

Supplementary reading material for

Indian Ethics: A few case studies

Collected by Michel Danino

for HS 503 course on Introduction to Indian Knowledge Systems

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Indian Ethics: Case studies of a few 'ordinary' Indians

The following case studies speak volume on the spirit of entrepreneurship in ordinary Indians, and the ethics it is based on.

The vegetable seller who became a millionaire

Ganesh Nadar, Rediff, February 3, 2009

Slumdog Millionaire has received tremendous international recognition and highlighted Mumbai's underbelly. While some hail it as a grand endorsement for the city, others think of it as a sorry stereotype.

Rediff.com correspondents met residents of the city's slums to find out what life really means for them.

Dharavi is the largest slum in Asia. Lest you think of it as just a sprawling ghetto of poverty, it also is home to some of the most industrious people in the city. The turnover per year from the scores of small business units that dot this expansive slum is said to be Rs 3,000 crores (Rs 30 billion).

Its entrepreneurs manufacture leather products, bangles and potato wafers every day. The prosperous residents of Dharavi have not become millionaires by appearing on quiz shows or by winning lotteries. What they have achieved is through blood, tears, sweat and untiring toil.

T Jaishankar, a longtime resident of Dharavi, earned his success with nothing else but tremendous hard work. He came to Mumbai in 1967 and began his career as an errand boy in a small restaurant. Forty years later, he is a millionaire. This is his rags to riches story, told in his own words:

I came to Bombay in 1967. I was 13. I went straight to Dharavi because my elder brother lived there. It felt like home as everyone spoke Tamil in the neighbourhood. I worked for a month in a restaurant called Nellai Vilas.

The eatery had a special meaning for me because my district in Tamil Nadu was also called Nellai.

After a month, a vegetable shop owner offered me a job for Rs 15 a month. This was more than what I was getting at the hotel. So I left and joined him.

Though I worked with him for 18 months, he paid me only for 12. His excuse was, 'You don't know Hindi, so consider the first six months as your training period.' On hearing this, I quit.

I then got a job as a cook but had to leave when I fell sick. It was then that I decided that I would not work for anyone and would be my own boss.

So in 1969, my brother and I started selling vegetables. We used to carry them in a basket on our heads and go from house to house in Sion (north central Mumbai) to sell them.

In 1970, we bought a 100 square feet shop in Dharavi for Rs 300 and sold groceries. We would buy goods in small quantities for the shop because we did not have the money to buy more.

Meanwhile, my brother and I took turns to sell vegetables from house to house. One of us would man the shop when the other sold vegetables.

We then had some money to rent another shop where we sold vegetables and dried fish. We continued doing our rounds of selling vegetables in the morning.

Then in 1972, we managed to rent a shop inside Sion vegetable market. Later we bought the shop for Rs 3,000. This brought an end to selling vegetables from door-to-door, but we continued to deliver vegetables to customers' homes from our shop.

Then we bought two shops and sold groceries. Our hard work was paying off because we subsequently added two more shops and were able to buy two houses. We also started two restaurants and a shop in which we sold vegetable oil. I started a phone booth too.

It has been a slow and long journey, but it has been fun. I married a girl from our district and have five sons. My friends and relatives call them the Pandavas and my wife as Kunti devi.

I have educated my sons very well. The first has a MBA degree. The second is an IT graduate. The third is studying physiotherapy. The fourth is doing a course in hotel management and the youngest is in Class X.

Two years back, our property was divided among us four brothers. At that time it was worth Rs 1.5 crores (Rs 15 million).

For my share, I got the oil shop, the phone booth and a house. I have since closed the oil shop and converted it into a beer and wine store. It is doing well.

I am now old and have diabetes, I can't work as hard I used to. But I look back at my journey with great satisfaction.

I still live in Dharavi and will always live here.

Beggar who gave alms to the poor

Radha Sharma, *Times of India*, June 27, 2010

AHMEDABAD: A beggar on Saturday proved that charity only needs a big heart rather than deep pockets. Khimjibhai Prajapati, 64 and a beggar in Mehsana for a decade, donated clothes to 11 poor hearing and speech-impaired girls at the Shrimati Kesarbai Kilachand School for the Deaf.

Rich philanthropists have been a more common sight but it was the first time ever that a beggar had walked into the school to share his savings. It was an unusual sight. An unkempt Khimjibhai in tattered, unwashed clothes, limped through the school gates on crutches and placed the brand new clothes in the hands of 11 eager girls. He had used his savings of Rs 3,000 to buy the clothes.

Khimjibhai begs outside the Simandhar Swami Jain Temple in Mehsana and outside the Hanuman Temple. He lives nearby and asks the devotees for alms.

So why did he give alms to the unfortunate children at the school? Khimjibhai said, "I just need two meals a day and some money to send back to my ailing wife in Rajkot to cure her ulcers and lung infection. Apart from this, whatever I earn I use to buy food for poor, hungry people. Since a long time I wished to do something for girls and I am happy to donate for them".

