

A Tryst with
Rural
Development

Experiences of a practitioner.....

HARNATH JAGAWAT

Press Information

Dedicated to my teachers,
my village folks, the
tribal community and my
colleagues in Sadguru, who
have all been instrumental
in enabling me for writing
this book.

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ABBREVIATION
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FORWARD

Many of us lead a normal life. Success means to work competently. If we are innovative, we develop new ways of doing the work that we are trained for and involved in and that we least try to perform our duties in a fair manner. Many people are not leader, but success is usually thought of in this terms. There are however, different breed of women and men, they refuse to accept injustice or incompetence and excuses for not taking on the bigger issues that societies and the human predicament faces. Such people are not normal in the day to day sense of the term. As the social psychologist, Eriksen pointed out, they questioned social values and try to change the existing order of affairs.

My friend Harnath Jagawat is one such person. He refuses to accept that the adivasi is destined to poverty, lack of opportunities and the ignorance. He developed an idea that adivasi is grown in nature's bounty, undulating hills and rivers and rivulets which flow through them. At a very young age, together with his wife, Sharmishtha, decided that this water which flows through the lands of tribals can be harvested for their development and once it is available, it will produce the wealth with which they would prosper. It was an audacious idea and most people felt that it would fail. Where would the energy come to take the water from the wells up the hills where the adivasi lives ? Where would the resources come from ? There were many other objections. Jagawat, however, persisted and succeeded. In this book at one level he discusses the technical part of the work that he succeeded and at other level he discusses larger part of the development. That is interesting. It is a useful book for the development practitioners,

the policy makers and the students. The interest of the book however lies in another direction.

At a more basic level, Jagawat like many of the women and men of his breed talks of his experiences. The village he lived in. The memories from which he developed a loathing for injustice. The women and men he worked with. The ones who gave him faith when world looked bleak. Others who were always hostile. Many incompetent. His moments of sadness and his hours of glory. It is this which makes a very interesting book. Jagawat is a practical man with the professional orientation and so literature is not his forte. But, for the person who is willing to read, this is a very rewarding book. He talks of Naniya Dada (“Naniya Dada {in that region an elderly person is called Dada i.e. elder brother irrespective of caste hierarchy} was elderly Scheduled Caste person, who was highly respected by all and everyone in the village. Naniya Dada was a straight forward, God fearing, hard working person”. “In 1970, when I was staying in Vadodara, I received a sad news that Naniya Dada and his family had been mercilessly beaten by two Thakur boys in some petty dispute. Being a self respecting person, Naniya Dada left the village along with his family after that incident forever and settled in a nearby village. I was terribly shocked after having heard that news and wrote to my village that it was the most shameful incident and that beating of such a pious person like Naniya Dada was something that I would never tolerate and that those who had beaten him would be punished by the Almighty God. It so happened that within a short period of time both the the Thakur boys who had beaten up naniya Dada died prematurely in their young age”. “Every time thereafter when I visit my village, I remind the villagers that what was

done to Naniya Dada was a kind of sin committed against the most pious Harijan couple. I have always held the view that no one should invite the curse of poor.”)

Jagawat talks with some loving memories of partnerships between the social sector and business, for which Gujarat was famous. In his own words “Though the money provided was relatively small amount relative to our budget, particularly in the last few years, it was crucial for the survival and growth of the organisation. The managerial expenses for several years were met from the contribution of support of the Mafatlals. This provided a great deal of security to the organization and paved a way for further progress through raising of funds from various other sources. Both myself and my wife were on the pay-roll of Mafatlals Company and this arrangement continued up to the year 2000. This arrangement gave me a feeling that whenever I was raising funds, I was not asking for my survival”.

He asked lovingly of natural resource management as the only panacea for the tribals and their development and begins with the obstacles faced from the statuesque. (“In those days, nearly three decades ago, the role of NGOs in irrigation development was neither accepted nor encouraged. The technical department would say that irrigation was their field and that NGOs had no business to enter into the field. While the then Chief Engineer, Irrigation Department, was prepared to encourage the NGOs, the Superintending Engineer, who was supposed to grant the technical sanction, was outright against the very idea of involvement of NGOs in

irrigation field. In anguish, he raised 60 technical objections to three of the four lift irrigation proposals under his consideration.”).

