

SOLDIER GRAND DAD'S TRUE STORIES

by

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DEDICATED TO -

**MY GRAND CHILDREN - SONAL, ANMOL, ROHAN
AND SARABDEEP.**

Preface

Most of the stories in this book are true experiences of my life. Childhood spent in villages living in mud houses and subsequently ,schooling and college education .

I spent a few years doing different jobs to support myself and ultimately landed up in the INDIAN MILITARY ACADEMY, DEHRADUN IN JULY 1958.

When I joined the Indian Military Academy, as a direct entry cadet, in 1958, I opted for joining the shikar club, of the Academy, which contributed, to a large extent, for my getting to know, about shikar, jungle lore.

Some of the stories are about personalities who effected my life and about human relationships.

Besides , there are true tales of interesting characters, as well as from wars I fought and various areas and terrains I served as an Army officer, in the service of MY BELOVED INDIA.

The stories are not in chronological order and have been written as and when these came into my mind.

THE SNOW LEOPARD

(A true story narrated by Lt Col Rajinder S Modgil (retd)

I was posted on the Indo-Tibet border during 1966, at a place called Kaurik, a small border village slightly short of the pass of the same name, Kaurik. The place is at a height of about 13000 feet, and is considered high altitude area.

I had been promoted to the rank of a Major in the Regiment of Artillery Of the Indian Army on completion of six years service as a commissioned officer.. My transfer to a Mountain Artillery Regiment came after my having taken part in the front line on the Lahore front during the 1965 war with Pakistan.

Kaurik was on the bank of a river called Parachu, which has its origin deep in Tibet and enters into our country near the Kaurik pass. The river gets frozen during winter when the temperature goes as low as minus 32 degrees Celcius. Kaurik is in a valley and surrounded by snow covered mountain peaks, which are a source of perpetual water supply during the summer when the snow starts melting. During winter we had to heat up the snow and then it would become liquid, and only then we could drink the water.

Being a shikari(Having been an active member of shikar club at Indian Military Academy), I tried to find out what type of shikar was available in the area. Luckily, I had one Non Commissioned Officer (NCO), who was interested in this sport and had been in that location for more than one year. I sent for him, and he briefed me in detail .

The area had mountain goats which were very elusive and stayed in small herds. There were chakor birds, which is bigger than a partridge found in the plains. Also there were rock pigeons in plenty. In the end, he said that there was a snow leopard in the higher plateau which was at about 17000 feet. I

had my Battery's observation post in that area which was located in the infantry company locality, overlooking the border. My Battery Officer Lieutenant R. K. Sharma was located there. I decided to visit my officer at the plateau which was called the Pong Maidan. I informed my officer about my visit to him next day. I also told him that he should try to get as much information as possible about THE SNOW LEOPARD.

Early morning next day, with my shikari NCO, I started the 4000 feet climb to Pong Maidan. Climbing in the high altitude area is a difficult task. I was about 28 years old in peak of health and strength. I had learnt the art of climbing in the high altitude, which is walk ten steps, halt for 7 to 10 breaths and continue. Reason being the lack of oxygen at that height. We took almost five hours to climb. In between we had short breaks to appreciate the changing scene and take rest. The colour of sky in high altitude is navy blue, as we climbed the colour of the sky became deeper blue. At that height there are no trees or big bushes. Since it was summer at that time there was enough grass, for the goats, sheep and yaks which the locals used to keep.

Pong Maidan was almost a flat plateau. The foot track led to the Infantry location. It was a beautiful view of snow covered mountain peaks all around. Lieutenant (LT) Sharma's observation post was at the edge of the plateau facing towards Tibet. You may say he was sitting right on the border. What surprised me was a beautiful green valley across the border astride Parachu River, with crops, across the Kaurik pass. I learnt the valley was fed by the water due to melting snow of the mountains around it. I had no camera to take a photograph, but the view of the green valley is permanently in my mind.

In the meantime Lt Sharma's staff brought a hot mug of tea. While sipping the tea I asked Lt Sharma, if he had any news about the snow leopard. Lt Sharma knew that I was fond of shikar, but my interest in the snow leopard surprised him. He said he personally had not seen it, but some sentries during nights have seen it from a distance as a shadow. Mostly it stayed away from the army locality. It appeared it was happy with its natural prey of mountain goats which were in abundance in the cliffs and rocks. It had not harmed any human beings. He said that some infantry jawans who had been there around two years had informed him that during winter, it moved down along with its prey - the mountain goats.

I had lunch with Sharma. We discussed some army matters and then along with my shikari NCO I started back to my Battery location.

After about two months winter started; and it started snowing. I observed that snow fall followed a certain pattern. It used to be cloudy for two days, followed by two or three days of snow fall and then bright and sunny for three to four days. The minimum temperature started going down.

I was living in a dug out, which in army language we call bunker. It was fairly comfortable. This bunker was located on the track going to kaurik, facing the track. The approach to the bunker was slanting down wards from the track. My bunker had a small attached toilet which had a rear door on the back for use of the safaiwala. There was a smaller attached bunker for my orderly, which was not occupied as I had permitted him to stay with the other troops of my battery. The roof and all the doors, were of usual corrugated sheets. From inside the bunker the doors were closed by a small iron bolt.

One night when I was sleeping in my bunker , I suddenly woke up hearing some sound as if some body was pushing in the front door. I switched on my battery light and looked at the bolt of the door. It was shaking. I was sure some body was outside and pushing it. I got up and went close to the door and peeped through a peep hole in the door. I could see part of a silohet, and I could hear the heavy breathing of an animal.

Suddenly, I REALISED THAT THE VISITOR OUTSIDE WAS THE SNOW LEOPARD. Here I was in a fix, with no fire arm, not even a dagger and a hungry leopard pushing my flimsy door. I had to act fast to save myself in this crisis. I picked up both of my snow boots and banged the door with all my strength and shouted as loud I could. I looked through the peep hole in the door; and saw the snow leopard going away against the snow as white background. I checked the door bolt, and saw that the holding nails had become slightly lose.

I went on my knees to thank GOD for saving me.

Going back to sleep was out of question. I checked my watch. It was 3 AM. Another three and a half hours for my orderly to bring my morning tea. But, I did lot of thinking as to why I had been careless. Here I was sitting within a kilometer from the border, which was my duty to guard . Yet I was without any weapon even to defend my self! Mentally I thanked the Snow Leopard for waking me up to realize my carelessness.

Around 6.30 AM, my orderly gave a knock and I opened the door. He came inside the bunker, but I went out to check the pug marks of the Snow Leopard, in the passage and up on the track going towards Kaurik. The pug marks were very clear. My orderly was surprised to see the pug marks and said , ‘Sir , you should allow me to stay here , I would have died of

shame if any harm had come to you'. I agreed with him and told him to draw his rifle and ammunition and move in the bunker. After some time, I went to our officer's mess for my breakfast. Then I called my senior subedar and briefed him to warn our troops about the presence of the Snow Leopard in the area; and that there should be a pair of sentries at night with loaded weapons. I also told him that we should prepare to go down to our alternative gun position which was almost 2000 feet lower in altitude, till the end of the winter. I also drew my carbine and ammunition which I did not part with even for a second all along my stay.

After about a week, the Snow leopard again tried to push my door of the bunker like last time. I had put two more strong bolts to strengthen it. Now, I was armed with my carbine and my orderly had his rifle. I opened my toilet door at the back and got on the roof facing the exit and whispered to my orderly to strike the door with boots. The Snow Leopard came out fast but I was ready to fire, He came on the track facing Kaurik but looked back straight into my eyes, as if saying some thing. He was hardly ten yards away and in the sights of my carbine which was set to automatic. I am a very good shot. One burst would have killed him. He started walking towards Kaurik and I let him go. After all he had done no harm and was a handsome fellow. Silently I said, 'Here after we are friends'.

Within one week, I moved my Battery to the alternative gun position near sumdo bridge, which was on the spiti river. Here we had no bunkers for living and had to pitch up snow tents which had only one entry that could be closed from inside. The snow tent had heating arrangement, by burning a kerosene stove called "Bukhari". The side walls of the tent

from out side were half covered with snow and gave protection and strength to the wall.

Our fresh rations supply used to be air dropped once a week. At times due to bad weather during winter it used to be erratic. We used to bury a whole goat meat in the snow, and our cook used to cut out required amount of meat daily from it. One morning , I got the report that whole of the remaining goat meat was missing . On examining the area I found the pug marks of my friend “THE SNOW LEOPARD”. May be he had heard me saying “HERE AFTER WE ARE FRIENDS” and thought he was on a friend’s territory!. The thought brought a smile on my face. Seeing me smiling the cook said , ‘The shaitan has stolen your meat, you must kill him ‘ . I told him , that the shaitan was my old friend and was hungry and hence took away the meat belonging to his friend. The cook did not like it and said softly “ You shall have to eat tinned beans till the next fresh para drop “. I did not mind it. After all what are friends meant for! .

I had to eat tinned beans for a week when we got the next para drop of fresh. The cook wanted to bury the meat inside the snow tent , but I told him to bury it at the same old place. But, to , my disappointment my friend ‘The Snow Leopard’ did not come for having his dinner on my ration. May be he thought of taking my ration as last resort.

I heard about his picking up some goats, sheeps and dogs from the village Kaurik sometimes. May be when he could not get his natural prey ,the mountain goats.

On end of winter we moved up to our main gun position. My friend must have also moved to the higher reaches.

After a few months my Battery was relieved and we moved out.

**I wished a silent 'GOOD BYE' to my friend , THE SNOW
LEOPARD.**

THE CHEETAL DEERS

All gentlemen cadets, on joining the Academy, were required to join a hobby club. I was good in drawing, but I wished to do something new. I consulted my platoon sergeant Randhawa, about it. He was secretary of the shikar club and said if I had interest in shikar, I could join his club. But he told me that normally first term cadets were not taken out till they pass their rifle shooting test in the weapon training. I informed him that at home I had learnt shooting with 12 bore gun and 303 rifle and could shoot well. Then, I signed up for shikar club.

But as Randhawa had told me already, I and other first term cadets were not taken out and only used to clean the shikar club weapons at the armoury on Saturday afternoon. After the weapons cleaning the senior cadets used to go to Kadwa Pani forest block for shikar under the officer in charge of the shikar club in two vehicles, one of the vehicles used to take the cook , waiter and rations etc .

After about one month, one Saturday, it so happened that there were very few senior cadets available to go for shikar. Randhawa told me to get ready to go with the Mess vehicle. He also handed over a rifle and ten cartridges, and warned me to be careful as there could be wild animals in the jungle. I assured him that I will be careful.