Khimjibhai used to run a tea stall in Rajkot but escalating prices and shrinking profit margins wreaked huge losses and left him on the streets.

His faith in God brought him to Mehsana where he took shelter outside the Jain temple. "Whether rich or poor, one should always try to help the needy," he says. Khimjibhai helped an orphaned girl marry some time ago.

Bharat Shah, a trustee of the institution that runs the school, said, "I have never seen such philanthropy in the 35 years of career. He just goes on to prove that the true donor is he who has one roti and shares half with the hungry."

One of those who received clothes was Swati Bhagwandas, an orphan who has been at the residential school for years. The 18-year old's eyes shone with happiness.

Rakhis against axes: Trees are brothers for them

Rediff.com, 3 September 2010

A number of young women have decided to take upon themselves the responsibility of saving the forest in Sambalpur near Rourkela from timber mafia by attaching themselves emotionally to the trees and protecting them as they would their own brothers.

The reserve forest atop the Budharaja hillock in Sambalpur town, about 150 km from Rourkela, has been losing its green grandeur as a consequence of large-scale felling by timber smugglers. The Budharaja Suraksha Samiti, which has been trying to protect the forest from axes for a long time but without much success, has decided to involve in its effort hundreds of young women, most of them college students, who are concerned about the deteriorating health of the forest. The women tied rakhis to the trees this past Raksha Bandhan and took the pledge to protect their 'tree-brothers' as they would protect their blood brothers.

"The tying of a rakhi on someone means you will protect him till your last breath. Similarly tying a rakhi on a tree bestows on me the responsibility to protect my tree-brother to the best of my ability," said Sangita, a second-year college student. Environmentalist Rushi Patra told PTI that the 'experiment' was first tried in 2008 with modest success, but in the following two years it caught the fancy of the young and old from all walks of life, especially in Sambalpur city.

The forest, spread across 126 acres, has witnessed many important historic events such as the heroic battle fought by freedom fighter Veer Surendra Sai against the British. Since the end of the 1980s, the forest is being reduced to a barren expanse thanks to constant attacks by the timber smugglers, Patra said. However, she said, "We have been successful in our two-decade-long efforts in transforming the giant bald patch back into a verdant green expanse again.

A temple in the forest and a moat around it are in ruins due to years of disuse till a group of locals formed a committee to restore them to their original state, Loknath Panda, a member of the Budharaja temple trust, said.

Response by Taj employees to 26/11 a case study at Harvard

From *Times of India*, Jan 27, 2011, 12.21pm IST

BOSTON: The heroic response by employees of Mumbai's landmark Taj Hotel during the 26/11 terror attacks is now a case study at Harvard Business School that focuses on the staff's selfless service for its customers and how they went beyond their call of duty to save lives.

The multimedia case study 'Terror at the Taj Bombay: Customer-Centric Leadership' by HBS professor Rohit Deshpande documents "the bravery and resourcefulness shown by rank-and-file employees" during the attack.

The study mainly focuses on "why did the Taj employees stay at their posts (during the attacks), jeopardising their safety in order to save hotel guests" and how can that level of loyalty and dedication be replicated elsewhere.

A dozen Taj employees died trying to save the lives of the hotel guests during the attacks.

"Not even the senior managers could explain the behaviour of these employees," Deshpande is quoted as saying in HBS Working Knowledge, a forum on the faculty's research and ideas.

Deshpande said even though the employees "knew all the back exits" in the hotel and could have easily fled the building, some stayed back to help the guests.

"The natural human instinct would be to flee. These are people who instinctively did the right thing. And in the process, some of them, unfortunately, gave their lives to save guests."

A documentary-style account of events, the case includes video interviews with hotel staff and footage of the attack.

It shows how leadership displayed by people in the bottom rank to the top levels in the organisational hierarchy helped in saving lives.

It also focuses on the hotel's history, its approach to recruiting and training employees, the Indian culture's "guest is God" philosophy and how the hotel would recover after the attacks.

Another key concept of the study is that in India and the developing world, "there is a much more paternalistic equation between employer and employee that creates a kinship."

Terming it as one of the "hardest cases" he has worked on, Mumbai-native Deshpande said it was hard to see people confront their trauma again.

"We objectify it, keep emotion at a distance, but after 15 minutes of questions with a video camera in a darkened room, there are deeper, more personal reflections of what happened," he says in the HBS Working Knowledge.

Deshpande said Taj employees felt a sense of loyalty to the hotel as well as a sense of responsibility to the guests.

He cites the example of a general manager who insisted on staying put and help direct a response to the attack even after learning that his wife and sons had died in a fire on the hotel's top floor.

"Nothing in the employees' training could have prepared them for such an unprecedented situation," Deshpande said.

Deshpande has taught the case in the School's Owner/President Management Executive Education programme.

It can also be taught as an example of managing the post-crisis recovery of a flagship corporate brand, he added.

