was a patently hilarious idea as cowardly terrorists hiding behind God and civilians surely don't have a reputation to protect!

On the second day, my colleague A.K. Suri contacted the militants inside the shrine. Their demands included getting the authenticity of the Moi-e-Muqqadas verified, opening the shrine to the public, removing the curfew and exiting with their weapons. We rejected these demands, so the militants asked to speak to Divisional Commissioner Wajahat Habibullah or Chief Secretary Sheikh Ghulam Rasool. Later in the day, Suri, now accompanied by Habibullah, was given the same demands. At this point, we were only willing to offer an unconditional surrender with a fair trial.

The militants were now barricaded inside without access to food and water. We let them walk around and collect rice bags already in the shrine complex. But our plan to cut off the food, water and electricity supply into the shrine was cut short by Chief Justice Aziz Mushabber Ahmadi of the Supreme Court when, on a petition by Hurriyat leaders, he ordered calorie-measured food packets to be distributed to everybody inside the shrine. Frustrated by the clearly flawed order, General Padmanabhan and I made public statements against it as it was needlessly prolonging a tense standoff with armed terrorists, some of whom were from Pakistan and Afghanistan. These food packets, however, played a key role during later negotiations as they gave us entry into the shrine and face-to-face interaction with the militants. Of course, this gave the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Opposition the chance to coin a cheeky slogan: 'Biryani for the terrorists, bullets for the innocent.'

The siege provided a lot of publicity to the APHC, a coalition of thirty political, religious and underground organizations who 'would not replace the gun'. Militant groups were initially hesitant about supporting the APHC. However, a week before the Hazratbal surrender, seven groups – the JKLF, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Al Jihad, Al Umar Mujahideen, Ikhwan-ul-Muslameen, Al Burq and

Operation Balakote – issued a joint statement asking the public to cooperate with the Hurriyat. But early in the siege, it had become clear that the Hurriyat and terrorists were working together and were planning protests in the Valley to improve their negotiating position.

On 18 October, the Hurriyat issued a warning stating that unless armed security forces withdrew from around the shrine, they would go to the UN Military Observer Group headquarters to submit a memorandum before marching to Hazratbal. Their spokesperson, Abdul Ghani Lone, said the ‘siege of the shrine is a direct interference in the religious affairs of Muslims’. S.A.S Gilani said, ‘The militants were within their rights to use places of worship because we believe in the unification of religion and politics,’ and ‘Mosques had been used as sanctuaries since the inception of Islam.’ The next call by the Hurriyat to defy curfew was issued on 22 October, and this received some response across the state since it was Friday, but we were able to control the crowds. Disappointed, the Hurriyat threatened that ‘the government must remove all security forces and bunkers around the Hazratbal shrine within six days or face serious consequences’. And again, we ignored the deadline.

The public’s trust was fragile due to a tragic incident that had recently taken place in Sopore, where forty-three civilians lost their lives after the Border Security Force (BSF) responded to a mob with gunfire. I’m unsure if it was easier or more difficult to handle misinformation in the era before social media and WhatsApp, but the rumours of security forces harshly suppressing crowds worried me. I urged my police colleagues across the Valley to communicate more, increase surveillance, control mobs early and improve community outreach. However, our efforts were undermined by an incident in Bijbehara, where a clash between a mob and the BSF resulted in thirty-one deaths. The BSF claimed they were targeting terrorists blocking the national highway, but I believed they used disproportionate force and authorized the local police to

file a first information report (FIR) against the BSF. This led to a reprimand from Union Home Secretary N.N. Vohra, but I stood firm. Fortunately, the governor supported my decision.

A siege is not a media-friendly event; it takes its own time and typically, no news is good news, which makes journalists impatient. I remember feeling saddened by the *India Today* article published halfway through the siege, titled 'Operation Blunder', suggesting we had goofed up by not storming the mosque. From our perspective, the scars to the Sikh psyche expressed in Khushwant Singh's remark post-Operation Bluestar, 'To kill a rat, you don't have to bring down the house', had still to heal. The international perspective was also crucial, especially with Robin Raphael, the American assistant secretary of state and known Pakistan sympathizer, casting doubts on Kashmir's accession to India and peddling falsehoods.