Two one ton vehicles used to go with the shikar party. One vehicle used to carry the shikar party and the other the mess staff and rations. The mess vehicle, used to follow the shikar party vehicle. When the first shooting lane used to arrive, the mess vehicle used to head for the Kadwa Pani forest rest house. The forest rest house was deep in the jungle. It was a dirt track and the going was slow. I was in the mess vehicle

and sitting in the co-driver's seat. After leaving the shikar party behind, I opened the overhead latch to stand up for a better view. The driver was knowing the route to the forest rest house, but it was my first trip. The going was slow as there were lot of small nullahs crossing the road. We had been driving for about one hour since leaving the shikar party. There was a sharp turn in the road. As soon as we took the turn, right in the center of the road a deer was standing. The driver stopped the vehicle and asked me, "Sahib goli maro" (sir, shoot). My rifle was already loaded, I took the aim and fired the rifle. The driver told me it was a cheetal deer . That deer jumped and disappeared to our left. Immediately another deer came from the right side and stood at the same spot. I re-loaded and fired. This deer also jumped and disappeared in the same way as the first deer. The distance between me and the deer was less than 20 yards. Even at that age I was a reasonably good shot. I was sure of hitting the deer. The mess servants had heard the two shots while sitting in the rear part of the vehicle. The cook was a mature person and jumped out and asked me what had happened. I told him that I had fired on two deer . The driver switched off the vehicle, we all got down and started looking for the deer. One deer was lying dead about 15 yards away from the road, the second was found dead about another 10 yards further. Both had been shot through the heart. Each of the deer was loaded in the vehicle with the effort of all of us. After about half an hour we reached the forest rest house. I told the staff not to unload the deer and leave them in the vehicle.

The mess staff unloaded their stuff into the cook house and got busy in preparing the meal. I told the driver to be alert and he pulled down the rear curtain of the vehicle. After some time the waiter gave me a mug full of tea, which I started sipping slowly.

It was almost dusk when the shikar party arrived in the other vehicle. Captain Norton, who was the officer In Charge of the shikar club, got down first from the co driver seat, and asked the cadets who were in the rear of the vehicle to come down. The Captain appeared to be in an angry mood. He asked sergeant Randhawa to collect all the cadets who, including me were only eight because he wanted to speak to us. Randhawa, asked all of us to get in a line. He went inside the rest house to report to the Captain. He came out and said, ‘You have broken all my records in this Academy, by firing 66 cartridges and not getting even a single jungle fowl, this is the worst day of my shikar life’. After saying that he went inside leaving all of us in a shock. Randhawa also appeared to be in bad mood. He allotted four cadets to each room and told me to be in his room with two other cadets. I asked him what had happened. He said that - ”today there were only jungle fowl who came out in the beat and all came flying and it is difficult to get a flying shot. So we came empty handed”. In that sad atmosphere I took some time to tell Randhawa about shooting the two cheetal deers. But when I told him he was not willing to believe it. He said, “This is your first day out, do you know how a cheetal looks like?“. I said that having shot today I know it. He took me out and I led him to the vehicle. Sure enough two cheetals were there in the vehicle. Randhawa literally hugged me and said you stay here and I will call the Captain. I remained near the vehicle and after a few minutes he came back with the Captain. He showed the cheetals to the Captain. As soon as he saw the cheetals, the Captain’s face changed dramatically into a broad smile. He patted me and said, “You have changed the opinion about my this day of shikar”. He asked Randhawa to call the other cadets out; and showed them the cheetals. Then he asked me my name and my Company. I replied,” Gentleman Cadet R. S. Modgil, Cassino Company, Sir“. The atmosphere of sadness changed to cheerfulness. All other cadets congratulated me and hugged me. The Captain

called me “LUCKY SHIKARI” . He also told Randhawa that inspite of my being a first termer, I should be brought for shikar hence forth.

THAT WAS MY LUCKY DAY.

THE COMMANDANT COMES

Every week end I used to go with the shikar party as per instructions of the officer in charge. But now I used to be in the company of Captain Norton, who had started liking me from the cheetal shooting episode. He told me to stay near him and watch him shooting specially flying shots.

Shikar was conducted in an organized manner. I learnt the club was using the services of a local shikari who used to arrange beaters. The jungle had a number of fire lanes from where the trees had been cut so that in case of fire, it does not spread to the whole jungle. the width of the fire lane was about 100 yards. The beaters used to be positioned in one lane and in the next lane the shikar party used to take up position. As soon as both parties were ready, each party used to give a signal by blowing the whistle. Then the beaters used to start shouting and beating the drums and tins to scare the birds or animals who would then start moving in the direction of the shooting party, which would be standing at the farther edge of the fire lane to get a clear view of the approaching birds or animals. The beaters used to halt about 50 yards short of the fire lane, for safety reason. Each shikari was allowed to shoot only in his front. No shooting was permitted between the area of two adjacent shikaris, again for the safety. At the end the officer in charge used to blow the whistle which was signal for no more shooting and also for the beaters to come forward. The officer in charge used to position himself in the center of the shooting line and used to have visual control. The safety rules were very strict. EACH SHIKARI USED TO UNLOAD HIS GUN ON THE SIGNAL OF STOP FIRING AND USED TO CARRY HIS GUN IN OPEN BREECH MODE, TO AVOID ANY ACCIDENTAL FIRING.

I picked up the safety rules and shooting methods being always next to Captain Norton. I also picked up how to take a flying shot, that after about two months , my success rate was more than 50% which according to Captain Norton was good .

Some times other officers, who were interested in shikar used to come along with our party. Shikar used to be carried out on Saturday afternoon, the night was spent in the forest rest house and again after breakfast with pack lunch till Sunday evening.

After about three months of my having started coming, one Saturday evening, while shooting, Captain Norton told me that next day, in the morning, The Commandant of the Academy, Brigadier Gobinder Singh was coming for shikar; and that he had decided to give me the chance to be The Gun bearer with the Commandant. He also informed me that the Brigadier was excellent in taking flying birds and that I will get a chance to observe him. I thanked him for selecting me for the honour.

The Commandant was a handsome Sikh officer, tall and sweet spoken. Captain Norton introduced me to him saying, “Sir , he is cadet Modgil , although he is a first termer , yet he is my lucky shikari, with your permission I wish him to be with you during the shoot today “.

The Commandant, gave a smile and said, it was fine with him.

The commandant was, really an excellent shot. In two beats only he shot five flying jungle fowl, without missing even

a single shot. I watched him very carefully, the way he swung the gun in a graceful manner, was a treat to see. He was indeed the best I have seen. After each beat, he used to hand over his gun to carry, till the beginning of the next beat. It was an imported gun, made in England, It was maintained very well. Compared to our club guns, it appeared to be lighter in weight.

When the third beat was to start, I handed over the gun to him, but after a moment he gave it back to me and said - “I had my fun for the day, now you shoot with this gun, I will watch you”. I pleaded with him that my duty was to carry the gun with him and to watch him shooting. He insisted that I should shoot. I thanked him. During that beat I shot one jungle fowl with flying shot and missed one. He then explained to me that I missed the second shot because my swing was slower and the bird was flying faster; and that the flying speed of each bird and the direction of flight has to be kept in mind. During the next beat, luckily I got both the shots right. He was pleased with my improvement. After that shoot he desired to go back to the Academy. I along with Captain Norton saw him off. Once his vehicle left, I turned back, but the vehicle halted and the Commandant called Captain Norton. I stayed back. After a few minutes, Captain (Capt) Norton came back and told me that the Commandant was happy with my conduct and shooting and wished that I should be given full encouragement. I thanked the Capt and said it was all due to his giving me the chance and told him that I had learnt a lot from the Commandant. The Capt patted me on the back. In my mind I thanked God .

IT HAD BEEN AN OTHER LUCKY DAY FOR ME.

THE KADWA PANI LEOPARD

My regular shikar trips improved my shooting with the gun . I also picked up the knowledge about the jungle lore and tracking as well as reading the pug marks and hoof marks of different types of jungle animals. I also saw a number of wild elephants in the jungle; a few times leopards, and once a tiger but from a distance. Essentially, we in the shikar club were to concentrate on small game, and were not to go after big game.

During my third term in the Academy, one Saturday afternoon, when our vehicles entered the Kadwa Pani forest we met our local shikari. He informed Captain Norton who was officer in charge of the shikar club, that one leopard had been killing the goats, sheeps, and dogs of the village Kadwa Pani for the last few months and the villagers were scared to move out after sun set, as the leopard used to strike during the night only. He feared that since the leopard had lost fear of human beings, it might start targetting human beings and turn into a man eater. He said that the head man of the village had requested that the Captain Sahib should have mercy on the village folks and kill this leopard as soon as possible. The head Man had offered to provide goats as bait for the purpose. The village was providing the beaters for us since the beginning of the shikar club. Captain Norton rightly thought that it was his duty to rid the village of the menace. He sent the mess vehicle to the forest rest house and in the other vehicle we proceeded to the village. Hearing the sound of the vehicle, most of the villagers came out along with the Head Man, who was an old and thin person but looked dignified. With folded hands he said to the captain, ‘ sir , save us from this curse , because for the last few months, it is killing our goats, sheeps, dogs and calves. The day is not far that it will start killing human beings

starting with children. The captain assured that he will do something to get rid of the rascal. We along with the local shikari went around the small village and found the pug marks of the leopard. The captain was an experienced person and had been good in big game shooting. He observed the pug marks carefully and showed us that the front left pug mark was having a lighter impression, meaning that there was some injury on the left front leg. He enquired if any one had fired on it before it started killing the village animals. At first they were hesitant, but then the local shikari admitted that one of the men who was a beater in his team did fire on the leopard at the water spring about half a mile from the village. That happened at night, the leopard was probably hurt as there was a blood trail seen next day by our local shikari. The Captain told the Head Man and the local shikari, that the leopard had been hit on its left leg that time and the injury had resulted in disabling the leopard in hunting its natural prey. The Captain asked to be taken to the water spring, which was also a source of water supply for the village. There we found number of old and fresh pug marks of the leopard. This meant that the leopard used to come for drinking water there regularly. The water spring was surrounded by a little open area. There was a suitable tree about 50 yards away which could be climbed and had strong branches for one or even two persons to sit.

The Captain decided that he and myself should occupy the tree after sunset. He told the shikari to tie a goat as bait near the water spring. He also told the Headman to arrange for a room in the village for our use. After tying up all arrangements, we drove to the rest house for our early dinner. After dinner, Captain Norton and myself, now armed with rifles and ammunition returned to the village, where already a room had been made available for us. I was armed with the same rifle which I had used on my first shikar trip, when I had

shot two cheetals. I always thought it a lucky weapon for me. There were two cots in that room for our use, we both rested for about one hour. The Captain knew that this was to be my first experience to sit for a big game. He briefed me and also told me that the leopards can climb the trees, and hence we shall have to be very vigilant while sitting on the tree at night.

