

The background of the entire page is a serene sunset scene. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow across the sky and reflecting on the water. In the distance, there are silhouettes of mountains. In the foreground, a person is silhouetted in a small boat on the water, holding a long pole. Two birds are flying in the upper right portion of the sky.

THE SUN WILL RISE AGAIN

BY
P. SARANGI

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A model village—Vision of Air Vice Marshal Paramjit Singh

Be it of late, the government planned to develop some villages under *Aadarsha Graam Nirmaan Yojanaa—AGNY* (Ideal Village Development Scheme). The main object of the scheme was to provide the rural people with basic facilities and at the same time build up a young generation to meet the challenges ahead. It was also thought to minimize their dependence on government aid. To start with, it was proposed to select 1000 villages across the country, which were rich in natural resources, had a good number of energetic youth (struggling for employment) but lacked the basic facilities like—water and sanitation, electricity, roads, health care and children education. Every department of the government was advised to adopt some villages for the purpose. Air Commodore Paramjeet Singh was asked to select a village and submit a report with a comprehensive action plan within a month. His first choice was Gopapalli, which he visited earlier. He visited again, studied the existing situation and submitted the report. It was approved and he got the government's nod to go ahead.

Gopapalli is on the riverside situated at a distance of five miles from the urban area. With river on one side and a huge lake on the other, it is a very good place to be developed as a tourist place. There are some hundred families living; mainly depending on cultivation. Although the villagers are laborious their economic condition is very poor. The village was neglected for many years. It has fertile lands but no irrigation facility. Condition of the road connecting the township is very bad. It becomes the worst during rains... There is no electricity. During summer there is acute

shortage of water. People use to depend on some wells which go dry during summer.

One day Singh visited Gopapalli to discuss the government plan with the villagers. First he met an 89 year old man, supposedly the *Mukhia* (head) of the village. “Namaste. May I know your good name please?” “Namasteji, I am Nanda Kishore Pradhan. People call me Nandu Kaka”, said the old man. “Kaka, I have come here to discuss with you all regarding the government program for the development of this village.” “Political leaders frequently visit close to the election. Officers sometimes come here to propagate high sounding plans of the government. Social Activists, members of Non Governments Organizations also appear to share our concerns. Babas of different faiths/religions also visit us highlighting the miracles of their respective religions. Some explain attractive schemes of the government and some provoke us to agitate. Then they leave. We are tired of all these. Our conditions remain unchanged.”

At Singh’s request, Nandu called a meeting of the *Gram Sabha*. Singh opened the large sheet and showed the Master Plan. “If you get a better place to live, of course in this village, shall you voluntarily quit this place?” Singh asked. “Singhji, you are right. Won’t it be risky to quit first and then run after government officials for a shelter?” asked Urmila, wife of Nandu. “But look here, this time I have come with an approved Master Plan for the village. I just need your co-operation. Let us sit down,” said Singh. All sat in the field and Singh explained the different sites of the Plan. They got impressed. Singh continued...

“Maaji, you are right. You should never quit before getting a shelter registered in your name. The land where you have built your house belongs to the government. Government at any time may evict you. We are going to construct some houses as per plan. While allotting the houses, you as already staying here since long, will be given first priority. You have to bear a nominal cost.”

“We are not able to feed our belly. How can we bear the cost of the house?” “Banks have been advised to provide loan at lower rate interest. Government will stand as the guarantor. You will also be given opportunities to work and earn. I am sure you will enjoy the pleasure of owning a house out of your own earning. Once again I tell you that you

will first occupy a house, get the document in your name and then quit the existing house.” This time they could see a ray of hope.

Construction of houses started. Villagers were also made a part of it. Bank Officers came. “Each of you, who have completed 18 years, shall open a savings account under the newly introduced scheme. Your wages and any other grant, the government may decide to give you from time to time, shall be directly credited to your account”, said the Bank Manager. The first phase of houses was completed in a year.

The residents got surprised to see a team of military men landing in a helicopter. A meeting of the villagers was arranged. “*Aap sab ko mera sadar pranaam (with folded hands)*. I appreciate your dedicated efforts. You have completed 110 houses within a short period. We have come here to distribute among you the legal documents of ownership of the houses. But, before that you are required to give a declaration that you have voluntarily vacated the land occupied by you,” said the Estate Officer. All agreed. All villagers were allotted houses. They shifted to their new homes. They were more interested in farming and caring for the cows. The major problem was marketing of the products due to poor road conditions.

“Our next task is to construct a four-lane bridge over the river Sarita. The incomplete work relating to the construction of the 4 km long tunnel, connecting the urban area will also be taken up thereafter. The existing 250 km road distance would be reduced to just 4 km, once the tunnel is completed. Also the time taken to reach the town would be reduced from five hours (through the longer route to just a little more than half an hour. This will improve the link with the neighboring urban areas. Thereafter government is going to have a dairy firm here with facility for packing of milk and storing the packets in cold storage. This will give you an opportunity to serve in production, management and marketing of milk and milk products. You need not sell milk by moving from door to door on bicycle. We are also going to have store houses for storing rice and wheat. Rice mills and flour mills will also be commissioned in the neighboring village—Nandgaon.” Singh’s effort in building the foundation stone of the country’s first model village came to be a reality.