The local press, calling the situation a 'crisis', often exaggerated or reported unsubstantiated incidents, worsening the already tense and emotional atmosphere. As the official spokesperson, my daily briefings at the Tourist Reception Centre, following visits to Hazratbal, aimed to temper local emotions, communicate our intentions to the terrorists and reiterate our stance to their overseers in Pakistan. My colleague, Mehmood-ur Rehman, joined us during the later stages to report on the progress of the negotiations. Mehmood, who later became the vice chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University, humorously remarked that university negotiations were marginally simpler than those at Hazratbal.

To appease the growing public demand for information, we began organizing media visits to Hazratbal during non-negotiation times, a rare practice before the era of 24-hour news coverage. Our deliberately slow pace of negotiations was strategic. We not only wanted to sow confusion among the terrorists whose orders from Pakistan were becoming increasingly contradictory but also convince the local population of our commitment to a peaceful resolution. Despite straining the media's patience, with some even

suggesting the situation was being deliberately prolonged, the Kashmiri ethos of 'taabus scho laabh' (patience pays) remained a guiding principle.

Soon, negotiations passed through several phases with several faces. The demands of the militant group remained similar – they wanted safe passage with their weapons, the curfew lifted in the Valley and the authenticity of the Moi-e-Muqqadas confirmed. We insisted on not giving them safe passage and demanded they surrender in full view of the media. We knew that video images of terrorists coming out of the shrine with their hands over their heads would be a powerful weapon in our ongoing psychological operations arsenal. By the second week, the militants accepted a visit by four doctors appointed as Red Cross commissioners, who found the living conditions subpar and some hostages suffering from minor illnesses.

Four militants led by the JKLF operational chief Idrees would come out clad in pherans with their faces covered to negotiate with various political and religious leaders (including co-opted members of the Hurriyat Conference). We allowed this to present the liberal human face of the administration and to engage the militants. These negotiations continued patiently for weeks as our priority was peaceful surrender. My colleagues, General M.A. Zaki and Wajahat Habibullah, handled the negotiations for the state despite direct taunts from the militants about being 'paid' Muslims and accusations of them acting as agents of the Hindu government.

Midway into the siege, General Zaki and Wajahat had an accident when their bullet-proof car collided head-on with a fast-moving military truck in convoy. Mehmood-ur Rehman and I rushed to the accident site and took them to the Soura Medical Institute. Both had severe injuries and were airlifted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi. Providence mandated their survival, and the good news of their health progress in the next few weeks warmed us that cold winter. However, on

cue, rumours began spreading in the Valley about Delhi having engineered the accident to kill two Muslim officers, Delhi arresting Habibullah , and much else.

Following this tragedy, Rehman and I now assumed responsibility for the day-to-day situation at Hazratbal. Sheikh Ghulam Rasool, the chief secretary, had already failed to contribute to the situation because of local pressures. He had even avoided appealing to the militants for peaceful surrender despite being advised to do so by the governor. Later on, he suggested he could arrange for the terrorists to surrender on the terms of safe passage with weapons as proposed by some Hurriyat members known to him. But we did not yield to his suggestions, and he even travelled to New Delhi to convince the highest political circles that we should accept the Hurriyat solution. However, he failed in these attempts.

By 7 November, the negotiations had hit an impasse. The demands on either side remained the same with minor tweaks. The militants wanted to surrender with their arms and ammunition and without the humiliation of a televised surrender, but this was non-negotiable for us. A successful resolution required a complicated balancing act between many security forces, central agencies and political sensibilities. My earlier postings as police chief in Srinagar and Kashmir helped me prepare for this siege; we knew the topography, understood the inner workings of the shrine, and had even attended trustee meetings of the Muslim Auqaf Trust at its office in the outer structures of the shrine. The governor was at the centre of the coordination effort with detailed strategy and negotiation terms, and the complex trade-offs between precedents, perception and safety were always run past him.