It was a moon lit night, in addition we carried a torch light each. We climbed into the tree after about half an hour, of the sunset. The goat and the water spring were clearly visible. The Captain occupied a lower branch and I occupied a higher branch. He told me to check the sight setting and load the rifle with five cartridges in the magazine. I did so. He then told me to practice aiming in the direction of the goat, and the spring. I did that too. Then the wait started. After about an hour the temperature started going down. The captain was having some throat infection and developed fever. Then he started coughing badly. He said with his coughing noise the leopard may shy away. He then wanted us to abandon the sitting and go back to the village. I suggested that if he permitted I could sit alone, and he could go back. He felt hesitant at first, but I insisted that we had promised the villagers and that it was unfortunate that he had developed fever and bad cough. I assured him that I will be alert and careful. He had been seeing me shooting and had full confidence in me, so he reluctantly agreed. He climbed down with his rifle and went towards the village.

The village was about ten minutes walk and he was armed and the leopard was not known to have attacked any human being so far. So I thought he must have reached back to the village safely. The moon light started fading after about 3 AM. Around 4 AM it was completely dark. It also became chilly, so I put on my heavy jacket which I was carrying and felt warm. I again started practicing aiming in the direction of the goat and the water spring . Although the moon had set down, yet the

star light was sufficient to give me a good shot, so I felt confident. Having been brought up in a village I was used to that sort of atmosphere at night and had good night vision. Then I remembered that the Captain had said that leopard can climb trees. So I practiced aiming downwards to face that sort of attack, if it happens. I was confident of facing such an attack also. The warm jacket made me feel comfortable. I do not know, how I dozed off sitting in that position.

Suddenly, as if shaken up I woke up. It was still dark although I could see in the east a slight tinge of pink color - an indication of the approaching dawn. I looked in the direction of the goat and found that it had disappeared. That meant the leopard had killed it and taken it away during my dozing off period. I thanked God, at least I was safe. The leopard could be close by or may have taken its prey far away. I blamed myself for this due to dozing off. I checked the rifle to see that it was loaded and switched the safety catch off very slowly and with the minimum possible movement. Now I had only one option, which was to wait for the captain in the morning, which could be after at least one to two hours later .

After about half an hour of my waking up I noticed some movement close to the water spring . Yes, it was the leopard . It was coming towards the water spring very cautiously and looking to its sides. I froze all movements and wanted it to start drinking the water, before making any movement. It reached the spring pool and started lapping the water. Very very slowly I started moving the rifle to take aim and took aim at the spot slightly behind the leopard's shoulder, which is the vital area of an animal being close to the heart and fired. The bullet struck at the correct spot. The leopard jumped in the air as it was struck and then fell down. I was not sure whether it was dead as I could see some movement of its legs but it did not get up. Just to make sure I took aim at its head and fired again.

This bullet went home and I noticed no movement in the body of the leopard. But remembering the famous saying of Jim Corbett, whom I considered as my ‘guru’ having read his book ‘The maneaters of kumaon ‘ a large number of times ‘A leopard can not be considered dead till it is skinned’, I considered it prudent to wait till The Captain arrived from the village. Surely, the sound of two bullets fired by me must have been heard by him and the villagers.

I had reloaded my rifle and felt fully relaxed having fulfilled my promise to the captain, and having rid a possible man eater of future. I also had a silent prayer to God for giving me the strength to accomplish the mission.

After about 45 minutes of the firing I started hearing some sounds from the side of the village, indicating the approach of a small crowd. The crowd was led by the Captain along with our local shikari, the head man and some other villagers. The captain halted the crowd and with his rifle at the ready he approached the leopard. When he was about 40 yards away he told the local shikari to start pelting stones on the leopard. I myself took an aim at its head, but there was no movement. Ultimately the Captain reached and touched the body of the leopard and found it dead. Only then he looked towards me and asked me to come down. I unloaded my rifle and climbed down, and walked towards the Captain and the leopard. In the meantime the villagers also had come closer.

For the first time the Captain hugged me very firmly and held me for some time, bringing tears of joy in my eyes. The head man, the local shikari and the villagers touched the captains and my feet, making me feel humble and to express my gratitude I touched the feet of my mentor, CAPTAIN NORTON.

The body of the leopard was willingly carried to the village by the villagers for all other villagers and children to see.

THAT WAS MY FIRST BIG GAME.

THE MOUNTAIN GOATS AND SUMER SINGH

While posted on Tibet border as mentioned, in the story of THE SNOW LEOPARD , I got interested in the mountain goats of that area. The mountain goats in local language were called 'NAABU'. I had a jawan in my Battery whose name was Sumer Singh, who was a very good shot and interested in shikar of the mountain goats. I had seen him shooting with rifle in the shooting competitions and found him an extremely good shot. A strange thing about him was reported by my Subedar was that since his joining the Battery about three years, back he had not gone on any leave, and used to refuse by saying that he had no family and hence no interest to go on leave. I was not convinced by this argument and decided to talk to Sumer Singh personally. I also decided to talk to him in private, while he was out on shikar with me. On a Saturday afternoon I told him that on Sunday morning I wanted to go for seeing the area where the Naabus normally were seen around Pong Maidan, as the 17000 feet high plateau was known .

Sunday morning, after early breakfast we left for Pong Maidan, which was a climb of about 4000 feet from our location. I was carrying my carbine and Sumer singh carried his rifle with ammunition. The climb to Pong Maidan was very tough, and it became tougher as we climbed higher. In high altitudes the oxygen level goes on becoming lesser and lesser as you go up. As it is we had to halt a while after every ten steps as per our army drill to take a breather .

Enroute , we had a few longer breaks to take tea from the thermos flask we were carrying. I started asking Sumer singh about his native place which was some where in Madhya

Pradesh. He said he belonged to a small village . On being asked why he was not going on leave for the last few years, he gave the usual reply that he has no family or near relatives and felt comfortable here . To me it did not appeal convincing. But I did not press further .

During the next tea halt I appreciated his rifle shooting and asked him if he had an opportunity to learn shooting before joining the Army, as I had been lucky to learn. My idea was to get the true story from him. I was sure in my mind that the way he could fire on moving targets, he must have learnt it before joining the Army. He kept silent for a long time, then he said, “Sahib it is a long story and if you want to keep it secret and promise not to take any action against me I will tell you “. I promised him as per his wish and told him to narrate it after we had reached Pong Maidan , and continued our climb. The previous evening I had rung up 2nd Lieutenant Sharma who was my battery officer deployed as observation Post Officer, at Pong Maidan, that we will have lunch with him. As we climbed higher the color of the sky became deep blue , the surrounding snow peaks looked very bright and I put on the dark snow goggles which darkened the whiteness.

It took us almost four hours to reach the Pong Maidan. Second Lieutenant Sharma’s post was about fifteen minutes walk. I was keen to hear Sumer Singh’s story. So I called for a halt . I again told him that it was not compulsory for him to tell me but that it will be safe with me as per my promise to him. He said that all the Jawans of the Bttery had lot of love and respect for me and treat me as their father or elder brother irrespect of my age. I was only 28 years at that time. FATHTER OF A SON AND DAUGHTER AGED THREE AND ONE.

Then he narrated his story, which was as follows.

“Sahib , I was about fifteen years old and was living with my parents and my elder sister in my village. We had a few bighas of agricultural land which was good enough to make a living. We had a buffalo, two milch cows and two bullocks.”

“One day while I was grazing my cattle away from the village, I was suddenly surrounded by a number of men on horse backs. They were carrying guns, and to my horror I realized that they were notorious dacoits of our area. One of them pointed his gun towards me and asked me to speak truthfully to his questions, other wise he would kill me. He asked me the name of the richest man of my village. I replied truthfully. He told one of his men to make me sit in front on his horse and I was carried off into the jungle to the dacoits hide out. Their leader was very well built and commanded their unflinching obedience and they addressed him as ‘sardar’. They treated me well and gave me the same food. At night the sardar enquired from me in detail about our village layout, whether any body had any guns in the village and how much wealth the rich man had, how many men in that house etc. I told everything truthfully. Then he told me not to worry and go to sleep. Sleep was difficult under the circumstances, but after some time I fell asleep. When I woke up I found all the gang of dacoits were up. Two of them were busy in cooking. One dacoit went along with me to allow me to answer call of nature. There was a small nullah near by and the dacoit told me to have my bath there and then he guided me back to the hide out. I was given chapaties with pickle and some tea made without milk, but with a lot of sugar in it. I was taken away by the same dacoit, while the sardar and his gang were busy in discussing the plans. I was scared about my life and worried about my family, who would be wondering about my disappearance and my cattle who might have returned ho me or stolen, but I was

helpless. Seeing me worried the dacoit told me that I should not feel scared and that if I do what the sardar of the gang told me to do, no harm will come to me. Around lunch time another dacoit came and said that the sardar wanted to see me and I was taken to his presence. He asked me to sit down and asked the cook to give me food. He told me that I should not worry about any thing and that he my will treat me like his son, but I was to obey all his commands otherwise he will have to order my killing, if I tried to escape or disobey. After my food I was told to go to sleep as lot of work was to be done that night.”

“I rested and had some sleep also. I noticed that all the time two of his men were on the lookout while others rested or slept. Since I had been warned, I had no thought of attempting escape, and had to accept that it was my fate to be a prisoner. Before sunset I was given food, and the whole gang also had their food. I also noticed that all their horses were taken good care by them and looked strong and healthy like all the members of the gang.”

“About ten o’clock I was woken up by one of the dacoits and I saw that all of them were ready to go some where. I was taken before the sardar . He told me that they were going to my village and that I was required to lead them to the house of the richest man, of my village, about whom I had told him earlier. He made me sit on a horse behind one of the dacoits. I took the gang to my village and to the house of the rich man. The sardar asked me to knock at the door, which I did giving my name in reply to the querry as to who it was. The door was opened and quickly the sardar of the gang and four other armed dacoits entered the house. The rest of the gang surrounded the house. I was also pushed inside the house. The sardar asked for all the cash and jewellery and othe valuables. That was done without any hitch. Then he was asked to remove the gold jewellery on the body of his wife and

daughter in law. The rich man hesitated. The sardar placed the gun to his head and called me to press the trigger. I was scared because another dacoit was pointing his gun on my head. I had no option and pulled the trigger of the gun held by the sardar on the head of the rich man, who instantly died. Then one of the dacoits forced the women to part with their gold and silver ornaments. After collecting the loot in a bag the dacoits and myself came out and the door was locked from outside, with a lock which one of the dacoits was carrying with him. Then the gang along with me returned to their hide out. Some tea was prepared by one of the dacoits. I was also given the tea. The sardar called me and told me, "Tonight you have committed a murder and a dacoity, and now there is no going back for you, because the family of the dead rich man know that you killed him and took us there and got the door open. So, now onwards I admit you in my gang. I promise to look after you as my own son. But you have to be loyal to the gang, failing which your life will not be spared". Then another dacoit brought some yellow turmeric paste, and the sardar applied a 'TILAK' on my fore head and I was asked to touch the feet of the sardar accepting him as my sardar and becoming member of the gang formally."

