

# UNDER THE SHADOW OF BAYONETS AND BARS

An Indian Spy  
in Pakistan



**Mohanlal Bhaskar**

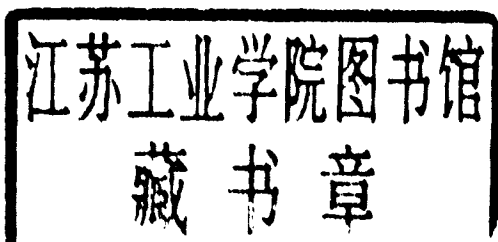
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# Under the Shadow of Bayonets and Bars

(An Indian Spy in Pakistan)



MOHAN LAL BHASKER

*Translated by*

JAI RATAN



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## *Preface*

The last profession I would choose for myself would be spying. The last country I would choose to enter as a Spy would be Pakistan. I do not have the nerve to become an agent and no amount of patriotic fervour would induce me to ferret out secrets of another country. Even if driven by circumstance to become an espionage agent, Pakistan is the last country I would volunteer for service. I have as much affection for Pakistanis as I dread the brutality of their police. I am in the fortunate position of only having to write an introduction to a book of one who had the temerity to go in and out of Pakistan, when apprehended suffered inhuman torture but not let out his secrets or betray his comrades. Not all the wealth of the world would persuade me to undergo what Mohan Lal Bhasker had to go through in the jails of Lahore, Kot Lakhpat, Mianwali & Multan. It is a miracle that after all that he lives to tell his tale, retains his sanity and teaches in a school.

Spying is a nasty but necessary business. Every country has its spies and counter spies. What came as a surprise to me was that we have so many in Pakistan and they many more in India. Both countries throw away large sums of money for acquiring information which they get from countries friendly to them. Pakistan from the United States, we from Soviet Russia. Both the Americans and the Russians have highly sophisticated planes which can photograph every movement of men and equipment several miles below them on the ground. They have cameras powerful enough to photograph newsprint of a paper being read by a man sitting in his balcony. Nevertheless we forbid taking photographs at our airports, engage a large number of trained people to infiltrate into each other's territory and suborn the loyalties of those willing to be bought. It would appear to be an anachronism and unnecessary waste of energy, time and money.

Mohan Lal Bhaskar was apparently on a mission to find out about Pakistan's nuclear plans. Very wisely, he does not tell us whether or not he

was able to lay his hands on what he was after. He was betrayed by one of his colleagues, presumably a double agent, and had to face the music on his own. The interrogation he was done by the army and police included torture of the worst kind unimaginable. Many of his comrades went insane or ended their own lives. Large portions of his stories describe them in gory and spine-chilling details. There were also lighter moments with dacoits, prostitutes, pimps and dupe smugglers who happened to be in the same jails. Most of his time was during the regime of General Yahya Khan. He saw Bhutto in jail and Bhutto as Prime Minister of Pakistan. He heard of Yahya's mistress "General" Rani at the height of her power and then lodged in the women's section of the same jail. He was in Mianwali when Sheikh Mujibur Rehman was brought there, had his grave dug and then refilled when Bhutto released him to return in triumph to Bangladesh. From his cell he watched Indian bombers and fighters knock out Pakistan's air force from the skies. He was due to spend 14 years in jail—perhaps not allowed to come out alive. He was lucky to be exchanged for Pakistani spies held by India.

Excerpts of Bhaskar's : *Under the Shadow of Bayonets and Bars* have been serialised in several language journals and is due to be published in book form in Marathi and other major languages. Jai Rattan's translation from the original Hindi reads very well. I can recommend it to readers who have the stomach to take in suspense and horror.

KHUSHWANT SINGH

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I am confined in a death cell of the Kot Lakhpat Jail at Lahore in Pakistan. It is the morning of May 24, 1971. A nambardar comes to my cell. "Get up!" he orders. "You're wanted in the jail vestibule. An army officer has come with your judgement." I follow the man to the vestibule, my heart pounding hard. The nambardar ushers me in the presence of Major Ashfaq. I recognise him at once. He was the advocate on behalf of the prosecution in my case before the Field General Court Martial. He reads out my sentence : "Mister Mohan Lal Bhaskar alias Mohammed Aslam, the Military Court has awarded you fourteen years, rigorous imprisonment on the charge of spying against Pakistan."