We sensed the end of the standoff was near because of a number of factors: the shifting public opinion, the dwindling processions in support of the militants across the Valley, the continuous defiling of the mosque after the bathrooms were clogged, the contradictory instructions the terrorists received from Pakistan, and our own



competence in enforcing the siege. The terrorists were getting tired. We also had help from the Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto, who, during the siege, said the Independence Act of 1947 had no provision for independence, implying Kashmir would have to merge with Pakistan. Bhutto allowing the purdah to fall from 'azadi' and revealing their true intentions of annexation was useful. Our intuition was accurate and over the next few days, we negotiated an agreement of surrender.

At 10 p.m. on 16 November, Mr Mehmood-ur Rehman and I travelled to Hazratbal for the surrender. Lt. General Padmanabhan, then commander of XV Corps, also joined us to ensure all security forces worked together. The army had quietly installed hidden night-vision cameras at the place of surrender to film the process. At around 1.30 a.m., the militants began walking out with their arms held up high. The process continued for two hours, and we took them into custody and transported them to the nearby Zakura Camp for interrogation.

Our recoveries included AK-47 and AK-56 rifles, a Dragunov sniper rifle, a heavy machine gun, two light machine guns, a rocket launcher, IEDs, wireless sets, binoculars, grenades and bullets. It was then that we also found the four Second World War-era .303 rifles that had been used by the J&K Police armed guards posted at the outer cordon; their contrast with the militants' weaponry was no excuse for the men's poor performance, but I made a mental note about a police weapons upgrade. There were a total of thirty-six armed militants in the shrine, of whom thirteen belonged to the JKLF, six – including two Pakistani nationals – to Al Umar, three to Operation Balakot, six to Ikhwan-ul Muslmoon, five to Al Jihad and three were members of other groups.

We had complete control of the militants and their weaponry by 4 a.m. on that cold winter morning. The governor's security adviser General Saklani, Mehmood-ur Rehman and I decided they would stay at the spot to further liaise with the army while I would go

home to inform Governor General Rao at Raj Bhawan through my RAX (secret) telephone. The governor had told me he would await through the night the official confirmation of surrender. I reached home at 5 a.m. after the night-long surrender process to the anxiously waiting Vina, who was aware that something significant was happening that night at Hazratbal. Governor General Rao picked up the telephone on the first ring, and I greeted him with the details of the successful surrender. He immediately shared the news on his hotline with Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. Knowing that Governor General Rao did not have a personal equation with Home Minister S.B. Chavan, I called Union Home Secretary N.N. Vohra to tell the home minister.

Announcing this significant development to the nation was a privilege and joy. I roused Ajit Singh, the Srinagar correspondent for All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan with a lively 'Jaago Mohan pyaare, jago'. My fondness for AIR dates back to when I first learnt of being selected for the IPS through their broadcast from Lucknow. Despite our personal acquaintance, Ajit took no risks, requesting a pause until he could activate his recorder. The news went public in the 8 a.m. broadcast and was echoed throughout the day by Doordarshan and AIR, highlighting the surrender as a triumph for the J&K Police, although many other security forces played crucial roles in this victory. Today, in an era where Doordarshan's viewership has waned, my loyalty remains – perhaps the feeling is a nod to Ajit Singh or because I find Doordarshan's reporting to be less sensational, emotional and hysterical compared to others.

Following the surrender, our immediate focus shifted to ensuring the safety of the area, tasking our bomb squad units with meticulously searching and defusing any explosives the terrorists had left behind. To facilitate the transition to normalcy, we appointed Mr Bandey, a police officer whose family had been associated with religious administration of the Hazratbal Shrine Board for generations, as

the person in charge. The militants had desecrated the shrine's main building, connected outhouses and toilets to the main building and defiled the sanctity of the place. Besides cleaning the place up, the Auqaf shrine management removed the prominent notice the militants had installed barring the entry of non-Muslims.