"The sardar sent a message to my father not to worry about me and that he will ensure that no harm will come to my family. I was put under one dacoit who was the best in rifle shooting. He trained me in shooting with the rifle even on moving targets and jungle animals, I became a very good shot and was given a new rifle as my personal weapon. The gang used to carry out regular dacoities, in which I also took part. I noticed that the gang did not kill or hurt if their order was carried out without resistance. The sardar used to send money to my father from time to time. He also used to help poor people who approached him, like providing money for the marriage of the daughter of a poor man etc. He really treated

me very well. After some time I started liking him. This way, almost one year passed .”

“One early morning the look outs of the gang raised the alarm of our being surrounded by the police. The sardar and most of the experienced dacoits managed to escape while I and two others kept on firing till they escaped and one of our party was killed. Since I did not want to be killed I shouted that we were willing to surrender. Myself and the other dacoit were captured by the police and taken to the police station. The police interrogated me and I told them the story of my being forced at gun point to join. The same was confirmed by the relatives of the rich man whom I was forced to kill by pulling the trigger.

“The sardar secretly sent a message to me that he will ensure that I and my companion will escape any punishment. He scared the witnesses and bribed the judge, that ultimately after spending more than one year in jail I and my companion were let off due to lack of evidence against us. I was a free man and joined my family in the village. But the whole village knew that I had killed the rich man and had been a dacoit.”

“After about a month, the relatives of the rich man tried to get me killed as revenge by hiring some killers. Luckily I escaped with minor injuries. My parents advised me that it was not safe for me to stay in the village. I had only two options - either to join the dacoit gang again , which I did not want , or to join the Army. Through some influence, I managed to join the Army, and since then I am here and have not gone back to my family because of threat to my life. That is my true story , Sahib.”

Having heard his true story showing how fate can turn an innocent boy into a dacoit, I felt sympathy for him and told

him that his story will remain safe with me and that I will take care of him. I asked him if he would like to be my batman, so that I be close to him and make him feel secure and then he could spend his leave with me. He readily agreed to my offer.

We got up and walked up to second Lieutenant Sharma's post. We had our lunch there. I discussed various professional matters with lieutenant Sharma.

Then, Sumer Singh led me to the area where I saw a number of Naboos, i.e. the wild mountain goats. I enjoyed their sight and spent some time in watching them. Sumer Singh asked me if I would like to go closer and shoot. But as the time was not enough so I decided to leave that to another day.

Sumer Singh took over the duties of being my bat man after a few days. Since we both were fond of shikar, every one in the Battery thought that I had selected him because of his being a good shikari.

We both had a number of shikar trips up in the Pong Maidan and provided fresh meat to the Battery Langar which all our fellow soldiers enjoyed.

I used to take him with me to my home when going on leave and he became a part of my family .

GANGA AND JAMANA

GANGA AND JAMANA are two sacred rivers in India and lot of boys and girls are named after these sacred rivers.

However , this is the story of Ganga Singh the mountain artillery mule driver and Jamana his mountain artillery mule .Each mule had its own name and responded to its name like human beings . Both were part of my mountain Battery which I had the proud privilege to command some where on the India Tibet border.

Each mountain artillery mule had one person who was called as mule driver exclusively for the care, training and welfare of the mule. Since the soldier and the mule spent most of the time together , it is very natural for both to develop some sort of attachment for each other . Some times I had heard the mule drivers talking to their mules in Hindi and I got the feeling that the mules understood the language.

During winter the snow turns into ice at places . The mules had to be taken out for exercise on the road . The road was running along the river which was about 1000 ft below . It so happened that while out for exercise ,at a spot on the road the snow had turned into ice ,Jamana slipped on this ice and went down about 50 ft , but Ganga Singh her driver did not leave the reins and went down along with his mule .Luckily there was a broad rock which stopped their fall . Both of them received some injuries . Both of them were brought up by use of man power and other mules power . Their injuries were taken care of and they both were put sick in quarters till both were fully recovered . But the incident proved to me that ganga singh was attached to his mule Jamana , even at the extent of losing his own life. At a special durbar of my Battery

I appreciated his action and promoted him as Lance Naik , which is a coveted promotion for a jawan. His promotion made him more attached to his mule . Both of them became very attached to each other.

Each soldier is entitled to two months holidays known as annual leave . Lance Naik Ganga singh wanted to go on leave which was sanctioned and he left our Kaurik location for his home in a military vehicle. However, in the evening I got a report from my battery subedar that Jamuna, the mule had stopped taking its fodder, most probably due to Ganga Singh having gone . This was a rare case of animal and human attachment. There had been examples of horses like the legendary Chetak the horse of Maharana Partap Singh of Chitor who although being fatally wounded carried his master away from the battle field to safety before collapsing.

I had to request my Regimental headquarters to intercept Lance naik Ganga Singh and inform him about the problem his dear mule was creating by refusing fodder in his absence. He returned back without any complaint .I was present at the meeting of Gnaga and Jamana and saw how both showered affection on each other at thei meeting . Jamana and Ganga had tears flowing from their eyes at the meeting. And Jamana strted eating its fodder.

Ganga Singh never asked for leave and never left Jamna till such time I left the command of my Battery.

The above is a true story of love and attachment between a human being and another living being called mule.

HERMIT

When I was a kid about eight years old my father was posted in a village in Punjab. We were living in a big mud house provided as his official residence cum office . He was Revenue accountant of the village ,called as Patwari in the local language . In our neighborhood a potter was living . He used to be busy making earthen pots on his potter's wheel. I used to sit near him and watching him turn the clay into earthen pots of different shapes and sizes. As a second profession he used to carry other people's goods to Sunam city about six miles away . He had four donkeys for this purpose. He and his son who was about ten years old used to ride their donkeys.

One day his son asked me if I would like to have a ride on a donkey, I said yes , so he made me sit behind him on the donkey and we rode to the outskirts of the village . Once out of the village , he offered to get down and allowed me to ride the donkey on my own . Earlier I was holding that boy , so he told me to hold the rein of the donkey. It walked nicely for some distance , when I happened to touch it with my foot and it started galloping at a fast speed . there were no reins on it , but I held on to its rein very strongly. I heard that boy tell me to pull the donkey's rein up wards which made it to slow down and then it came to a halt. In the meantime the potter boy came running and by holding the ear of the donkey's ear turned it back towards the village and again mounted the donkey behind me. He appreciated my courage and presence of mind in the galloping episode . We reached back near our house where I dismounted from the donkey whose name was Kalu because his colour was dark grey. I thanked the potter

boy and he promised me that he will allow me to ride Kalu independently once I had gained further experience in riding it. Within a few weeks I became a good donkey rider.

My dream to ride a horse had to wait another eight years ,when my father got his promotion as field Kanongo , incharge of 25 villages . To perform his duties in touring his domain , he was allowed to maintain a horse for which he was entitled horse allowance. So he bought a mare with a baby mare basically for the reason that a mare is docile to be ridden by me and my mother .He arranged an ex soldier who had served in horse cavalry in the Army to teach me riding. But since I was an old donkey rider , my instructor told my father after about a month that he was satisfied with my progress and that I may be permitted to ride the mare without supervision . My ex Army Instructor told me one important point that if a horse goes out of control then the rider should take the feet out of stirrups ,because if the rider falls , the horse may drag the rider resulting in injuries and even death . He also told that in case the reins slip out of hand then the rider should hold on to the mein of the horse , this point I had learnt during my first ride on Kalu the donkey. Further he advised me that horse and dog are faithful animals for human beings and responded well if shown affection by its owners. Whenever my father was not on tour , I used to take the mare named Bhuri because of its brown colour out for a ride on the village out skirts on dirt tracks along a canal. I named the foal as Chameli because of its whitish colour. Chameli used to follow her mother when I used to go for a ride.

When I was studying in college ,I got a chance to ride only during vacations . The foal had grown up into a nice mare but was still not fit for riding. It still followed her mother.

I joined the Indian Military Academy during 1958 as a Gentleman Cadet . Riding was a compulsory subject as part of our training . But with my experience of riding I did not have any difficulty . However, the Academy horses were much bigger in size and some of them were frisky as well as rogues. The term rogue was used for horses notorious for throwing down cadets resulting into fracture of legs or arms. I used to reach early at the riding school to get a non rogue horse

However , once due to my cycle having got punctured I was late , and was able to get the only horse left out . His name was Hermit , and was well known for his rogue habits. Anyway I mounted it without showing any nervousness. That day riding lesson included jumping over obstacles. After I had successfully crossed three obstacles Hermit tried to throw me off by suddenly stopping but I managed to remain in saddle by holding its rein . Then in order to carry on further I used my heels which had spurs on my riding boots. May be I spurred it hard , Hermit started at the gallop and went out of the riding school and into the famous tons river bed which was full of stones and river sand, In spite of my pulling the reins , the horse did not slow down and became out of control. I remembered the ex cavalry man who had advised me to take feet out of stirrups and hold on to the rein. I promptly did that. Now I was prepared for the worst , which is a fall from a galloping horse. It went on galloping for another fifteen minutes ,then it slowed down and after another five minutes it halted on its own . I slowly patted its neck and softly spoke to the horse to calm him down . I could feel it reacted to my show of affection. I turned him around to go back to the riding school , but kept my feet still out of stirrups. I allowed it to move at its own speed which was walk in the riding terms. Enroute , I met the riding instructor on his horse. After the class was over , he had come looking for me . He was pleased to see me in saddle . He said that he had already rung up hospital for sending an

ambulance vehicle , expecting that I might have fallen from Hermit. He noticed my feet out of the stirrups. He told me it was a very good action on my part .I informed him that an old soldier had told me who taught me riding. We reached the riding school.. On dismounting I again patted Hermit on his back and neck and kissed him on his cheek. I could see signs of affection on his eyes.

After that day I always selected Hermit during the riding classes . I always patted him talked to him . Some Sundays I used to visit him in the stables to caress him and talk to him. We became good friends . After the passing out from the Academy , and before leaving I went to meet Hermit to wish good bye.

During 1966 I was posted to a Pack Artillery unit which had mules Artillery and horses called as chargers. My personal charger was introduced to me . Its name was Bahadur . I treated him as I use to show affection to Hermit . Bahadur used to return my affection by looking in the same way as Hermit. I started calling him Hermit Bahadur and he responded to his double name. I wonder if Bahadur was a re-incarnation of Hermit !

After almost fifty years , whenever I see a horse or even a picture of a horse I am reminded of my friend HERMIT.