I go mad with joy. I have been saved from the gallows—the verdict that the Summary Court Martial had pronounced against me. I run like mad towards my barrack.

"What's happened?" my fellow prisoners ask. They think that I have been freed.

"Fourteen years exile!" I reply, still feeling elated. "It's like Ram Banbas."

I enter my cell and start ruminating over the long period of incarceration that I have already gone through and the still longer period that lies ahead of me. In that lonely cell the shadows of the past start creeping over my desolate heart.



And now on with my story.....

The curiosity as to what was happening in the neighbouring Pakistan had got the better of me and I was seeking avenues of satisfying this curiosity. And then came the war of September 1965. It further whetted my curiosity. The issue of *Dharmayug* dated 14th November, 1965 carried an article of mine : An Eyewitness Account of the Front at Ferozepur. Subsequently, at the fair held on the *samadhi* of Shaheed Bhagat Singh on March 23, I recited the following lines in the course of my speech:

We have eaten the grain cultivated with your blood,  
It has nurtured the seeds of martyrdom in us.

(It may be recalled that after hanging Bhagat Singh in the Lahore Jail on 23rd March, 1931 his body was secretly brought to the bank of the Sutlej to be dismembered and disposed of. But people got wind of it, forcing the authorities to hastily cremate it.)

The audience vociferously applauded me for my patriotic sentiments. But as I got down from the stage a man who seemed to be wearing the semblance of authority came to me and said, "Bhaskar Saheb, it's one thing to wax eloquence and recite patriotic verses and it is quite another to shed one's blood for the country. One should not take a martyr's name in vain. Are you sure that you are also fired by Bhagat Singh's patriotic favour?"

I was cut to the quick. "Saheb, call me whenever the guns start booming along our border," I replied. "I'll walk four steps ahead of you. And if I try to run away from the battle front, put a bullet in my back. If it's a question of serving my country I will not be found wanting. I'm prepared to serve with my life and soul in whatever capacity you want me."

Who was this man? Who induced me to take to the path of spying ? And what steps I took to get initiated into this game? — it's not in the country's interest to reveal these facts. A spy's life is so solitary and self-centered that he does not even allow his self-interest to have a peep into the world of his secrets. I quietly underwent circumcision and became a Muslim convert. Not to talk of my parents, even my wife was not aware of this momentous fact. Nor did they have any inkling of what I did and where I went.

If you ever try to look across the border you will be greeted by an eerie darkness. You never know where death stalks and in what form and when it is going to overtake you. Even if a serpent bites or a scorpion

stings you, you must at once suppress your shriek. Or else you will immediately become the target of the enemy's bullet. There may be a wild boar grunting somewhere or a jackal howling close by. And there may be fierce hunting dogs, maddened by the taste of flesh, giving you the chase. A spy has to face them all with a cool nerve. When twenty crore prying eyes of ten crore aliens suspiciously chase him his sunglasses are his only protection. He roams about among strange people in unfamiliar cities. And he has to play-act all the time.

I am talking of the days when Ayub's swagger had lost some of its bounce. Bhutto's star was in the ascendancy. He had announced on the floor of the UN that if it came to that Pakistan would be prepared to wage a thousand years' war with India. By such braggadacio he had won over the people of Pakistan to himself, and was now hanging like the Damocle's sword over Ayub's head. Ayub, still clinging to power, had declared Bhutto as mentally deranged and had sent him to China for treatment. Ironically enough, this clever ruse boomeranged against Ayub himself. Bhutto returned from China like a scourge out to topple Ayub from his high pedestal. In 1967 when Bhutto landed at Karachi port nobody had even gone to receive him for fear of incurring Ayub's displeasure. But it seemed the people had already read the signs of the time and were waiting for Bhutto's call. When the call came, the peasants, workers, doctors, lawyers and the college students rushed out to him, wearing shrouds round their heads. Martial law was proclaimed and the jails filled in no time. Political unrest showed no sign of abating and curfew was clamped on big cities and towns of Pakistan, including Lahore, Sialkot, Multan, Lyallpur, Peshawar and Rawalpindi. It was during this period of turmoil that I had started making incursions into Pakistan.