Following the resolution of the siege, Home Minister S.B. Chavan and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh travelled by special aircraft from Delhi to pay their respects at the shrine and start the healing process. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Rao convened a meeting in Delhi to assess the aftermath of the situation. A slight shadow was cast over this meeting by intelligence reports that indicated that the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was furious about the militants' surrender and were ordering new chaos, but otherwise, the mood was celebratory. Parliament also passed a unanimous resolution reaffirming J&K as an integral part of India, declaring India's resolve to repel any attempts to meddle in its internal matters and demanding Pakistan vacate areas of J&K under its illegal occupation. Pakistan's National Assembly has passed many resolutions on Kashmir, but this was only the second resolution passed by the Indian Parliament concerning J&K, with the first occurring during the 1962 China war.

The Hurriyat tried to salvage their defeat by calling people to defy the security cordon on 7 December. They called for people to march to Hazratbal in white shrouds, symbolizing readiness for martyrdom, for *deedar* (viewing) of the holy relic. We enforced a strict curfew, rendering their efforts unsuccessful. We collaborated with the J&K Muslim Auqaf Trust to dismantle the bunkers within the shrine complex and reintroduce police checkpoints to prevent the re-entry of the terrorists, but the Hurriyat maintained that 'nobody can stop a Muslim from entering any place of worship'. Despite our keenness to resume prayers at the mosque immediately, the Hurriyat's stubbornness delayed this process for eight months.

Most Muslims in Kashmir were relieved by how this situation was resolved. They credited the Prophet with having blessed and ensured such a peaceful solution to the detriment of the militant's causes and efforts, and I agree with them. We were blessed; many things could have gone wrong in an armed standoff at the religious shrine, but they didn't. The siege taught us many lessons we thought we would never need again. But we were wrong.

### **The Siege of 1996**

The surrender of the militants in 1993 punctured the early bluster of the Hurriyat spokesperson Abdul Ghani Lone, who said, 'If armed forces storm the shrine, we will win. If they withdraw, we win.' He admitted later that 'the end of the episode was not according to the wishes of the Hurriyat conference'. We knew that televising the militants' surrender would create dissent, and predictably, the bickering soon began. The Jamait-ul-Mujahideen told local newspapers that the Hurriyat's 'coffin sellers' had let the people of Kashmir down, and the Hizbul Mujahideen said, 'We gave them guns to use rather than surrender.' I observed many personal jeers and sneers in local circles about the militants' cowardice in surrender, their inability to live up to their lofty talk, and for coming out at night with their hands above their heads. As my friend Sati Sahni wrote, 'Hazratbal was a god-sent opportunity for the Hurriyat leadership, but the lack of imagination, factional rivalry, inept reflexes and incorrect appreciation of the situation meant they failed to capitalise on it.' Pakistan clearly agreed, as their proxies soon killed Hurriyat leader Abdul Ghani Lone.

The 1993 surrender marked a pivotal moment, with the ISI accelerating resources towards pro-Pakistan and pro-Islamic organizations with directions to assassinate JKLF leaders like Idrees Khan and Farooq Ahmad Wani. It also created discord between Amanullah Khan in Pakistan and Yasin Malik in Kashmir, which

simmered for nearly two years. Events reached a tipping point on 21 September 1995 when Amanullah Khan ousted Yasin Malik as the president of the JKLF because he had ‘damaged the Azadi Movement at the behest of the Indian government and had not complied with directives from the high command . . . he is only interested in the chief ministership.’ The UK wing of the JKLF responded by ousting Amanullah because ‘he has been indulging in an opportunist, undemocratic, and dictatorial style of functioning. He has been making financial gains in the name of Kashmir and compromising the position of the JKLF at the behest of his masters.’ Yasin Malik rejoined the Hurriyat and Abdul Ghani Lone welcomed him, saying, ‘The emergence of Malik as the JKLF supremo under the aegis of Hurriyat has restored the independence movement to a sound footing.’