This was highly praised at the top level. Singh was promoted to the rank of Air Vice Marshal. He was so much loved by the villagers; he preferred to settle in the village after retirement. Finally he settled there with his family. Even after retirement he contributed substantially for the

development of the village. While he was returning home from the HQs, he developed some cardiac problem. He was immediately rushed to the Command Hospital, but the untiring efforts of the doctors could not save him.

It was 09:30 pm. There was heavy rain with thunder storm. The residents of Gopapalli suddenly got scared of an unusual sound. Some of them immediately rushed to the nearby field. A helicopter carrying three officers of the air force had an emergency landing due to some technical problem. The surrounding was totally dark. “Police has come. Let us leave this spot.” Said one of the villagers. “They are our military man—who guard our borders and keep us safe. They may be in some trouble,” said an old lady. She went close to the helicopter to find one very seriously injured, the other two were also not in good condition. She got the details from the pilot and took all of them to her home. Some village guards were asked to guard the copter. The village *kaviraj* made the first aid and offered some snacks to the army men. Wing commander Robert got very much impressed by the hospitality of the villagers who extended all possible help. At the request of Nandu two men moved to the Police out post—five miles away and briefed the officer in charge of the whole incident. The old lady asked the pilot for his wireless set. Just to keep her request he gave it, but was sure that the lady couldn’t use it. The officers were surprised to find that the lady was talking using some military code. “I am Anita Kaur, wife of Air Vice Marshal Late Shri Paramjeet Singh. I want to talk to Rear Admiral Shri Thakur.” “Good morning madam. Please wait.” “Sir, Smt. Anita Kaur wants to talk to you.” “Namaste bhabiji. How are you?” asked Thakur. “I am Ok. AF 035, (air force helicopter) had to take an emergency landing in our village. All officers in the copter are fine now. Inform the Air force HQ immediately.” The Air force HQ was very much perturbed as the whereabouts of the copter was not available past few hours. They got a respite after talking to Smt. Kaur. In no time the air force helicopters landed in Gopapalli and the village, neglected for so many years, came in the national; news. While the team was preparing to leave, Anita approached Robert and asked “How can you leave without having even the breakfast? If you are afraid of your officer give me the phone, I shall talk to him.” “Maaji, how do you know our Rear Admiral? You were using our military codes. Were you in military service?” “(With little smile) I am proud of being the first lady doctor in the defense

service. I served as a Captain (Surgeon) in the Navy. My husband Late Shri Paramjeet Singh served as Air Vice Marshal. Thakur was very close to him. We were given some military codes for use in case of emergency. After retirement we chose to settle here. Ten years back, while he was returning home after attending an international conference organized by the United Nations, developed a cardiac problem and died on the way. And...his vision to develop this ill-fated village remained a distant dream.” Anita’s eyes were full of tears. The team waited, had the breakfast and prepared to leave. “OK maaji, I shall visit this place once again by the end of this month.” All army men saluted the villagers with folded hands and left. The village, neglected for so many years, finally could see the rising sun.

Robert visited the village again after getting the plan to complete the tunnel—initiated by Singh. The incomplete tunnel was used by some terrorist groups and those engaged in looting the travelers. In the beginning, some local people provoked by the trouble makers, obstructed the work but later on, they were tackled and the work started in full speed under continuous police patrolling. Suitable light arrangements in the tunnel were also made to ease safe driving in night. The tunnel was thus completed under tireless efforts by Robert and the villagers. To lessen the financial burden on the government for this expensive project, two toll gates were established on both sides to collect tax from commercial vehicles crossing the tunnel. However, exemption was allowed to government vehicles, ambulance, school bus, and vehicles transporting fruits, vegetables, milk and milk products from the village and some other vehicles engaged in public service under written permits from the government.



Shekhar and his childhood

Shekhar belonged to this village. He used to attend school with his friends—Natrajan, Karim, Inderjeet and Mathews. They used to walk three miles on foot to attend the school. All the four were regular visitors to the temple in the evening during prayer. The specialty of the temple was that any one was free to attend, irrespective of his faith and religion. Acharya Dayananda—the Mahant (Head Priest) liked the boys very much. Shekhar’s father was managing the family with his earning from the lands. His financial condition was not enough to meet the cost of his son’s higher education. Shekhar was interested in the field of engineering. Some villagers assured them to finance. The priest had a major contribution in this aspect. Natrajan’s condition was still worse. As all the four boys were very intelligent Dayananda used to say, “Shekhar, Mathews, Karim, Inderjeet and Natrajan are gems of our village. It is our collective responsibility to see that their higher education is not disturbed just for finance.” After completing secondary courses in the school, Shekhar got admitted to a college and completed a degree in science. One day he asked the Priest, “You all are helping us. How shall we repay after we start earning?” “Don’t think of repayment now. Remember, after you get established, don’t forget your village. Help the needy persons to the extent you can. We won’t be there to see, but our blessing shall always be with you.” The priest’s advice had a permanent impression on their mind. Since that day they took it as one of their duties to help the persons in distress. Elders’ advices were highly impressive. “We should never forget our rich heritage and culture. We must perform all functions strictly according to our rituals.” The priest had a good stock of old books mostly written in palm leaves (*Tala patra*). At his last stage he gave all his books to Shekhar.

