

Doing good

AN Singh has had an interesting career spanning several years in the government, private and developmental sectors

After serving in the police force for more than two decades, it's not easy to start afresh in the private sector; but this change of lanes is something that AN Singh, the former deputy inspector general of police at Patna in Bihar, later deputy managing director of Tata Steel, and current managing trustee of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and Allied Trusts, has taken in his stride.

Even though his experiences during his stint in Tata Steel were a world apart from his earlier experiences in the Bihar Police Service, Mr Singh was able to forge connections between them. He says, "Much of good administration is common sense. The sense of discipline and logical thinking acquired in the police department has helped me to a great extent."

With a degree in political science (and history as supporting subject) from Patna University, Mr Singh decided to compete for the All-India Services. He moved to Delhi University to do his post-graduation, and qualified for the Indian Police Service in his very first attempt. Being placed high up in the merit list, he was allotted his home cadre of Bihar after his training.

Donning the uniform

It was 1969 and Mr Singh braced himself for the challenge that was Bihar. The training he went through, in Mt Abu at the National Police Academy and in Raxaul in the East Champaran district of Bihar which borders Nepal, was a fitting prelude to a long and illustrious career.

He says, "All kinds of things were happening there, including smuggling, encroachment across the open border and illegal immigration. According to the practice then, the officer-in-charge had proceeded on a month's leave to enable the trainee to assume charge and get hands-on responsibility. What made things difficult was that we did not have a vehicle. We had to cycle or walk for miles in the villages to investigate crimes. Also, there was no electricity for days on end. But it was all very enriching."

These difficult experiences set the stage for Mr Singh's later postings, the first of which was as

assistant superintendent of police at Bhagalpur. Later, he went to Ranchi as city superintendent of police and thereafter to Jamshedpur as superintendent of police.

"It was during this stint, around 1974-76," says Mr Singh, "that I came to know most of the people who were at the helm of affairs in Tata Steel and Tata Motors." His next posting was as superintendent of police (intelligence) at Patna. This was followed by what Mr Singh describes as "the most interesting part of my career", as superintendent of police of Bhagalpur.

He remembers, "It was in late 1980. The police were accused of blinding 36 criminals in Bhagalpur. There was a massive investigation by about 200 CBI officers. The public took to the streets in support of the police despite the fact that their actions could not be justified in any way. I was posted as superintendent of police there following that incident. Dealing with the aftermath of that event was the most difficult. I had to do a balancing act between managing the district and the police department. This was a very traumatic experience. Several of my colleagues were indicted."

That was a watershed year in Mr Singh's career. It enabled him to reflect, analyse and appreciate the role that had been assigned to him by the constitution. With the restoration of order and normalcy, Mr Singh was promoted as deputy inspector general of anti-Naxalite operations in Jehanabad.

But by this time, he had begun to feel a sense of disillusionment. He explains, "Things were more or less in control during the early part of my service in Bihar. There was respect for the law to some extent. But in the latter half of my career, things changed. It had disintegrated into a situation where respect for the law had vanished."

There were other nagging issues, including frequent threats of transfer, politicisation of the service, pressures for recommendations, etc.

Changing tracks

It was around 1990 that Mr Singh took the momentous decision to change track in his career.



“Resources for improving the quality of life of the citizens were never grudged, even in the years when the company [Tata Steel] didn't make very good profits. It was a great learning for me, that the community good should not be taken for granted even in bad times”

The decision was criticised by his seniors and friends alike. But Mr Singh did not lose confidence. He says, “I was one of the first police officers to actually move out of government service and get into the private sector.”

Mr Singh had been toying with the idea for some time; when the opportunity at Tata Steel arose, he decided to take it. He adds, “I am very happy I did that. I have had more opportunities for learning and self-development. Also, the family was able to stay together. Life became far more anchored and steady.” Mr Singh also derived satisfaction from seeing the efforts he put in take shape in the form of improved facilities for the residents of Jamshedpur.

The goodwill that Mr Singh had generated in his career as a police officer now stood him in good stead, as did his ability to switch off the past and put his energies in the future.

The environment at Tata Steel was conducive to learning and growth. Mr Singh also benefited from the opportunity to interact with people of various professional competencies. He says, “In the police service, you meet all kinds of people, but deal mostly with the crooks. In the process, you may sometimes lose your sensitivity as a good human being.”

New beginnings

Having joined as a principal executive officer to Russi Mody, the then chairman and managing director of Tata Steel, Mr Singh went on to serve as the general manager of the town services division and then later, as the vice-president of town, medical and social services. The latter job included responsibility for the Tata Main Hospital, besides the Tata Steel Rural Development Society, the Tribal Cultural Society and the Family Initiatives Foundation.

Mr Singh was not the only one to benefit

from his decision. His family too enjoyed the security and quality of life that Jamshedpur provided.

Mr Singh says, “The role challenged me to improve the facilities. The management of Tata Steel was very supportive. Resources for improving the quality of life of the citizens were never grudged, even in the years when the company didn't make very good profits. It was a great learning for me, that the community good should not be taken for granted even in bad times.”

Later, Mr Singh became the deputy managing director, corporate services, a position he held until he superannuated from Tata Steel in September 2007. In the meantime, the town division had been hived off as the Jamshedpur Utilities and Services Company. Mr Singh served as its chairman from its inception until late 2009.

Despite being at home in Jamshedpur, he was happy to come to Mumbai and assume his new role at the Tata trusts. The work itself is an extension of what he used to do in Jamshedpur. Mr Singh says, “In Tata Steel, we did actual field work. Here we act as donors, monitor projects and conduct impact assessment studies. We have the satisfaction of ensuring that the quality of life of the underprivileged has been positively impacted.”

Mumbai city has also left him more time to read books and listen to Indian classical music than before. The only one of his hobbies that has suffered neglect is golf. But Mr Singh does not let that bother him as he finds the work energising.

He says, “This role has brought me a lot of satisfaction. I have the opportunity to deal with people and subjects which are inspiring. I am also happy to see so much good generated from the investments we make.” Mr Singh truly believes that the Tata trusts are the best manifestation of the ethos of the group. ●

Cynthia Rodrigues