Wife walks into Chambal, secures man's release

Anand Raj Singh, *The New Indian Express*, 11 August 2010

LUCKNOW: A brave woman, whose husband was kidnapped a few days ago and for ransom, walked into the dense forests of the Chambal valley in Madhya Pradesh and secured his freedom.

Ajit Singh was kidnapped on August 6 when he was returning from Agra. Some dacoits of the Bheema gang kidnapped him on the pretext of giving him a lift. Later, the gang sold him to the Mukhiya gang which, in turn, raised the

ransom amount for his acquittal. Ajit Singh, a resident of BSF society in Greater Noida, is a lecturer by profession.

Ajit's wife Savitri, alias Guriya, told the dacoits about the family's financial condition and begged them to leave her husband for payment of smaller amount.

Unfazed, the dacoits set a deadline beyond which, she was told, her husband would be killed.

Seeing no way to secure the freedom of her husband, she talked to her brother and decided to go into the forest to locate her husband. Guriya took all her ornaments and cash available at home, not more than a few thousands, and started on her journey into the unknown.

A mobile phone was the only connection with the outside world.

After some eight hours walking, Savitri came face to face with the dacoits. The dacoits, who had never expected anything like that, were moved by her courage. After hearing her story, the dacoits gave her a gift of Rs. 5,100.

They even touched her feet and wished her luck for prosperous married life with Ajit Singh.

The dacoits did not take a penny from her to release her husband.

Guriya later told media persons that the only thing she regretted earlier was to have made her brother enter into the matter as the "dacoits could have killed both of us as well as my husband."

She does not hold anything against the dacoits. "My husband is back. They (the dacoits) must have their own reasons for what they are doing. None of my concern."

Real potential is with communities

Interview of Rajendra Singh, March 2002

Center for Alternative Agriculture Media

This Magsaysay Award winner has been instrumental in rejuvenating the rivers of Alwar in Rajasthan. Yet, Rajendra Singh, in this interview by Shree Padre, says he is just a facilitator. Rajasthan is no more a synonym for drought and water scarcity. The traditional

water harvesting structures called johads built by the villagers have changed the face of Rajasthan's Alwar and neighbouring districts. River Ruparel started flowing perennially after three decades. It is among the five rivers of Alwar that has seen life after death, thanks to the commitment and foresight of Rajendra Singh and his team Tarun Bharath Sangh, who were instrumental in mobilising communities to rejuvenate their own water resources. It was not an easy journey for the Magsaysay award winner Singh, who had to face troubles from all the fronts in his attempt to make these villages sustainable. The 'rain catcher' speaks about his mission in this interview by 'Centre for Alternative Agricultural Media' member and journalist Shree Padre. Singh had recently visited the Eechalahalla river rejuvenation project in Gadag, Karnataka.

Anil Agarwal always maintained that the entire nation could be made drought free through community rainwater harvesting. What is your opinion?

His vision has become a reality in Rajasthan. In these 17 years we have made certain dry regions including Alwar, Jaipur, Savai Maadhapur, Karoli drought-free. Nature has maintained a balance between population density and rainfall in our country. Population density is low in Rajasthan and so is the level of rainfall. When we study the 'rain chart' since 100 years, we can find that the rainfall is balanced unevenly in Rajasthan. Five to six years of meager rainfall will follow two successive rainy seasons. When the cycle repeats like this, it becomes very useful if the rainwater is stored through proper ways. It is very essential that we realize water as a limited resource. Though there is a balance between the rainfall and density of population, there is no balance in usage of water. Everybody wants more water. If we use water like a poor man's ghee, then no village or person will face the scarcity of water in India.

Is it possible for other villages in India to replicate your success in making Rajasthan drought-free?

Definitely. Not only in India, it is possible throughout Asia.

Your *Jal-jameen-jungle* (water-soil-forest) conservation campaign enhanced the confidence of the villagers in Rajasthan. Throughout the

process, you limited yourself to inspire people and encouraged them to work for the cause. What is the idea behind this?

Our community is creative. It has the latent capacity to bring a social change. We woke up this sleeping knowledge bank and encouraged them to work. Tarun Bharath Sangh helped the villagers to rejuvenate their style of functioning. In Gopalpura, the first village, it took three years for us to get results. We could achieve the same in 45 villages in the next one year. It was made possible due to the active participation of the villagers. The formula for success was made known to those who are interested. The success stories of these villages influenced neighbouring villages to join hands and work towards another success. This cannot be achieved through speeches. The society should feel the necessity for such a work. The methodology should be decided only after understanding the community's notion about soil and water. Unless and until we live with them, we don't understand their relationship with water resources and soil. It is very important to utilise the indigenous knowledge in any work. Tarun Bharath Sangh never used any outside help for water and forest conservation. A work becomes sustainable and replicable only when local knowledge is applied.

To grasp the customs and practices of Alwar you became a fellow villager and lived with them. There is a large gap between becoming one of them and showing so. Isn't it?