SECOND LIEUTENANT RK SHARMA

While serving with my unit , the only Heavy Regiment of Artillery , I was stationed at Kapurthala which was capital of a sikh state of the same name , founded by Nawab Kapur singh and later ruled by legendary Jassa singh Ahluwalia . How K apur Singh got a Mughal title is an interesting story , which I need to tell briefly. The Mughal emperor , finding the Sikh's becoming powerful and occupying territory in Punjab , thought it wise to offer the title to Sikhs so that they accept him as their emperor. At a meeting of sikh chiefs , none of the chiefs was willing to accept the title, although, it was also felt that in order to pacify the emperor of Delhi , the title should be accepted . There was a fan bearer ,who used to serve the chiefs very faithfully and sincerely by the name of Kapur singh. For his sincere services, the chiefs unanimously decided to nominate him as the Nawab , who later became the founder of Kapurthala state.

I was living in the palace of the Prime Mimister of the erstwhile Kapurthala state ,allotted to me by the Army as residential accommodation . The palace was named ‘ AMALTAS’ ,by the owner late dewan Jarmani Dass ,who had authored a book ‘The Maharaja’ about the lives of maharajas of his times . My son Moninder spent his early childhood in that palace.

There was a government college near my residence and the college students used to go past the gate of my residence which had my name plate ‘ Capt RS Modgil , Artillery ‘ . Later in my life , I came to know that one of the students passing that way was RK Sharma.

While serving with a mountain regiment on Tibet border in high altitude area near Kaurik pass , an young officer second lieutenant was posted to my Battery . He was RK Sharma. During his first meeting interview with him , he asked me if I had been ever posted in Kapurthala. I replied in positive and asked him how he came to know about it . Then he told me that he belonged to Kapurthala and used to go past my residence had been seeing my name plate at the gate daily and hence remembered my name. He told me that he joined the Officers Training and got short service commission . He had not been able to finish his graduation due to his having been selected for the Army. His mention of Kapurthala brought back the memories of ‘Amaltas’ , the birth of my son Moninder , and subsequent move to border for 1965 war .

Out of elderly brother’s affection I gave him a pet name ‘RAJI’ , which is actually my own name given by my wife to me after our marriage. In the high altitude area most of the time it is snowing . I advised Raji to start studying for his graduation as a private candidate ,as Punjab university permitted him to appear . He asked me what was the benefit for doing graduation. I told him that since he was short service commissioned , which was for five years only. If he graduated he could apply for IAS or other civil services for which he was to take only three subjects and that a number of vacancies were reserved for ex short service commissioned officers. He took my advice seriously and obtained necessary books and started his study . I also coached him as much I could to help him in his effort.

He took his examination for his degree and succeeded in getting his degree. In the mean time our Regiment moved into a peace station . Raji was transferred to our regiment headquarters as survey officer , but our brotherly affection and fondness remained. I advised him to start applying for IAS

COMBINED CIVIL SERVICES examinations. After some time I was posted out to another unit in J&K and moved out . However , I came to know that ultimately Raji was selected for IPS and after completing his training had been posted somewhere in Punjab. I felt very happy about him .

Sometime during 1973 I was serving as second in command of a medium regiment in Ferozepur in Punjab . At about 11 AM , I received a telephone message from our regimental police check post that a police officer with police flag on his car wants to come in the unit area and wants to see some one. I told the regimental police non commissioned officer to allow him to come in with his vehicle. After about ten minutes the Police officer entered my officer. He was wearing the rank of senior supdt of Police and was my old friend RAJI (RK Sharma). There he was standing in front of me , and saluting me and said ,” Sir,your Raji reporting’. I got up and embraced him. His coming this way was indeed a very pleasant surprise. He told me that after I had left the mountain regiment , he was posted out to a Para Artillery Regiment and did his commando course and after that got selected for IPS. After his training he was posted to Hoshiarpur and now on promotion he had taken over as senior supdt police at Ferozepur. He said only that day in the morning from a gunner soldier he came to know about my being the second in command of the medium regiment . Hence, he could not wait , and straight came to meet me . He had not changed at all since I last saw him about 6 years back , exept he was now in khaki uniform instead of olive green . My eyes swelled up with tears of happiness. I ordered for some tea and spent some time talking about his life and my war experiences of 1971.

He insisted that I should accompany him to his Headquarters immediately .I could not say no to him ,so I went with him. He did not allow me to take my vehicle and drove to his

Headquarters. His office was huge size ,very well furnished . I was reminded of our 8ftx8ft dug outs of kaurik location ,in my mind. He told his assistant officer to call all officers of his headquarters. After sometime about fifteen police officers assembled in his office . He introduced me as “ Meet my Guru ,Major Modgil , he is responsible for what I am today” . The words were true it made me feel proud but humble. I shook hands with his officers who left after the introduction,Raji and I sat down . I sensed that the police officers were having lot of respect for their SSP due to his Army background . He told me about his family . After some time , he dropped me back in my unit . I gave him my residence address and requested him to have dinner with us so that the families could meet each other. He accepted the invitation and promised to come soon.

He along with his wife and infant son visited us and had dinner with us. We talked about our adventures in Kaurik and our life there. My wife also became friendly with his wife , with Delhi being common maternal city for both of them. The family get together continued till I was posted out to J&K .

I lost contact with Raji after that. After my retirement and loss of my wife I was advised by my younger daughter Dimple to settle down in Delhi , as my elder daughter was staying there and my wife’s five brothers and two sisters were settled there. Dimple convinced me about her point of view about her suggestion when I visited her during my visit to USA on her invitation. So in December 1995 I bought a flat in Rohini Delhi and settled there.

For the retired Army officers two get togethers are held every year , one is the course mates get together and the other regimental get together. In my case the Regimental get together is the Gunner’s Day party. Whenever I am in Delhi I

try to attend both these party's because it gives a chance to meet old friends.

The Gunners Day Party of 1996 was my first such party in the Artillery Mess in Delhi. I drove to the place in Delhi Cantonment and after parking my vehicle I went inside the Mess. As I turned towards the door of the mess I saw my Old friend Raji looking towards me. I recognised him straight away, although he took some time due to my grey beard. The last time we had met was in Ferozepur about 23 years back. I said 'RAJI it is me colonel Modgil,'. Then he recognized me and we embraced each other for a long long time till others in the party started looking at us.

We started updating each other about our lives in different modes. He was sorry to hear about death of my wife. I told him about my daughters being in USA and my visits to that country twice. I also told him about my son having resigned his job with HAL and now planning to do Phd in physics.

Then he told his story. How the life in the police was just like an island with very little social life and being like an island. He said that his army background made others to feel inferior to him and that the political bosses trusted him more than other police officers. He was tough with terrorists then active in Punjab. This made him as a person to be eliminated by them, but he came to know about it and he reported the matter to the central Government. Consequently he was posted to the Indian Embassy in USA as attaché. He stayed there till a few months back. In the meantime his promotion as DG police was given to a junior to him in his absence. He said he is likely to fight for his due promotion in the court. The party lasted for three hours. I told him to meet other officers but he said that he has met me after 23 years and wanted to stay with me only. He even walked up to my parked car to see me off.

I talked to him on phone a number of times while he was holding a high post in Punjab Police, but again lost contact with him. He must have retired by now and may be gone back to USA where his children were studying. Wherever he may be , he is a very dear friend –Raji – and may God bless Him.

RUSTAM-E- HIND(Strogest Man Of HINDUSTAN)

I was about seven years old when my father was posted to a village by name Jakhepal in Punjab. My younger maternal uncle Laxman Singh used to live with us. He was very fond of me. He got a number of pigeons as pets for me and raised a bamboo basket on a pole for them for their roosting.

My elder maternal uncle Chanan Singh was a well known wrestler of his village and surrounding villages. He was a handsome and well built person. My younger maternal uncle (MAMA) used to tell me that Chanan Singh had never been defeated even once by any other wrestler in any wrestling tournaments in the near by villages. Taking the example of his elder brother, my younger Mama, Laxman MAMA as I used to call him, used to do mustard oil massage and ‘Dand Baithaks’ the Indian system of exercising. I used to count the numbers and go on informing him the numbers finished which used to be fifty in each case. Seeing his interest in exercise and wrestling my father who was the village Patwari and the only representative of the state government, told my Mama, that he can speak to Puan Singh Pehlwan, and request him to make my Mama as his deciple wrestler. My Mama readily agreed. My father called Puan Singh Pehelwan and spoke to him about my Mama. The Pehlwan called my Mama to his presence and I also accompanied him. The Pehlwan accepted him as his deciple and as per custom he touched the feet of the Pehlwan. I who was also present there, did the same that is touched his feet. And the pehlwan smilingly blessed me and accepted me a lad of seven years as his youngest deciple. Although it surprised my father because he had never thought of my this

action, of his only child becoming deciple of the Rustam E Hind of his times. But destiny being the Master, it had to happen. Even today I feel I was destined to be his youngest deciple.

Puran Singh, Rustam E Hind, was the biggest man in physical size I have seen so far. In a way he was one of the handsome men I have met in my life. I do not remember his weight, but suffice it to say that no horse could carry his weight. Even ordinary camel could not get up on its feet if he sat on it. Only one special breed and well developed camel could carry him. I learnt later that if he sat in a tonga at the rear the horse hung up in the air due to its feet being lifted in the air. The Rustam E Hind was the State wrestler of the Maharaja of Dharbanga state. The Maharaja was paying him 500/- rupees in those days that is more than 60 years back as stipend for his diet and other expenses.

The custom of wrestlers was to reside at the akhara of the Guru wrestler hence my uncle moved to the akhara. Although seven years old and going to the village primary school I too wanted to go to live at the Akhara, but my father said that he will speak to the Pehlwan as I was to attend my school and too young to live with professional wrestlers. He spoke to the Pehlwan, who permitted my going to akhara after my school and sleeping at home with my parents, thereby I became a part time deciple of the Rustam E Hiind.

My Mama was the youngest in the akhara and I was the centre of affection of all the wrestlers at the Akhara. Surprisingly, all of them including the Rustam E Hind were illiterates. I was then in my second or third standard in the school and was the only educated (Second class pass) deciple in the Akhara. After about two months I suggested to Guruji, as all of us used to call the Rustam E Hind, that he should permit me to teach Punjabi language to all the deciples. He readily

agreed but on one condition. The condition was to teach him first as his Gurudakshina in advance for being his deciple, and that all others were to address me as chote ustaad. It was acceptable to all concerned. Secretly I felt proud for being education guru to the Rustam E Hind.