I recall it was four in the afternoon when I found myself walking through a crowded bazaar in Lahore Cantonment. The curfew had been relaxed for three hours for shopping. Suddenly a swarm of people appeared on the scene shouting, "Ayub Murdabad! Mister Bhutto Zindabad!" followed by heavy stone throwing on the soldiers who had come there in jeeps and were trying to surround the crowd. Soon after they opened fire at the crowd. I was watching all this from a deep hole in a distance. I was appalled by the sight of people trying to save their lives by hiding under dead bodies. The soldiers, as I could see, were ruthless in performing their job. Even if a fallen man stirred slightly they shot him dead and then without caring to find out whether a man was actually dead or there was a spark of life left in him they threw him in a three-

tonner army vehicle. There were twenty such vehicles filled with the dying and the dead and they drove off towards Ganda Singhwalla on the banks of the Sutlej. Later it was said that they were cast into the river by tying heavy stones to their bodies to be made a meal of the fishes.

While Muslims killed Muslims God watched this carnage in silence. Not even a little finger was raised in protest. I thought that in our country even if a single Muslim had died by mistake at the hands of the Indian police there would have been an outcry of Islam in danger. The Indian Muslims would have gone on rampage, indulging in arson and loot. They would have even attacked the police stations and abused the very democratic system for which the Muslims in Pakistan are undergoing terrible oppression.

If the science of geology has any meaning, then as the future unfolds itself we shall find the bones of these butchered Pakistanis turning into fossils and then glacier-like drifting towards the plains and forming into many-tiered rocks, eventually to be turned into oil which will in turn kindle the flame of democracy in Pakistan. But Pakistanis have yet to traverse a long path of sacrifices before they can achieve their cherished goal. It will particularly take a heavy toll of the coming generations in Pakistan.

In this respect we Indians, who had such illustrious leaders as Nehru and Patel to guide us, are really fortunate. They sowed the seeds of democracy in the sacred soil of our country and were pleased to see the sapling growing into a sturdy tree before they disappeared from the scene.

Such thoughts swarming my mind, I staggered along towards Sheikh Wahid's haunt, Gulberg, where I had decided to spend the night.

This is one of those places where coy damsels lie in wait for young revellers. I had heard about these haunts from friends back in India who told me that such places are considered to be the safest for spies. Pakistan is teeming with them. In Lahore alone they have Tibbi Bazaar, Rangmahal, Shahi Mohalla and Gulberg, some of them exclusive, highclass redlight districts, where beauties like General Rani (Yahya Khan's sweetheart) and others run their brothels. Kingdoms rise and fall at the flick of their fingers.

## A Night at Sheikh Wahid's

Gulberg has a memorial to Pakistan in the shape of a big minaret, commemorating Qaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah's *Karardad-e-Pakistan* where he had placed a formal proposal before the Muslim League that a separate country should be carved out for the followers of Islam and a resolution was adopted to that effect. Here Muslims would rule independently free from the taint of other religions and consider themselves as 'pure' and 'sacred'. As such the country was named Pakistan—the abode of the pure.

Call it the quirk of history that every sixth house in Gulberg, where that historic resolution was adopted, is now the abode of high-class call-girls. Here also live big shots who have a say in the affairs of Pakistan. Here fates are decided over goblets of wine and at the toss of a pretty head. It is here that aspirants climb up the ladder of administrative hierarchy, sign contracts and obtain route permits and licences.

Someone had taunted the husband of Aklim Akhtar alias General Rani, the keep of Yahya Khan, that did he not feel embarrassed that the General openly hob-nobbed with his wife?

The husband smiled, took a sip of whisky and said, "Not at all, Janab. To get on in life I've adopted new ways of thinking. Now I say to myself that this woman is the General's wife and my keep. Once in a while I manage to spend a night with her in bed on the sly."

Sheikh Wahid, tall, finely trimmed beard, gold-rimmed spectacles, diamond rings dazzling his fingers, clandestinely dabbled in the business of forged currency notes. Near Adamkhel Pass and in the vicinity of Kair beyond Peshawar, they deal in the currencies of all countries. It is a straightforward business at rates varying from 25 to 50 per cent. Pay with one hand and receive double the amount with the other. The forged notes look so genuine that even banks accept them without raising an eyebrow. One can get all currencies there—the Indian rupee, the American dollar, the Russian rouble. You ask for it and they have it.