He preserved them with utmost care. He used to read them whenever he found time and then discussed with his friends. They used to study together. Natrajan, Karim, Inderjeet and Mathews were very much liked by Shekhar's parents. Natrajan's financial condition was not sufficient enough for higher studies. It was Shekhar's father who assured him to bear all expenses and he studied in the college with Shekhar.

After completing Intermediate in Science, Shekhar joined a four year Engineering course in Electronics and Telecommunication in the Armed Forces Institute of Science and Technology. The college was fully funded by the Central Government and was under direct control of the Ministry of Defense. The entire expenditure of a student including boarding, lodging and books was borne by the government. The candidate after passing out was required to serve the Army as a commissioned officer for a minimum period of ten years.

Natrajan had an inclination towards pure science. For his excellent performance at Intermediate stage, he was selected for a five year integrated course in Nuclear Physics at the National Institute for Fundamental Research under the Department of Space Technology. He was granted a scholarship @ Rs. 5000/- per month which was nearly sufficient to meet the expenses for boarding and lodging. He was entitled to free accommodation in the Institute's hostel. Initially Natrajan's father was reluctant due to his poor financial condition but got some solid hope from Shekhar's father. He said, "What I shall do with these lands. I shall sell them to meet the educational expenses of our sons." The priest too said in affirmative.

Mathews had a totally different choice. His financial condition was comparatively better. He excelled in Law and after completing LLM started his practice in the High Court and then in the Supreme Court. He founded ASHA BHARASA—a Non-Government Organization (NGO) dedicated to help the needy in legal matters.

Karim chose to be a teacher. For him *a teacher is second to none*. After completing studies with an excellent academic career, he joined as a faculty in the Department of Environmental Sciences at the Institute of Social Sciences. He visited different countries to participate in Internationally-organized seminars on Pollution and the environmental disorders.

Being inspired by his mother, Inderjeet was interested to be a doctor. He joined Air Force Medical College and Hospital—an institute fully owned by the Ministry of Defense. Full expenditure of a student was borne by the government. The group of five worked at different places but was closely connected with each other and shared views from time to time.

Shekhar started his career as a Lieutenant. He was mainly posted in the intelligence wing of the defense services. While he was serving as a Colonel; he along with one senior officer was deputed to conduct a combined examination for recruitment of cadets in the Army, Navy and Air force. The senior officer, who was well aware of Shekhar's honesty, kept him out of the whole process and managed the entire thing with some corrupt employees. Shekhar was appointed as the Deputy Superintendent of the examination. The examination was over. Subsequently it was discovered that 25 ineligible candidates were allowed to fill up the forms and appeared the written examination. This was telecast in the national TV and also published in leading newspapers of the country. Being perturbed by the situation, the Senior Officer immediately called for an explanation from Shekhar as to why departmental proceeding shall not be initiated against him for such irregularity. Shekhar requested him to withdraw the allegation as he was no way connected with the process of scrutiny of the forms. In his tactic way his officer assured him to write a simple thing and the matter will lose its importance very soon. Shekhar didn't agree. He requested him to be provided with the names of the persons involved in verifying the forms and forwarding it to the board. When he didn't get it he asked for it under Right to Information Act. This time too, he had to move the Chief Information Commissioner to get the information. Shekhar got a message from the HQ to appear before the Disciplinary Committee in connection with the alleged irregularities in conducting the examination. The Enquiry Officer allowed him some time to prepare for defense.

Sekhar produced all the documents (which he got under RTI Act) before the Enquiry Officer and pleaded his innocence. The Disciplinary Committee was surprised to find that Shekhar's name was not in the list of verifying officers. The forms were scrutinized and verified by some other persons and forwarded to the board by the senior officer himself. Shekhar was acquitted of the charges. The information received under RTI Act

came to his rescue. The senior officer along with his team was prosecuted as per law.

Natrajan, after completing his Post Graduate in Physics, joined National Space Research Organization (NSRO) as a Scientific Officer. NSRO is under the Department of Atomic Energy and Space Research. He was associated with manufacture of fighter aircrafts.

Mathews completed LLM and started his career in the High Court. He was mainly interested in Constitutional matters and Protection of Human Rights. He founded *ASHA BHARASA*—a non government Organization aimed at providing legal aid to the common mass.

Karim joined as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Environmental Science at the Institute of Social Sciences and Research.

Inderjeet, after completing PG with specialization in Neurosurgery, followed his mother and joined as a Flight Lieutenant in the Medical Wing of the Air force.

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