Guruji was very intelligent and a good student. He was very hard working and regular compared to others. He also used to ask me about progress of each deciple. However, the first lesson important for him was to learn how to sign his name because till then he used to put his thumb impression. I understood his requirement and concentrated on his signatures. With our joint efforts in about two weeks he was able to write his name in Punjabi. When he could do it confidently he was very very happy and told me that now I should teach him to write in Urdu language, his signature and Rustam E Hind also. I worked hard with him and in about one month he could sign his name and write Rustam E Hind in both Punjabi and Urdu. When he did so his joy was like a child having done an impossible skill. He kissed me on my forehead and said in his husky voice “ Son, you are my only deciple who has taught me, the most cherished thing, that is to sign my name and title in two languages, may God bless you.” In response I touched his feet for blessing me. There are tears of joy in my eyes on remembering that incidence while I type it.

Besides my Mama there were three other deciples excluding me. They were all being fed at the cost of Guruji. The diet was very rich and used to be non vegetarian. The chicken or he goat used to be slaughtered by the deciples. Cooking was also done by them. There were three buffaloes for milk out of which butter, ghee, etc used to be taken out. All used to exercise two hours in the morning and one hour in the evening with wrestling practice in the evening. I could attend only in the evening session as morning I used to go to school. I used to do

‘Dand Baithak’ which is the Indan system of exercises. Guruji used to make me sit on top of his neck while doing his exercise. Now I realize it was his method of weight training. I used to enjoy that part. Coming to think of it how many boys could have had the chance to ride on the neck of a Rustam E Hind! At least two of his wrestlers used to practice fighting with him simultaneously. Sometimes even three of the wrestlers used to practice with him all together. But he used to hold all of them under his arms or legs. Indeed he was a giant of a man like BHIM of the Mahabhart.

Then the second world war started and the Army recruiting Party came to the village. My Mama wanted to join up and on the quiet he took permission from Guruji. And along with one more wrestler he went to the recruiting officer. They both were well built and were selected. And they departed to Patiala cantt for their training. Guruji was left only with two full time deciples and me. He did not feel happy but he also did not stop his two deciples from joining the Army as they wanted to join the profession of arms which was considered a noble profession.

In spite of my uncle having gone I continued my duties of a deciple of the Rustam E Hind for another one year or so till I passed my 4th class. During this period I leant some interesting things about him. Although he had been married for some years, yet he was following celibacy and hence no issue. Lot of people used to come to him for asthma medicine from far off places. He would not charge any thing for the medicine and the medicine was potent and people who had been suffering for years got cured. He gave medicine only for this disease. One day I asked Guruji why he was giving only one medicine. He told me, that one holy man saw his wrestling match while he was In Darbhanga state and that a holy man liked it so much that he gave him the formula for this medicine with the condition not to charge any money and that he should not

reveal it to any one till he became old and then to pass it own to a person of charitable nature with the same condition. He casually mentioned that he may pass it on to me when he grows old since he liked me a lot and I was his youngest deciple as good as his own son. I thanked him and wished him a long life, but promised him that I will perform his duties as delegated to him by the holy man.

Due to my education, my father decided to shift us to Sunam. My grand father was also in Sunam, though he was staying at the samdhi of Bhai Mool Chand Ji, and living the life of a holy person and doing service to the community. I and my father went to meet my Guruji and he advised me to continue my physical exercise along with my studies. I promised to do so and bowed before him and he blessed me. We left for Sunam, where I joined the high school. My father told me that he had also studied there and even introduced me to one of the teachers who had been his teacher too. My father also told me that the High school building was constructed by my grand father as contractor on the orders of the Maharaja of Patiala.

Whenever I got a chance to go to the village with my father I used to visit my Guruji and spent time with him including riding on his neck while he exercised. He always used to give a broad smile on seeing me. In my heart I missed his company. This way years passed. Even my father got transferred to another place, but I continued visiting my Guruji by going on cycle which my father had given me. I also started playing football in addition to the physical exercise.

Time passed, I joined college, then after my graduation did some jobs with the aim of joining the Army, which I ultimately succeeded by joining the Indian Military Academy. When I got commissioned as second lieutenant in the Regiment of Artillery my father arranged a small gathering of near and

dear ones and my Guruji was also specially invited for the event. I was very happy to meet him. He blessed me and said that his youngest deciple has grown up to serve the Mother land as an officer and that he felt proud of it.

Due to my Army service and being away from home I could not meet him although I always used to enquire about Guruji and his well being from my father. He used to give me good news about him. I learnt that Guruji had been blessed with a son. Once he started getting old he stopped taking part in wrestling bouts. Till then he remained unbeaten.

Long long time later I learnt that he passed away peacefully. My father had gone to visit him a few days before he passed away. My father told him that my Guruji enquired about me and on being told that I was on Tibet Border said that he had always missed me, but was happy for me and told my father to tell me about it. His son was well educated and became a superintending engineer in PWD. Guruji passed on the formula for asthma given by the holy man to his son.

I always feel good whenever I REMEMBER riding on the neck of the Rustam E Hind and teaching him to sign his name and title in two languages.

PURAN SINGH, THE STRONGEST MAN OF INDIA OF HIS TIMES WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN MAKING ME, A VILLAGE KID INTO AN OFFICER OF THE ARMY OF INDIA, TO SERVE THE MOTHERLAND. HIS MEMORY IS ALWAYS WITH ME, INDEED MY GURUJI HAS AND IS ALWAYS WITH ME, IN SPIRIT.

BOAT NAMED PREETO

There is an area known as Chamb Jaurian in J&K , which is now partly under occupation of Pakistan , which it captured during 1971. However , the story I am going to narrate is of the period around 1969 when that area was with us and I was stationed there with my field regiment artillery . We were fortunate to be staying in built up accommodation in barracks. The local population comprised of Dogras who were mostly agriculturists. They speak Dogri language which is very much like my mother tongue Punjabi. We had a small village near our unit location . The villagers used to play Punjabi songs during any festival or marriage functions on the loudspeaker. One of the pet songs of the villagers was ‘nain preeto de’ , which means the eyes of Preeto, an imaginary female damsel.

We had a natural small lake located in our unit location surrounded by lots of trees mostly mango , jamun and some other trees . The lake was adjacent to my room in the officers mess barrack and I and some other officers used to sit out on the lake bank to enjoy the peaceful atmosphere. One of these officers was our Quarter Master captain Sowaran Singh who was a good friend of mine. I used to do some painting , which is my hobby , in that beautiful setting . One day I started sketching the lake on paper . Captain Sowaran singh who was watching me doing the sketch that if I could draw a boat in the lake ,it would look interesting. I drew a boat with a few strokes of pencil . Indeed, the inclusion of boat made the sketch look interesting. But it gave me another idea, that is to construct a boat which we could use for rowing on the lake for exercise and fun. Since captain sowaran singh was the quartermaster I told him that I would be grateful if he could get a boat made . He liked the idea.

Wood was readily available from the river Chenab which flowed not very far away, and carried wood sleepers not caught by the boom up stream. I made a sketch plan for the boat and captain Sowaran singh was kind to get it made along with a pair of oars. On a beautiful Sunday morning we carried out its trials on the lake and the trial was successful. We gave the boat a name 'PREETO'. I painted the name of the boat on both side of the boat. It was a small boat and could carry only two persons. The boat became very popular with most of the officers of the unit, who liked to do rowing on the lake . A few of the even used it for fishing in the lake. There was a small island in the lake which had a single tree. We started using that island as a picnic spot.

Life in the field area sometimes becomes dull and boring if one does not have a hobby. One has to go on inventing new ideas to keep oneself busy. The rowing in the lake after a few months became routine . Then I hit upon the idea of carrying it on a jeep trailer to a canal which was about two kilometers away and then enjoy the ride in the boat with the flow of the current of the water. I drove along the canal road and found that the idea was practical except that at one bridge which was very narrow , the boat could have got stuck. Any way I decided to give it a try ,on the next Sunday.

Next Sunday after an early break fast and haversack lunch we took the boat to the canal and launched it. Compared to the rowing in the lake , rowing in the canal required different technique because the current was fast and the canal was not very wide. However by a little experience we were able to get a good ride for at least five kilometers. My jeep driver continued following us driving on the canal road. Around lunch time we halted and had our haversack lunch followed by mugfuls of tea which we brewed on the spot . We had enjoyed the ride and the lunch. It was a sunny winter day , we relaxed on the bank of the canal and then loaded 'PREETO' on the trailer and returned to our unit area. The canal boat ride also became

popular with other officers and the boat became a good source of entertainment.

SHIKAR ON THE BORDER

The foot hills and the jungles in chamb jaurian was full of small game . As the area was close to the border , there was hardly any civilian population to disturb the birds and animals in the area. As you have read in the previous stories shikar had been one of my hobbies.

So I returned back to my old favourite hobby of shikar. The surrounding foot hills had lots of game in the shape of partridges, jungle fowl ,rabbits and wild boar. Luckily, there were a few other Regimental officers who also had interest in shikar. One of them was Captain Thomas who was always ready to give company to me.

But due to regimental duties our shikar activity was restricted to Saturday afternoon and Sunday. On Saturday afternoon around 4 P.M. we used to leave our unit area and head for the foot hills for shooting the partridges. This area had brown and black partridges. Black partridge is a very beautiful bird with the male having a plume at its peak. There were plenty of jungle fowls and pheasants in the foothill forests. We used to shoot the birds during day light. Once it was dark the rabbits used to come out and we used to shoot a few. Then we used to return to the unit . The mixed bag of shikar used to be handed over to the officer's mess cooks . If the shikar bag was big part of it used to be sent to my Battery langar.

After sometime we started going closer to the border because we heard from the locals that there were lots of wild boars because the Pakistan side people did not shoot them due to religious reasons. I had tasted wild boar meat earlier and used to like it. Besides it was good training in shooting a fleeing wild boar. Captain Thomas was very fond of shooting the wild boars. The wild boar being bigger and heavier provided more meat. Our mess cook produced good pickle out of the extra meat. One night we shot one porcupine. It had lot of black and yellow quills. I did not like its meat taste and decided not to shoot any porcupine after that.

You may wonder why I used to go for shikar. Life on the border where there is no family life becomes lonesome and boring. Although Army routine used to keep me busy but week end and holidays were heavy. Other officers used to waste their time by indulging in drinking beer, whiskey or rum which did not suit my temperaments. Further shikar has been considered a royal sport even during the Ramayana and Mahabharata times. It also improved my shooting skills, which is good for a soldier.

BILOO THE NOTORIOUS DACOIT

I was about 13 years old at the time of partition of our country. Our Patiala state was still an independent state ruled by the maharaja. The communal riots during the partition gave rise to lot of criminal elements in our area . That time the money lenders in the villages were looting the poor and un educated villagers by charging very heavy interests . If the borrower did not pay the heavy interest the money lenders used un scrupulous methods to recover it with the help of police or muscle power.