Amanullah Khan responded by appointing Shabir Siddiqui as the JKLF president in Kashmir, ‘General’ Basharat Raza Khan as chief military commander, and Salman Yavar ‘Nikka Bhai’ as deputy chief commander. The presence of Shabir’s family’s schools in Budgam led to friction with the Jamaat-e-Islami over their demands for him to close his educational ventures. Choosing defiance, Shabir aligned himself with the JKLF. In February 1996, Shabir called a press conference suggesting that 95 per cent of ordinary Kashmiris wanted independence and said, ‘I call upon people to strengthen their militant activities . . . only an armed struggle can deliver freedom to the people of Kashmir. We won’t ever lay down our weapons. We are soldiers of Allah and will fight to the last drop of our blood. Our quam will bleed security forces till they surrender to our demand of Azadi. We will not rest, nor will we allow them to rest.’ He soon held another press conference to rant against Malik and Hurriyat for their ‘failure to represent the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir’. He also promised that ‘We are soldiers of Allah and will bleed Indian security forces till they surrender to our demands.’

We would have let this slide, but our intelligence team had intercepted communications between Shabir, Basharat and Amanullah Khan discussing Hazratbal, and this felt like a bad omen. I met with my colleagues A.K. Suri and P.S. Gill to bolster security around both the shrine and the new JKLF office established across the shrine in a building that was previously the shrine's library. The leadership duo had complementary skills; Shabir was articulate and cautious while Basharat was aggressive and violent. Basharat's tactics – kidnapping faculty members from the Regional Engineering College, extorting local merchants and harassing women – created ill will that proved valuable during our siege.

After the morning namaz on 24 March 1996, Basharat and Shabir led a JKLF group to the main gate of Hazratbal. Shabir had told his men he did not expect much resistance from the J&K Police but told them to shoot to kill if they resisted. When they tried to enter the mosque armed, a J&K Police officer barred their entry. In response, Basharat fatally shot the officer at close range, and charged into the mosque with his henchmen. In the ensuing two-hour confrontation, our courageous policemen eliminated nine militants, including Basharat, his deputy Nikka Bhai, Srinagar district commander Dilawar, Baramulla commander Tipu, Budgam commander Waseem, and four others. We lost two valiant police officers that day.

The siege of 1996 triggered a different response from J&K Police from 1993. We immediately threw a cordon around the shrine and met with Governor General Rao to decide strategy. Unlike in the previous siege, we took the primary responsibility for resolving the standoff. The priorities were the same as they were in 1993 – no damage to the shrine, free the hostages unhurt and ensure the sanctum sanctorum was safe. The recent memory of Mast Gul burning the Charar-e-Sharief shrine worried us, but we found comfort in Shabir's dislike for Pakistan and Wahhabism.

Inside the mosque, Shabir was recovering from the shock of

police resistance that had left nine of his best men dead, but soon he began carrying out Amanullah Khan's instructions to use saws, hammers and fire to break open the safe. They tried all night but failed. We sent Moulvi Bashir-ud-din to Hazratbal to speak to Shabir, and their demands echoed what JKLF had asked for three years earlier: the removal of security forces from Kashmir, tripartite talks between the JKLF, India and Pakistan, and safe passage for the group with their arms.

The next day, A.K. Suri began negotiations with the militants at the shrine's entrance. The police offered safe passage without arms and let Shabir know that arranging tripartite talks required the central government's permission, which would take time. Shabir soon held a press conference saying there would be no prayers at the shrine until the government met his demands. As in any hostage situation, we tried to prolong the negotiations while developing alternative solutions. The J&K Police now had a trained SOG, vital intelligence and local support.

So, we modified our negotiations to get the terrorists out of the shrine by offering them a security-free corridor to move back to their office. We sweetened this offer with vague inducements of prioritizing the JKLF over other organizations in future political and peace talks. Shabir's team members were hesitant to vacate the dargah, but Shabir prevailed. On the fourth day of the siege (27 March), the JKLF terrorists, a few women and children made their way from the main building (where the sanctum sanctorum was) and moved right across the street to an abandoned library, which was also a part of the dargah complex. A team, which included Suri and members of the shrine trust, entered the dargah and confirmed the vault was damaged but unopened.