To outward appearances, Wahid maintains a guest house which is run by his Begum. I knew its code word. In the morning I had phoned up the Begum. "Madam, I hear these days donkeys too have started eating mangoes," I said. "Really, when did you see them eating mangoes?" she asked. "About six or seven hours ago," I replied. She thanked me and said that she would also like to see these animals. The implication being that she had agreed to my coming over to her place between six and seven in the evening.

I reached her *kothi* at seven on the dot. I gave the *darban* the code word, telling him that I was coming from Adamkhel and had brought grapes. The *darban* immediately threw open the door and let me into the drawing room where the Begum was already waiting to receive me. I stared at her as if looking lost and then taking out Rs. 200 from my pocket placed them on the table before her. She smiled at me as she picked up the money and then pressed a button. The side door opened from which ten dazzling figures emerged, all of them college girls. I stared at them like one bewitched trying to decide whom to select to spend the night with when my mind said that such girls were barren of secrets and a woman like the Begum could only have them. So I sent the girls away.

The Begum gave me a quizzical look.

"I'm sorry Aslam Mian," she said. "These are all the girls that I've tonight. I don't have any other to press into your service." She extended her hand to return my money.

"Please don't stand on niceties," I said. "Tonight I want you."

She looked at me surprised. "You mean you prefer me over those young and beautiful girls?"

I said, "You're not only beautiful in my eyes but also seasoned timber too."

"But I won't be free before ten," she said. "I won't mind waiting," I said.

"In the meanwhile you can send me a bottle of whisky."

After finishing my food I was relaxing when the Begum came in. I gaped at her as she stood before me looking like the denizen of some other world. I threw my arms around her. Perhaps it was after a long time that she had chanced upon a person who really admired her. She opened out to me. Slightly intoxicated, she kept mumbling as she lay in my arms and answered all my questions without demur. About Sheikh Wahid, about the army officers and the places they came from and all the military matters they bragged about.

In the morning I woke up at the muezzin's call. The Begum was still asleep. After taking my bath I looked at the morning's paper. A news item said: "Four rebels shot dead in Lahore Cantonment." I was amazed at this blatant lie. I had myself seen hundreds of people falling under the hail of bullets.

Promising to pay another visit I took leave of the Begum and proceeded towards the Shahnoor Studios which I felt was quite a secure place to spend the day in. Here I came across young boys and girls who had run away from home to try their luck in films. Generally, they are reluctant to tell their correct names and the places they hail from.

## From Lahore to Multan

I had to meet someone at Multan Cantt. The bus stand at Lahore looks so bright and gay. And I have liked the bus system of Pakistan. Anybody who has the means can buy a route permit from the government by paying a specified amount and can then ply his bus on this route without any restriction. There is no time schedule and hence there is a keen competition between bus owners. They vie with each other in attracting a passenger and serving him well. "Come Janab! Come Hazoor!" the boys cry as they run after prospective passengers and get a four anna tip per passenger from the bus owner for whom they do the canvassing.

The conductors are equally solicitous of the passengers. The women passengers are taken great care of. If a woman is occupying a seat a man would avoid sitting next to her. The seat would even go vacant till another woman passenger occupies it.

Badami Bagh, the bus station that serves Lahore, is quite big and extensive. It was here that last month two of my spy-friends, Sohanlal and Chanan Singh were put under arrest. In the world of spies such arrests have no special import. They are regarded as a part of the game and are taken in their stride.

Our bus was proceeding towards Kasur and I was specially watchful of the deserted roads whose gaiety had been marred by the martial law. People looked so worried and concerned. They could not openly talk against martial law. As I noticed even now electricity had not reached most of the villages of Pakistan. I had to get down in a village near Montgomery, where I had to obtain information about some of my acquaintances. I was told that the person concerned would meet me at five in the evening outside the military hospital at Multan. I would be required to wipe my face three times with a red kerchief to establish my identity. I immediately set off for Multan. My guide who was living in this village accompanied me.

We came out of the village and stopped by the roadside, for a bus. In front of us, at the other side of the road there were some passengers

waiting for the bus going to Lahore. One of them beckoned me to come over to him and said, "Where are you coming from? And what do you do?" I told him that I was serving as an extra in the Shahnoor Film Company. My answer pleased him and he asked me whom I had come to meet here. "Sheikh Abdul Rahman," I replied. He was startled at my reply. "What do you mean Sheikh Abdul Rahman?" he asked me. My guide at once drew closer to me. "This young fellow has come to meet Sheikh Saheb Din," he said. "He is visiting him for the first time." In the meantime our bus came and saying a hurried good-bye we rushed towards the bus.