Our society is sensitive and also responsive. It observes your each step towards them. If you are trustworthy and reliable then they extend fullest support to you and move ahead with utmost commitment to their work. When you started your mission you didn't had the aim or dream of rejuvenating the rivers. Had you ever thought of such a possibility? Here I remember an incident. In 1993, when I was talking with Dhannaa Gujjar, a fellow villager, he said, "Bhai Rajinder, you are working for the cause of water. It fills mother earth's stomach. The day her stomach is full, water flows out into the rivers. She is very kind and never keeps water to herself. Whatever you provide her she gives back. This fills even our stomach and helps sustain our farming." The scientists who came subsequently and studied the process of river rejuvenation for three years also gave the same opinion!

You have contributed a wonderful skill to the nation. Now, at this juncture, it is natural for you to wish to move back to your family. If it happens so, what will be the future of those villages?

Years of slavery and negative forces in the society have made our society like handicapped. The villages struggle from lack of confidence. In this situation if someone becomes one of them and boosts their morale, society wakes up and works with a new hope. I became a sort of crutches for them. Crutches are needed till the community regains its strength and starts working independently. Now we have enough young enthusiasts who will sustain the new zeal. When we see the West, those countries have fully exploited their natural resources by converting them to luxury items. This way, their natural resources are exhausted. It is not the case in our country. It is time for us to make use of our insights and our natural resources properly. This century is going to be ours.

From a man who has learnt to treat the diseases of a body, you have grown to the extent of treating the sickness of the country. How do you feel when you look back?

If I had continued to be an Ayurvedic doctor, I would have cured a few persons with the medicine. But now I am repairing the souls of people. I'm trying to broaden the minds and hearts of people around me. This will help the society to progress with confidence and responsibility. My second job has started giving good results.

Two IITians sowing change in Bihar's farmlands

Sify News, 3rd November 2011

Patna: A degree from IIT was the big ticket of Shashank Kumar and Manish Kumar to white collar jobs. But instead of chasing corporate dreams, the two youngsters are dirtying their hands in the fields of Bihar, providing solutions to farmers and trying to bridge the gap between buyers and growers.

'After completing my B Tech in 2008, I got placed in a management consulting firm in Gurgaon. My working area was supply chain and FMCG consultancy services. I used to solve the problems of leading FMCG companies like Pepsico and Britannia. While working, I came to know of the problems they face while

sourcing raw materials from farmers,' Shashank, 25, who quit his corporate job after two-and-a-half years, said.

Despite coming from an agricultural background, the boy from Chapra district harboured the dream of becoming an entrepreneur and says his job helped him shape his dream.

While pursuing engineering at Delhi IIT, Shashank contemplated several options and decided to serve in the agriculture sector, which he feels 'is the most neglected despite being the most important sector'.

'And my job experience allowed me to identify that there is a huge gap between growers and consumers.'

He wanted like-minded people to join him and his friend Manish Kumar, another engineering graduate from IIT Kharagpur, shared his dream. They formed the Farms n Farmers (<http://farmsnfarmers.org/>), a farming solutions company.

'Manish had a job offer from IBM, but he didn't accept it and joined me immediately after finishing his course in 2010,' said Shashank.

They decided to focus on educating farmers about soil quality, crop selection and marketing of their products.

In October 2010, the duo launched their pilot project in Chakdharia village in Vaishali district, the place Manish belongs to, with 13 farmers.

Mainsh, 27, said, 'Initially it was difficult to convince farmers because they have been cheated so many times. They were unwilling to change their traditional pattern.'

To get rid of the hurdle, the two formed an advisory team, which has scientists from IIT Kharagpur, Rajendra Agricultural University, Pusa, Bihar Agricultural University, Sabour (Bhagalpur) and thankfully it helped him in convincing farmers.

'Farmers face a plenty of problems. What is shocking is that they face labour and water shortage and still grow wheat and paddy.'

'We are offering a 360-degree solution. Based on the soil condition and farmer profile, crop selection is done. We ensure right input availability, training, trouble shooting and marketing,' said Shashank.

'For our pilot project, we suggested rajma instead of wheat and fortunately it brought 100 percent profits. Then word spread and in one year you can find our footprints in seven other districts in Bihar.'

Farms n Farmers also works in Muzaffarpur, Sitamarhi, Purnea, Banka, Rohtas and Patna with over 1,000 farmers.

'Our survey revealed what the buyer wants. If he wants potato, then what kind of potatoes is he looking for and for which variety will he pay the maximum price - so we select the crop accordingly,' Shashank said.

'There is no intermediary between buyers and farmers. Thirdly, more than 85 percent farmers belong to the marginal category and it's difficult for them to go to bigger markets,' he added.

There are other problems like post-harvest management. 'Value addition is not done in our country; nothing is done to improve the quality, post-harvesting. We are doing that,' said Shashank.