There is a village by name Namol which is a few miles from my hometown Sunam. In that village there was a Brahman agriculturist who had taken loan from the money lender for meeting the expenses of marriage of his eldest daughter . He promised to return the whole loan after Baisakhi after sale of his crop . But due to his badluck the crop was lost due to accidental fire . So instead of paying back the loan , the poor Brahman had to take further loan to feed his family consisting of his wife ,two un married daughters and a son who was the youngest and seventeen years old at that time. The son was nick named BILOO , Who is the main character of this story.

The money lender Bania took advantage of the situation and with the help of police and muscle men took away the bullocks and cows of the poor Brahman. This angered the young son of the Brahman. He with the help of some others who had suffered similar treatment at the hands of the money lender decided to take law in their hands. They all hatched a plan and one night robbed the moneylender's house and took away cash

jewellery and licenced gun from him. Before departing they shot the money lender and all his family members. THAT IS HOW A YOUNG BOY BECAME A DACOIT 'BILOO THE DACOIT ' .

BILOO became a notorious dacoit because of his killing all the family members of his victims who were always moneylenders of the neighbouring villages . His name became a terror in the area surrounding our home town Sunam. Some attempts by police to capture him failed as by now his gang had become big and people were scared to inform the police about his whereabouts. Further as his targets were moneylenders only the common villagers who had suffered at their hands had some sympathy for Biloo.

I came to know about Biloo from my father's cousin , Lieutenant Bharpur Singh , a retired army officer , who at that time was company commander of the Home guards of our district. Since the police had failed , my this uncle was asked by the state government to capture or liquidate the gang of dacoits.

In those days there were lots of forests around the villages which provided good hide outs to the dacoits. Further they shifted their camp very frequently hence it became difficult for the Home guards company commander to complete the task given to them. Lieutenant Bharpur Singh, my uncle who was the Home Guards Company Commander , was a veteran of second world war ,hence experienced in dealing with the dacoits. The Home Guard personnel were also veterans of the war and had been armed with rifles which they knew how to handle, unlike danda wielding police men. Biloo Dacoit through his own contacts came to know that my uncle had been given the task of liquidating his gang. He changed his tactics and stopped raiding villages but started robbing people

travelling in between villages by hold ups at places like canal bridges. I used to hear all these stories from my uncle because he used to visit our house very often and talk about the dacoits.

My father was posted in a village about ten kilometers from Sunam. He used to come home every weekend to Sunam to spend the weekend with us. It so happened that he did not visit us one weekend. My mother got worried about his not coming. I suggested to go to the village on cycle. In those days there were no telephones to the villages or even homes in Sunam. My mother allowed me to go to the village. I left on my cycle. As I went a few kilometers outside Sunam I noticed that there was not even a single traveler coming on the track coming from the village. Having heard the stories of hold ups by the dacoit I became more alert.

I had known route to the village very well , having travelled on it number of times. I knew there was a canal bridge on the route. As I was about three hundred yards from the bridge , I noticed lots of village folks sitting on the bridge. Immediately I realized that it was a hold up by the dacoits. I immediately turned my cycle around . At that moment I also heard a rifle bullet hissing past me. Luckily there was a turn in the track and I came under cover of a line of trees although I heard another bullet being fired and whistling past me. I speeded up my cycle and came back to sunam. My uncle's Headquarters was close to the fort , which I had visited earlier a number of times. I went to him and told him about the hold up. Luckily he had about ten Home Guards present with him. He appreciated my intelligence and presence of mind and told me to go home.

A few days later I learnt from my uncle that he with his home guards reached near the canal but could not engage the dacoits as lot of villagers were in their captivity. However as the sun set the dacoits allowed people to go. My uncle was able

to send some of his Home guards to cross the canal by swimming up and down stream. Thus he was able to encircle the dacoits and surprised them by a volley of fire from all directions. Although Biloo and his gang tried to break out but his complete gang was liquidated by the Home Guards, the Veteran soldiers.

My uncle and his Home Guards were suitably rewarded by His Highness the Maharaja.

I was given “SHABASH” by my parents and my uncle for my part in this encounter.

There is a moral to this story. The Greed of the money lender turned a young son of the poor Brahman into a dreaded dacoit . Hence Greed is a sin .

TRI BHAVAN NATH MITTAL

(A true life story, narrated by Lieutenant Colonel Rajinder S Modgil Joshi)

(Dedicated to the memory of my dearest friend TRI)

TRI as I and most of his friends and his own family used to call him by his pet name was one of my closest friends. He was third in order of age out of five brothers , son of Babu Atma Ram MITTAL, who was a retired civil engineer . Tri's father had a huge house in our neighbourhood. Before TRI'S family came to reside in that house , the Deputy commissioner of Sunam District used to live there as a tenant .Sometime in 1945, I and my mother had also moved into our ancestral house due to my education , after I finished my primary education at village Jakhepal, which had only a primary school. My father was a revenue official of that village, and continued to stay there. He used to come to Sunam on week ends.

I exactly do not know when and how I met Tri. But I do remember that his elder brother Jagnandan was my class fellow and Tri was junior to me in the school. Age wise Jagnandan was elder to me and may be Tri was of my age or a few months younger or elder to me. But I feel it was around 1947, a little before or after the partition of our country. I distinctly remember my sickness due to typhoid at the time of Independence, which made me physically very weak. It so happened that I was the only boy from my neighborhood class fellows who passed the seventh class examination, inspite of my serious sickness . In those days 8th class used to be something like a board exams , hence students were not promoted to 8th

class unless they were really good to pass 8th class exams. This created some sort of anti friendly feelings towards me by all of them and they all stopped talking to me . luckily Tri's elder brother , Jagnandan came from some outside town and joined my class in the school . He became friendly with me although he was elder to me. Tri had joined the same school but he was in some junior class. He was friendly with other boys of our neighbourhood who made him feel that I was not a good friendly material. But since his elder brother Jagnandan was my fellow classmate , he somehow convinced Tri to become friendly with me. Tri's eldest brother was Amar Nath who was in the 10 th class. At the end of the year their eldest brother passed out of the school and stood first in his class.

Tri and Jagnandan were well built and good athletes. They both were good in playing football . In fact Jagnandan was the captain of the football team when we were in tenth class. Jagnandan and Tri also used to win lots of prizes in athletics . They were responsible in making me take interest in sports specially football and body building.

1951 I passed my tenth class in good second division and took admission in Mahendra College Patiala because I wanted to do FSC in medical. Jagnandan joined Ranbir college Sangrur. However, due to my increased interest in sports I quit medical and switched to arts subjects. I completed my Fellow of Arts , known as FA from Patiala. I took admission for my BA course (Bachelor of Arts) at Ranbir college Sangrur , along with Jagnandan. Tri was in 10th class at Sunam and was captain of the school football team. I and Jagnandan were members of the college football team. At that time I took the National Defence Academy examination and qualified for interview. But I could not make it at the selection board due to lack of coaching and guidance. I and Jagnandan shared a rented room as we could not get a seat in the hostel.

When I and Jagnandan were in the final year of BA , Tri joined the same college in first year. He also joined NCC as a cadet. He also became a member of the college football team with his good game and having been the captain of his school team. All three of us got seats in the college hostel. I and Tri shared the same room. Staying together and playing together and from neighbouring houses strengthened our friendship a lot. Sometimes we used to cycle down to Sunam on a weekend.

He started body building exercises in addition to football. He progressed well. This also gave me the incentive to start weight lifting and weight training exercises and to put on some muscles to my otherwise sleek body. Tri took part in body building competition and was selected as Mr College for his well built body .

I finished my Bachelor of Arts degree in 1955. I wanted to do some professional course like LLB OR BEd . But due to financial constraints started looking for a job. After doing short terms jobs as a teacher in a village and store keeper in industry department , I with the help of a well wisher VIP got the job of an auditor in Public Health Department of PWD at Patiala . I rented a room, became member of the central Library and continued my physical exercises with weights. I used to return to my room after dinner in a hotel which was opposite to the Phul Cinema and close to my office. I had informed Tri by letter about my address. One evening when I returned to my room , the land lord gave me a note left by Tri ,who had come to my room. That he was taking admission in Mahendra college, and since he did not find me in the room he was going to the college hostel to meet some friend and stay the night there. I could not wait till next day to meet him, so I went to the hostel to meet him. In spite of his friend's objection I got

Tri to come to my room with his baggage. He got admission in the college on merit of his being an outstanding sportsman.

You may ask why he did not continue at Sangrur itself. The reason was that since I and his brother left Sangrur , he felt alone. Since he knew that now I was working in Patiala ,he could be close to me and Patiala college being a bigger and famous college he had better chances of shining in his sports activities. But I know that he being a very close friend wanted to be close to me.

He could have got a seat in the college hostel , but I insisted to his staying with me. He agreed , but after some time we both felt that his college was at a long distance from my room, so we started looking for some room close to his college and not far from my office. One of his class fellows, who used to live in the staff quarters of Moti Bagh Palace suggested he could find some place for us in the area where he was living. He showed some rooms and then showed a lonely deserted bungalow near by, which had lots of rooms. His father was having the keys to the place, hence he showed it to us. The lone bungalow was called as 'BHOOT BUNGLOW'. That was the reason , nobody wanted to live there and it had been lying vacant for many years. That boy said that he can speak to his father and we may have to pay only nominal rent for the room. But there was no electricity and water supply available. However there was a hand pump which could be repaired at our cost. Since , I and Tri were both brave hearts by nature , we accepted the offer and moved into one room there after getting the water hand pump repaired. The place was close to Tri's college , olympic stadium and slightly far from my office , but we thought it suited our requirement and pockets , since the rent was almost half of what I was paying for my room. We did not find any ghosts in that Bhoot Bungalow , and stayed there for a few

months. We used to leave around seven in the morning and come back at night around 9.30-10 .

One morning while we were leaving one Sardar jee stopped us and asked us as to who permitted us to stay in the bungalow. We told him the name of the father of Tri's class fellow. He said that the Bungalow was inhabited by ghosts and wondered how we dared to stay there without any mishap and advised us to leave the place. We thanked him for his advice and decided that may be the ghosts if there were any did not trouble us , but it was adviseable to find some other place. I was able to get a room in the canal colony which had electricity and watersupply and proper bathroom and toilet facilities. The owner was un married and agreed to provide cooked food for us, as he was cooking himself. We liked the place and food arrangements , although Tri's college was comparatively away but he did not mind .

Tri had obtained his B certificate from NCC. He knew that I had qualified for NDA INTERVIEW. One day while we were doing our weight training , he casually asked me why I had not applied for the IMA(INDIAN MILITARY ACADEMY) competition. His remark suddenly woke me up and reminded me of my ambition to be an officer in the armed forces. Patiala being a big cantonment , I used to see army officers in their glamorous uniforms every day. I thanked him for reminding me for my old dream and ambition .I also promised him that I will certainly start preparing for the competition. I started working hard and thought of applying for the next IMA examination.