This change of location felt like an opportunity. We asked Farooq Khan (the head of the SOG) to present some options for an assault. This attack reminded me of one of my favourite lines in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, which reads, 'Soldiering

is the art of attacking mercilessly whenever you are strong. Take the enemy at a disadvantage and never fight him on equal terms.' Farooq deserves credit for the immaculate planning and execution of the operation; he was the right man at the right time with the right strategy and team. The SOG was already familiar with the layout of the shrine complex and the area around it; they soon surveyed the bylanes and sent some team members in civilian clothes inside the shrine to conduct a recce.

On 31 March, my colleagues from the intelligence team intercepted a late-night wireless message from Pakistani agents asking Shabir and his team to 'go back to Allah's protection'. We interpreted this as an order to return to the dargah building as we had convinced Shabir to stay out of the shrine, but not his bosses. We kept negotiating but gave the go-ahead for the SOG operation. Farooq handpicked a small team equipped with AK-47s and personal sidearms, requisitioning light machine guns, sniper rifles, bulletproof jackets, grenades and tear gas. We also decided Farooq's team of thirty officers would take mortars into an operation for the first time, and the inner and outer cordons would be provided by the CRPF and BSF. The SOG planned to move in at night and be out by dawn, and all roads leading to the shrine from the Dhobi Mohalla and the Kashmir University campus would be closed. SOG spotters would be positioned on all sides of the building with powerful night-vision binoculars to report on movement inside the building every few minutes.

Soon, Farooq came to me, asking for a final go-ahead and his final briefing also included what could go wrong because of the narrow lanes and high civilian density. But his confidence, team and track record gave me the courage to give the approval after consulting with the governor. At 2.30 a.m. on 31 March, the SOG used handheld loudspeakers to give the terrorists one last chance to surrender.

The terrorists had hunkered down in the building, but a little while later, the building doors opened, and a group of women and



children walked out. I have never asked Farooq about it, but I later heard that some SOG officers were hesitant to storm the dargah premises carrying weapons. Farooq assured them they were not entering the mosque and reminded them of their duties. The SOG continued its announcements for two hours, and it felt like the militants were going to surrender. But soon, the militants began firing from the second floor of the building and threw some hand grenades at our bunkers. A few shots rang out from the corridors of the main dargah, but the SOG quickly shot two militants stationed there. An hour later, the SOG had killed twenty-two militants and wiped out a large part of JKLF leadership.

## Conclusion

In the dark years before the Hazratbal siege in 1993, slogans like ‘Hum kya chahte hain? Azadi! Azadi ka matlab la ilaha illala!’ (What do we want? Freedom! What does freedom mean? Allah!); ‘Yahan kya chalega? Nizam-e-Mustafa!’ (What will rule here? Islamic law!); and ‘Asi gasyi kasheer, batav warai, batnyav saan!’ (We want Kashmir without Kashmiri Hindu men but with Kashmiri Hindu women!) were common. These slogans faded with the two sieges puncturing the notions of the invincibility of the terrorist, the invulnerability of Pakistan and the inevitability of azadi.

Valley Muslims mostly practise a moderate Islam and were horrified by the guns and bombs in the house of God. They were surprised by terrorists threatening to blow up the structure, making shrill threats to kill innocent hostages, and using women and children as human shields. The notion of jihad was alien to Kashmiris, and the two sieges made the contrast between radical Islam and Ahle-et-quad (Muslims who believe in saints and shrines) obvious. Though conducting elections required many other inputs, the result of the two sieges which increased confidence amongst locals created conditions for elections to be held after almost a decade.

One positive outcome of these sieges was the confidence boost that the J&K Police rank and file received. The daily press briefings, favourable coverage about our firm but restrained response and the opportunity to learn from cutting-edge Indian army formations really helped. In addition, the partnership such as the one between the state and central governments, J&K Police, army and other central forces working together in the first siege hadn't been seen for some time. It sent a strong message across the border and brought international attention to Pakistan's support of terrorism.

In my life, few things have hurt me as much as the subsequent release of some of the terrorists who surrendered at Hazratbal in 1993, because they soon crossed the border into Pakistan and returned to cause chaos with their murderous ways. But the J&K Police's SOG ensured that karma caught up with most of these terrorists in the second siege.