They are already on the success path. This year 'we are going to supply rice to Wallmart. From small villages we are going to export potatoes. We have to work on how to reduce cost and earn profit,' said Shashank.

They also grow moong, turmeric, papaya and paddy.

What about funding?

'Our project needs very little, mainly petrol for our bikes and our survival. I was in Belgium for internship in my fourth year. I saved more than Rs.1.5 lakh and my father helped me too,' said Manish.

Shashank is also using the money he saved in his job.

Their parents were not so happy when they announced their decision, but things are changing.

'My parents were not happy, but when we showed good results, they were with us. They still worry a lot because agriculture is an uncertain sector. They say, *'kaam to achha hai. kisi na kisi ko aisa jaroor karna chaiye, magar tum hi log kyun?'* Shashank said.

Manish said: 'My father supported my plans, but ma still wants her son to enjoy an air-conditioned life, rather than roam the fields. Also, there is no provision for pension in my father's job and I have a younger sister whose wedding is my responsibility.'

1 man. 1 rupee. 1 check dam

By Kavita Kanan Chandra, Yahoo! India News, 4 June, 2012

Y! Editor's note: Anil Joshi, an Ayurveda doctor in Fatehgarh village in Madhya Pradesh collected one rupee each from one lakh people and constructed a check dam across a local seasonal river called Somli. Going on to repeat it across eleven locations, he is now a full-time water conservationist. With a dream to build 100 such check dams in nearby villages, constantly experiencing drought conditions. One premise of the green economy (World Environment Day 2012 theme) is social inclusion and here is an economically inventive version of that possibility, where the initiative remains human.

The story of Re 1 and a dam 'doctor' In Fatehgarh, a check dam, constructed in 2010, permanently altered the face of this village - from a drought stricken - a well-irrigated one. And in that little dash sits this unsung story.

Anil Joshi, (39) with wife and two daughters. He went on to sell his wife's jewellery? Why? Read on. Anil Joshi had a clinic here since 1994 and knew most of the gaonwallahs. "Some of my patients were farmers who obtained 100-200 quintals of food grain during harvesting season but after eight years of meager rains, they were in a very bad situation and had to buy food grain to feed their family," says 39-year-old Joshi. The situation was so bad that patients couldn't pay his fee either.

As a resident of Mandsaur, (the district HQ) Joshi has seen better days when rains were sufficient and farmers harvested enough to sustain their families. Things had taken a turn for the worse after 1999 as rainfall began to decrease. In 2008, the village faced its worst drought and water scarcity.

Joshi felt building a check dam across the river Somli would help the villagers, as it would raise the ground water table in the area. However, when he shared the idea with his farmer friends they just laughed it off. But Joshi borrowed about a thousand empty cement sacks from a friend and filled them with sand. He himself stood in the middle of the Somli river with a rope tied around his waist and his friends held the rope on either ends. "Though the river was dry, there was always a stretch where water flowed with a strong current. As I stood in the running water, I could gauge its force and realized what a challenging

task I had in my hand. The barrier that we planned to put up across the river had to withstand the force of the water," he recalls. With the help of a few friends, Joshi put all the sand filled sacks across the river in a row. Within fifteen days, it rained and there was water in the check dam. Meanwhile the hand pumps sputtered a memorable gurgle.

"There was a good crop that year after years of drought," remembers Joshi.

Joshi's check dams effort and evidence of a raised water table. Recharged at many levels, what does Joshi do next? Remember the earlier photo. He sells his wife's jewels and borrows some money to construct another check dam on the Somli river. "Even today when I get involved in the house we are constructing, she motivates me to go and build check dams instead and not worry about our house," Joshi's voice beaming with pride.

In 2010 Joshi hits upon the idea of taking one rupee from each villager for constructing a permanent check dam across the Somli river. He felt such a dam would permanently end the drought situation of the village. Joshi was able to collect Rs 36 in just three hours on day 1. The next day's collection was Rs 120. However, some people began to question him on his motive - collecting money, why? But positive press coverage played a role here. "After the media wrote about the check dams I had built, more people started to support me," says Joshi. Two teachers, Sundarlal Prajapat and Omprakash Mehta, extended their support in a big way.

Joshi and his dedicated team collected 1 lakh in three months flat and a permanent check dam was built at a cost of Rs 92000. The villagers voluntarily provided their labor. Following the success at Fatehgarh, Joshi has helped to build eleven more check dams on rivers and 'nullahs' (smaller channels of water) in eleven villages within a 10 km radius of Fatehgarh. He now aims to plant trees along the 120 km road to Sawaliya Dham to provide shade for the barefoot pilgrims visiting the Krishna temple there.

And build 100 check dams within a few years. "Constructing check dams by collecting one rupee from each person in a drought stricken village has now become my mission and I will make this effort a continuous process," says Joshi, who is now becoming known more as a water conservationist and less as a medical practitioner.

This story was in partnership with www.theweekendleader.com. The Weekend Leader is a news portal that reports good news, takes up public causes, and celebrates unsung heroes like Dilsher Khan.