"Oh, hell, we had a narrow escape!" my guide whispered in my ear. "That fellow is none other than Sheikh Abdul Rahman. The Chairman of this place. Even a slight suspicion and you would have got it in the neck."

We reached Khanewal enroute. I got down from the bus and cast a lingering look at the railway cabin room. My grand-father Daduram had served as a cabin man at this place. In 1947 he was still here and managed to reach Abohar with great difficulty at the risk of his life.

The bus reached Multan at four in the evening. I left my guide at the bus stand and hired a three-wheeler to take me to the military hospital. At the main gate I took out a red handkerchief from my pocket and wiped my face with it three times. An old man standing at some distance behind me pushed past me. "Mian, get aside," he said, "Why are you blocking my way?" By then a folded piece of paper had slipped into my trouser pocket. I mumbled something as if in objection to his tantrum and after walking a few steps I took a rickshaw and reached the bus stand.

Multan is blazing hot in summer. It is called the city of faquirs. Here lived a faquir by the name of Shams-Tabrez, who at the behest of his mentor had flayed his skin and made a gift of it to his mentor. As a result, worms had started crawling over his body. Nobody would even give him alms. One day a butcher took pity on him and threw him a piece of mutton. But nobody was prepared to bake the meat for him. He fixed the chunk of meat on his spear and spreading out his hands in prayer said, "Ya Maula, you, who are the solace of all, if I have worshipped you with a true heart you must come to my rescue." It is said that hearing his supplication, the sun descended so low over the earth that its heat was enough to bake the chunk of meat. This had happened in the twinkling of an eye but the whole city of Multan felt as if it was ablaze. Since that time every year Multan has a blistering summer.

I caught a bus and returned to the same village, Sahiwal, near Montgomery.

At night I called on Sheikh Abdul Rahman. His son, Mohammed Akram, received me very cordially. He evinced keen interest in the film world and the Shahnoor Studios. I tried to satisfy him by telling him a lot of lies. In the morning I left for Lahore.

I straightway made for the Shahnoor Studio where the shooting of 'Jarka', a Pakistani film, which proved to be a great hit was in progress. A dance sequence by Neelo, the heroine of the film was being picturized. Her legs tied with chains, she was lashed as she sang and danced. 'One dies to be born again', she sang. It is the dance of death, a sop to tyranny. 'I will dance on, without a whimper, without bowing my head. For, a lover of freedom can dance even while in chains'.

As I watched the dance I felt it was an oblique reference to the conditions in Pakistan. The entire nation was shackled in chains and dancing to the lashes of martial law. Since its very birth and through its childhood and youth the nation had been ravaged by the martial law fiends whose claws were dripping with the blood of the innocent people. Sometime it was Liaquat Ali and then Iskander Mirza and Ayub. Only the faces changed. But the iron grip of the military hands round the people's neck never relaxed. The film 'Jarka' had been depicting the Palestinian insurgents fighting against the Israelis. It drew an unmistakable parallel with the Pakistani situation.

I was scheduled to leave for Sialkot the following day and spend the night with a friend who had his house not far from the studio. In the morning I met my guide at the Badami Bagh bus stand. Instead of going direct to Sialkot we decided to make a detour to Gujranwala via Lyallpur. Lahore had by then extended up to Lyallpur in the same way as Delhi had stretched upto Rohtak. We took a room in the Grand Hotel at Gujranwala. My guide was an old man of sixty. I told the hotel manager that we were bound for Daska where the old man wanted to have his eyes examined.

Daska is only a few miles from Gujranwala on the Sialkot side and has a reputed eye hospital. After getting my old companion's eyes examined at the hospital and getting the necessary prescription for him, we took the bus to Sialkot. At Darmiwala Chowk, a place near Sialkot, a man clad in white got into the bus and sat down by my side. My sixth sense started working, telling me that I must be careful. Getting down at Sialkot we proceeded towards a chemist's shop. On the pretext of cleaning my mercury goggles I looked into the mirror and found the same man