It so happened that the person who rented us the room in the canal colony, decided to get married at a short notice and wanted us to vacate the room . Luckily Tri got a place in his

college hostel and one of my office colleagues agreed to share his room in Model Town , till I found some place myself. After about a month , I found a room for my self in model town itself. I invited Tri to join me , but by then he was nominated as captain of the college football team and the professor incharge advised him not to leave the hostel seat which he had arranged for him. I MYSELF ADVISED Tri not to leave the hostel for my company's sake as I could meet him whenever we wanted and he could come and spend sometime or some days at my place. Thereafter, we used to meet regularly at his hostel or my place. He went on encouraging me for my IMA COMPETITION. I started my preparations very seriously and applied for the IMA when the advertisement came. I qualified in the entrance examination . I also took coaching for the interview. When I went for the interview ,I was full of confidence. I was the only candidate in my group to be selected. I also qualified in the medical examination .I sent a telegram to TRI and my parents about my success ,and came back to Patiala . The same evening I went to his hostel to meet him. I found him in a very happy mood. His joy was so much that I can not explain. That week end I went to meet my parents who were staying in a village where my father was posted , near Dhanaula , a town close to BARNALA. My parents were also very happy to hear about my selection. I came back to Patiala . Now I had to wait for the merit list. One morning the merit list was published in the newspaper and my name was there in it . In the end it was mentioned that those selected will get the call letter from the Academy. I went to meet TRI at his hostel and gave him the news. He was very happy. I thanked him for inspiring me for this aceivement. He introduced me to a friend of his M M SHARMA (He retired as colonel from the Army and is settled in Patiala), who belonged to a village near Sunam. TRI told me that Sharma had the title of MR PATIALA in best physique competition. He was doing his B.ed. He had also C Certificate of NCC. SHARMA

congratulated me and said that he also aspired for IMA and will be trying for it through NCC entry. I wished him success. We had a small tea party at the college canteen of hot samosas jalebees. TRI came with me to my place and next day being Sunday , we spent together and also saw a film at Phul cinema . I also sent a telegram to my parents about my being in the merit list for the Academy.

After about two weeks I got the joining instructions from the academy. There was another boy from Patiala who had also received the call, Varma , his father was Executive Engineer in the PWD. He located me from the address given in joining instructions , and invited me to his house. TRI and I spent most of the time together till I left for the Academy. He saw me off at the railway station and hugged me for a long time . We both had tears in our eyes . Varma was also there in the same compartment. His parents and sister were there to see him off. He must have noticed TRI AND ME CLINGING TO EACH OTHER WITH TEARS ROLLING DOWN . When the train started moving and myself along with Varma were the only passengers in the compartment. Varma asked me if the person who came to see me off was my brother. I replied, ‘ YES, MORE THAN MY BROTHER’ . For some time we both were quiet as varma sensed that my separation from TRI WAS MORE EMOTIONAL THAN HIS OWN , LEAVING HIS PARENTS AND SISTER. Then I realized that the train journey was the beginning of a new life for me . A journey of my LIFE which lasted thirty six years in uniform in the service of Motherland.

I remained in touch with TRI through letters as there were hardly an telephones in those days. When I went for the term break after a few months I met TRI at sunam. He was very happy to see me. He remarked that I looked smarter and

stronger. I spent some time with him. Next term break I could not meet him as my mother was not well and my father had been posted to Dhanaula itself as Field Kanongo and had to tour 24 villages under his jurisdiction. However I wrote to TRI about my problem.

Next term break I was able to meet him because my father had shifted to some other place and decided to keep my mother at Sunam at our ancestral house , which was close to TRI'S home . I also requested TRI to take care of my mother as my father used to be away on his tours.I found him a little depressed and the reason was that he had not been able to pass his BA Examination. I asked him to work harder and to spend less time in playing football which he was very fond of . I impressed on him that it was he who had inspired me for the Academy and now it was my turn. I suggested that he had achieved the best in sports by being captain of Mahendra COLLEGE FOOTBALL TEAM AND MR COLLEGE OF RANBIR COLLEGE AND B CERTIFICATE IN NCC. I SAID IF HE WORKED HARD HE WILL PASS HIS BA AND GET A GOOD JOB. He promised me that he will stop playing football and use that time to study. When I passed out from the academy with my 2nd lieutenant star on my shoulders I went home, and was happy to hear from my mother that TRI had passed his BA. I went to his house with two boxes of sweets ,one for my getting my rank and the other for his passing his BA. His parents and brothers and sisters were very happy to see me in army officer's uniform , but I was more happy for TRI having passed his BA. With BA degree in his hand and outstanding sportsman credentials, I asked him that he should start applying for jobs.

During my next annual leave I came to know that TRI had been selected by the Railways as TTE mainly with his being a outstanding sportsman. I got his address and congratulated

him for his success. He replied back and said that all his success was due to my inspiration.

We were now both in service and in different fields. Only a few times we were able to physically meet each other as whenever I was on leave and he happened to come to Sunam we were able to meet. He was based at Mathura and settled down there after his marriage. I roamed around the whole India with my family during my service in the Army. A few times we and our families and children met each others at Sunam.

After my retirement on 28 Feb 1989 I spent a few months in Sunam with my parents and after a very long time I was able to meet TRI and his family . He was still in service and his children had grown up. Like me he also had done his LLB. While in service. It reminded me of his nickname 'VAKIL' , BY WHICH HE USED TO BE CALLED BY HIS PARENTS. We both enjoyed a few days together at Sunam. He went back to Mathura and after sometime I went to Bangalore to join my family as our son was working as design engineer in the HAL and my wife was practicing as advocate in the high courts. I also joined her and started practice in the high courts as an advocate. But during 1991 the Army recalled me on re employment for legal duties and offered me the job of STAFF OFFICER LEGAL, at Bangalore itself for two years. After that I spent about a year and a half with the Legal cell at Chinnai in the army Area Headquarters looking after five south Indian states. This gave me good experience in dealing with legal cases at High Court levels.

Between 1988 to 1995 lot of things happened in my life. My elder daughter got married in 1988. My younger daughter got married in 1989 and wet to USA, ON SCHOLARSHIP FOR

HIGHER STUDIES. I lost my mother in 1992, father in 1993 and my wife in 1994, within one month of my second retirement from the Army. I and my son decided to leave Bangalore in search of spiritual peace and went to Mount Abu. I stayed there for about an year at Brahmakumaris Head quarters ,and then went to USA TO VISIT MY YOUNGER DAUGHTER Dimple. She advised me to shift to Delhi where my elder daughter Gorinder was living with her husband's family and working as t.v. engineer. Also my in laws families were living. I accepted her advice and I bought a flat in Rohini, a new colony coming up then. During a visit to Sunam, I got TRI'S address and telephone number and got in touch with him and asked him to visit me along with his family.

He was prompt to my request and visited me along with his wife and one daughter who was working in Delhi. He had also risen to the high post of in his department. They spent two days with me. It was very nice to be with him and his family. After this visit I received a very beautiful letter from him which I am still keeping as my precious memento. I was touched by his calling our this meeting as KRISHNA AND SUDAMA, THE LEGENDARY FRIENDS MEETING of our epics.(I FAIL TO KNOW WHO WAS KRISHNA AND WHO WAS SUDAMA BETWEEN TWO OF US)

We remained in touch mostly by phone. He told me that he was planning to shift to Sunam. I liked his Idea, to return to our roots there. He had started getting his house in Sunam renovated. I also told him that I may also build some place myself in Sunam on my plot near Bhai MOOL CHAND SAMADHI.

Then , one day I got a sad phone call that TRI had left for his heavenly abode suddenly after a massive heart attack. I was

under shock for a very long period. I had lost TRI , WHO WAS MORE THAN A BROTHER TO ME.

Where ever his soul is I am hopeful to meet him again and again and again.....IN FACT HE AND HIS MEMORY IS ALWAYS WITH ME.

(The above true story is part of my memoirs / stories, which is/are under preparation. I thought of sharing this with my beloved friend's wife and children---- to show that Tri was also part of my life as HE was part of their lives. HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR INSPIRING ME , A SMALL TOWN BOY, TO BECOME AN ARMY OFFICER OF THE MOTHER LAND.)

(I request Trideep Mittal to send copies OF THIS to other children of TRI , AS A TRIBUTE TO MY IMMORTAL FRIENDSHIP TO THEIR FATHER . GOD BLESS YOU ALL.)

MOTHER

Mother word is a very sacred word in our society . In our mythology Mother is known as a Goddess of creation , shakti as well as protector of the devotees. There are numerous teples all over the country in the name of MAA , MATA, KALI ,DEVI ,JAGDAMBA, SARSVATI .

In the physical sense mother is the creator of life , whether it is the human child or of any other living species. There can not be life without Mother . All mothers protect , feed and bring up their children. In our society the mother is the first ‘GURU’ or teacher. Thus , there is an unique relationship of all living beings with the Mother.

Narrated below is the story of my mother.

She was named Darupadi, after the legendary character of the epic Mahabharata . However, my father told me that he changed it to Dalip Kaur after the marriage into the Sikh family. Although I know various, people who called her by both her names.

She was born in a village by name Laut in the erstwhile state of Nabha, which was one of the Sikh states of Punjab. She was the eldest child of her parents ,and had two brothers and a sister. The sister died at a young age after her marriage. The Two brothers were named , Chanan and Lakshman . She lost her parents at a very young age. All the three children were brought up by her uncle, who was un married. I recollect her uncle only faintly when I was an infant, because he used to carry me on his shoulders. At that time , his eye sight haalso become very weak.

My mother was married at the age of ten years and my father was also only twelve years old. He was studying in seventh class then. I am told that early age marriage was a common custom in those days. She joined my fathers family at that young age. She was un educated as there used to be no school in her parental village. My father's family consisted of my grand father, four sons ,my father being the eldest and one daughter. My father's name was Nand Singh, younger to him was Harchand Singh, followed by Savitri, my aunt, Younger to her was Mehar singh ,followed by my youngest uncle Ram kishan Singh. My grand mother was not keeping good health hence all the house hold work was done by my mother only. She narrated her routine to me, which was getting up at about 4AM in the morning , grinding flour for about one to two hours, then preparing family's breakfast and then sending all school going children ,including my father to school. Then she had to clean the house,utensils ,wash clothes and attend to needs of my grand father and my grand mother, and prepare

lunch for the family. She got about half an hour rest after lunch and then start preparing the evening meals for the family. People used to take the evening meals before sun set ,hence the family used to go to sleep early with my mother going to sleep as the last person. The whole family depended on her care . After a few years my uncle Harchand was married and my mother got a little help. But the whole house hold responsibility rested on her only.