Independence Day Special: The Hero of Tiger Hill

Claude Arpi, Rediff.com, August 14, 2012

Yogendra Singh Yadav survived 15 bullets while capturing Tiger Hill in the Kargil War and was awarded the Param Vir Chakra, India's highest award for gallantry.

On the eve of Independence Day, the 32-year-old soldier relives that night when he and his fellow commandos won one of India's most historic military victories.

Yogender Singh Yadav of the 18 Grenadiers believes that every deadly bullet has a name engraved on it. Yadav knows what he speaks about; after all he survived some 15 bullets while capturing Tiger Hill during the Kargil conflict and was awarded the highest award for gallantry: The Param Vir Chakra.

Yadav was a member of the 'ghatak' (assault) commando platoon which captured three strategic bunkers on Tiger Hill overlooking the Drass-Kargil road on the night of July 3-4, 1999.

Twenty-two highly-trained men approached the Pakistan-occupied peak via a vertical cliff at an altitude of 16,500 feet.

The Param Vir Chakra citation said Yadav 'Unmindful of the danger involved, volunteered to lead and fix the rope for his team to climb up. On seeing the team, the enemy opened intense automatic, grenade, rocket and artillery fire, killing the commander and two of his colleagues and the platoon was stalled. Realising the gravity of the situation, Grenadier Yogender Singh Yadav crawled up to the enemy position to silence it and in the process sustained multiple bullet injuries. Unmindful of his injuries and in the hail of enemy bullets, Grenadier Yogender Singh Yadav continued climbing towards the enemy positions, lobbed grenades, continued firing from his weapons and killed four enemy soldiers in close combat and silenced the automatic fire.'

Claude Arpi met the hero recently. Interestingly, the long list of prepared questions was soon set aside as the commando, now 32 years old, started to 're-live' his experience. It is only towards the end of the encounter that Claude could ask him a few clarifications.

Some thirteen years ago, on July 3, you and your team was given the task of capturing Tiger Hill. What do you remember of these difficult days? What were your feelings then? How do you recall the events today?

Even though 13 years have passed, I still feel that the Kargil war happened just yesterday. I will never be able to forget through my whole life the memories of Kargil.

During this war, I do not know how many comrades I lost; comrades who were even dearer than my own brothers.

Inside me live their memories and it will thus continue to be.

I do not know how many hundreds of my comrades were injured; today some among them cannot even walk or move.

Those are 13 years of memories... it is still as if it all just happened to me yesterday.

I remember, 13 years ago, on the night of July 3-4, my battalion was ordered to capture Tiger Hill top.

Tiger Hill was the highest peak in the Drass sector. To take control of it was very difficult; a height of 16,500 feet, with sheer, precipitous sides of ice and snow.

Before that we had won mastery over many hills (particularly Tololing), but our success could turn into failure, if the dominating feature of Tiger Hill was not won, all other victories could be nullified.

The senior commanders concluded that only after Tiger Hill is captured would our other gains bring a complete success.

Our battalion was then ordered to capture the top of Tiger Hill; attack plans were made. A 'ghatak' (assault) platoon was formed, with Lieutenant Balwan Singh as commander.

This 'ghatak' platoon, under the battalion, was to attack the top of Tiger Hill first. The path that we decided to take was such that the Pakistani forces could not envisage that the Indian Army would be using this path to reach the top.

The path to the Pakistani positions had sheer, vertical peaks.

We made plans on how to accomplish our task and finally on July 2, we set out to accomplish our goal. The whole battalion moved together. The attack could only happen at night as the enemy, from their heights, could observe us from afar.

If we had attacked during the day, they would have shot down our jawans; hence we could only attack in the dead of night, that too, when the moon was hidden.

After an arduous climb for two days, during the night of July 3-4, we went through a tremendously difficult path, a very small path. But hearing the stones sliding under our feet, the enemy surmised that the Indian Army has reached this area. They opened fire on us.

When the firing started, there were only seven jawans who were ahead; the others were slowly reaching up from below in a line. A bit of path was blocked and only those seven jawans had been able to reach this higher spot.

We reached up to a 8 to 10 feet level with Pakistani bunkers; 4 to 5 soldiers opened fire at us. All seven of us went on firing and sent several Pakistani soldiers into the valley of death.

We obtained victory on that ledge. But the top of Tiger Hill was still 30 to 35 metres higher. From there the enemy could see where the Indian soldiers had reached. They started firing at us so heavily that neither were we able to move higher, nor could we could come out from behind the rocks.

For five hours, the exchange of fire continued, however they were unable to estimate how many jawans were present below them.

At about 10.30 am, the Pakistanis sent some 10, 12 soldiers to check. When the enemy came close to us, we fired at them and killed them all, excepting one or two.

But by then our positions had been marked by the Pakistanis and they knew how many we were; they returned to the top to report to their commanders that there were only 8, 10 Indian soldiers below.

Within 30 minutes of getting this information, the Pakistani troops launched a counter attack on us; such a powerful attack, using several supporting weapons, throwing big boulders down on us.

As they slowly came closer and closer, they managed to damage our LMG (Light Machine Gun), our supporting weapon.

Then they got still closer and launched a hand to hand battle, during which six of my companions were martyred.

I still remember that moment, those preceding instants when we seven mates were discussing and talking together about what to do next and what was going to happen, and the instant later when all my comrades had been martyred.

I was bereft by this loss, but also glad that before losing their lives they had killed 10, 12 enemy soldiers. I too was severely wounded and was taken for dead by the enemy.

Two, three times, they returned to shoot some bullets into all the dead bodies and checked that no one was alive.

The enemy also shot bullets into my body, I was shot in the arm and leg, but had firmly resolved that unless I got a bullet in my heart or head, I would remain alive, even if they cut off my arms and legs.

It is due to that resolve and will that I am alive today.

Some 500 metres below was our MMG (Medium Machine Gun) post, the enemy then made plans to destroy it. Next to Tiger Hill was the Mushkoh valley, where their base camp was located. It is from there that the orders to destroy the MMG post came.

I heard this order; I knew that some 10, 12 of my fellow soldiers were manning the MMG post.

In my heart, a voice spoke to me and said that I must save my companions. It is true that if one remembers Ishwar (the Lord) with full faith, then Ishwar-shakti (the Lord's power) aids you. It can even appear before you. I prayed to Ishwar to keep me alive long enough to save my comrades.

Perhaps He heard my prayer.

When the Pakistani soldiers again shot at us and tried to take our weapons, I attacked them with a grenade. One of their soldiers was killed.

Another turned his muzzle at me and fired at my chest. In my breast pocket was my purse which contained some five rupee coins. The bullet hit the coins and ricocheted away; I felt that I had died.

But the next instant, when he bent to take my weapon, my eyes opened and I realised that I was still alive. Within a moment, I turned and grabbing a rifle, opened fire on them.

During the firing, four Pakistani soldiers were killed. I fired from one boulder, then rolled behind another to fire again and then a third.

They thought that some Indian reinforcements had reached from below and they ran away. I returned to my companions to check if any of them were alive, but to my deep sorrow, no one was.

I tried to see how to descend, when Devi-shakti appeared before me and told me how to go down.

My broken arm was useless at my side, I tried to tie it, I even tried to break it off with a jerk, but I could not manage. Finally, I fixed it into my belt behind my back and rolled downhill towards my companions.

I gave my mates the warning about the impending attack and told my team commander, Lieutenant Balwan Sahib the entire story.

He, in turn reported to our battalion commander that our leading section had been entirely destroyed, only one jawan had returned (Yogender Singh Yadav) and he is giving this information.

Battalion Commanding Officer Colonel Khushal Chand Thakur told them to get this jawan down to him as quickly as possible so that he could hear the information first hand.

At that time it must have been 1:30, 2 in the afternoon (of July 4). Blood was flowing from my wounds like water. Though my comrades gave me first aid, the bleeding would not stop. They brought me back to the CO and by the time we reached, it was completely dark, and I was unable to see.

The CO asked, "Son, do you recognise me?" but I could see nothing. He had me laid in his personal tent, and had 2, 3 stoves lit around me. When my body gradually got warmer, the RMO (Regiment Medical Officer) Sahib came and gave me again some first aid and made me drink some glucose.

I got some sort of energy back in my body and then the CO asked again, "Tell me now, son, what happened with you all?"

I told him the whole story and concluded that "Now Sir, they are going to attack the MMG post. Sir, you see, beyond this helipad there are stones, behind which

are the living tents of the enemy, they have support weapons deployed there, and ammunition has been dumped there."

After I gave this information, RMO Sahib gave me an injection to put me to sleep.

When I woke up three days later, I was at the Srinagar base hospital. I learned that the same night, our reserve company had attacked the top of Tiger Hill, and without any casualties, had succeeded in capturing the top.

I was then shifted to the army hospital, New Delhi, and after 16 months of treatment, I could serve the army again.

It is the dream of every soldier to fight for his country and with his own blood to anoint this motherland. To be able to do this is his great fortune.

I consider myself fortunate to have taken birth on Mother India's soil and to be part of this great Indian Army, which is today considered to be one of the best in the world.

I am proud of my country and of our army and I would tell the youth of this country that we can be devoted to our nation from anywhere, but the real progress, the inner and outer protection only comes when we all come together, when we try to progress in every realm and each one tries to grow in our own sphere.

I would appeal to our youth that no matter which area you chose, you should work with honesty, straightforwardness and work hard and you should keep their devotion to their country awake, alive. Jai Hind!

You said that the Devi Ma's Shakti came to you. You had earlier already had a vision, telling you that you would be injured, but would not die. Please can you elaborate?

When, with full faith, a man surrenders everything he has to accomplish a certain task, and this, without reserve, (ulterior) motive or calculation, certainly then, an inner strength, a shakti, arises in him.

He becomes conscious of what is going to happen to him today or tomorrow or whenever.

This happened to me, I was given the awareness that I would be injured; my arms and legs would become useless, but that I would remain alive.

It is a fact that in Kargil we had surrendered ourselves fully to our task (to recover Tiger Hill from the Pakistanis), we were fully aware that we could lose our lives, but we still surrendered ourselves to the task ahead with complete faith in the Lord... then there is no question of thinking that one could fail in one's work.

The task has to be completed -- the Lord himself tests man, He tests how much a person can take, how much pain he can bear; only when one can bear the most intolerable pain does the divine strength comes (to accomplish the task).

You had the certitude that you would not die, tell us more about this vision of 'Devi Ma' who showed you the way down to the MMG post?

At that time, I knew that I had to reach my comrades; it was a selfless wish, to try to save the lives of my mates, my brothers.

I had no desire to try to save my own life, in fact having witnessed my six companions sacrifice their lives, I was proud that I was now being given another opportunity to serve my motherland and follow in their footsteps.

This is the dream of every soldier, his glorious journey to fulfil the prime duty of his life.

When he returns home wrapped in the national Tricolour, his family, his country and even the whole world rejoices with tears at his self-sacrifice.

I was given that strength and She showed me the way down.

The 'vision' told you which way you must take?

Yes, absolutely, in front was a being in white who said, "Son, roll down this nalla (gully)."

Have you seen LOC Kargil, the Hindi movie made about your action?

They did not interview me for that. But the movie, LOC Kargil has my role played by Manoj Bajpai.

Did you see the movie? How did you find it?

I liked it. They have highlighted the task that I and my companions performed; our sacrifice for the good. The world could see this. It made the general public aware of the difficulties a soldier has to endure to do his duty successfully. I liked it very much.

Thirteen years later, would you do it again?

Yes. Many citizens want to join the army, (not all are selected), but those who are, feel they are blessed that out of so many aspirants they are the chosen few who will serve to protect their country.

A soldier's ultimate wish is that he should be allowed to do this job of protecting his country, and even if he has to lay down his life to do it, that is not too big a sacrifice.

I have merely shed some of my blood for my motherland, only put a tilak with my blood on her land, but I am still alive. But if I were given the chance, I would put down this life for her.

Since that time, there have been a lot of changes in the army?

The Army is the Army.

At that time, there were many shortages in the army, lack of equipment, ammunitions, adequate clothing, etc. Has the situation improved?

At that time (in 1999), the war was declared all of a sudden. In those areas (Kargil- Drass sectors), there was little army deployment. The units which had to be called in from other parts of India, from the plains and they did not have the right clothing.

But the main need of the hour (during the war), was neither adequate clothing nor right equipment available, but to accomplish the task at hand, and this, with whatever means we had.

It is a matter of pride that the Indian Army jawan has a dedication, a patriotism not present in any other army of the world.

It is only because of this that we were able to vanquish the enemy at those impenetrable mountain heights.

It is said that a soldier believes that every bullet carries someone's name on it. Do you believe that too?

Of course. See, I am a soldier, and so is the man fighting against me, we are not bothered by which bullet carries whose name.

Definitely each bullet carries a name, just as we say that every morsel of food bears the name of the person who must eat it.

Similarly, for a soldier, he has a bullet with his name on it, the one which will kill him; perhaps the bullet with my name was not made and as a result, I am still alive.

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Claude Arpi adds: Though not mentioned in this interview, one of the motivations of the jawans and officers during the Kargil conflict was the barbarian behaviour of the Pakistanis.

On May 15, 1999, India sent a patrol to ascertain if some parts of her territory were occupied by intruders.

The patrol was ambushed on the Indian side of the LoC and the patrol leader, Lieutenant Saurabh Kalia and five of his jawans were captured and tortured.

Their mutilated bodies were returned on June 9. Yogender and his companions knew this. It motivated them further to recapture Tiger Hill.

Before the attack on Tiger Hill, Yogender Singh Yadav's battalion had been involved in the battle for Tololing, another peak occupied by Pakistan. They fought for 22 days.

Many Indian jawans and officers lost their lives in the battle. Yogender who was just married and could only reach his battalion a few days after the battle had started was given the task of supplying ammunition to the forward troops.

The 19-year-old Grenadier managed to climb the peak twice a day to supply his companions.

In a booklet on his life, he stated: 'It was gruelling and back-breaking work. My officers noted that I had tremendous stamina and could climb these treacherous steep and snow-covered slippery slopes almost constantly for 2 days carrying heavy loads. Please see: *Our Heroes: Param Vir Chakra, Grenadier Yogender Singh Yadav*, Shyam Kumari, Vraja Trust, Pondicherry, 2011.

It is why he was selected to lead the final assault on Tiger Hill.

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