Jagawat raises the issue as to how the practical group of his has to raise issues of larger policy which has been the method of experience. (“Another development that took place around that period of time is also worth sharing, as it pertains to Sadguru’s first successful effort in public advocacy for changing a government policy. The community lift irrigation schemes under DPAP had a provision that 50 % of the cost of the scheme would be contributed by the beneficiaries. In principle, Sadguru had no objection to such a cost sharing requirement. But, Sadguru had serious reservations about the rationale of such a policy on the ground that this amounted to doing injustice to the tribal beneficiaries. I argued that when all kinds of community irrigation systems, large, medium and minor, were supported fully by the Government, that too, for relatively richer people and richer regions, there was no justification for requiring the poorest lot of people to share half of the cost of schemes.”).

We now know if for no other reason but the Asian development bank’s recent culture that social change requires champions. As Jagawat says “In 1981, the then Secretary, Rural Development, Gujarat, Mr. Anil Shah, visited a couple of lift irrigation schemes. I still vividly remember that when Mr. Anil Shah visited the district, I had to persuade him greatly to visit the lift irrigation schemes also, because, he thought he had seen many lift irrigation schemes, and therefore, there was no need for him to see more of such schemes. Ultimately, he agreed to visit the schemes and as usual,

he interacted with the farmers very intensely. He found the schemes were very beneficial to the farmers. From that day onward, Mr. Anil Shah became one of Sadguru's great supporters. On his return to the state capital, Gandhinagar, he talked to the then Finance Minister, Mr. Sanat Mehta, about Sadguru's lift irrigations schemes and the need to expand the programme. The Finance Minister wrote a special letter to our organization to undertake 100 more such lift irrigation projects in the district, assuring the availability of necessary funds." He has many interesting vignettes in this book.

He makes the point that in this country when we face a problem, instead of solving it, we try to develop a new structure preferring over the earlier failure. "Is it because they do not want to own the responsibility for the failure of their schemes ? Or is it because by winding up the old schemes, the question of inquiring into the causes of the failure of past schemes is automatically eliminated? Or, is it because the ruling party finds it more convenient to replace the scheme than revamping the ongoing one and telling people: "look, old schemes of the previous Government were not good and that is why we instead of improving the ongoing programme are now giving you a new and better scheme".

There are many hours of glory for him and he describes them affectionately. Of Somabhai, "Whereas he earned a handsome amount from the nursery, other farmers in the village were suffering from the adverse effects of a drought, particularly, due to the acute fodder shortage. He decided to give water from his well to the nearby farmers and provided irrigation to

ten acres of the land of twenty farmers almost free of cost by charging only the actual diesel cost”, and of the farmers Hirjibhai and Nurjibhai he started with who still brings for him the first harvest of maize cobs. Jagawat makes light of some consultants who want their coffee are always complaining and have nothing to contribute and keep on blaming other people and sometimes institutions which behave in an odd way because of bureaucratic compulsions.

All in all, the delightful book to be read both for pleasure and profit. I consider it a great privilege to recommend it to the development community.

Yoginder Alagh

PREFACE

For the last about 30 years, I have been engaged in serving the cause of poor tribals in rural areas in three Indian States of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Being a student of rural development and the Founder Director of an NGO, N M Sadguru Water and Development Foundation, popularly known as Sadguru, which is known nationally and internationally for its expertise in the field of integrated water and land resources development, I had been thinking for a long time to find time and write about my work and experiences. Several of my friends and well wishers in academics and colleagues as well as funding organizations also encouraged me from time to time to write a book. But busy as I was with my institution building and other organizational responsibilities, I hardly had any time to spare for the purpose. But as they say there is an opportune time for every thing that one is destined to do. So at last that time arrived

and so also an opportunity. For the last couple of years, I had been waiting for Dr. Katar Singh, an old friend and well wisher, to retire from his post of Director, Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA), and to help Sadguru in improving the status of its training institute and the quality of its training programmes, besides providing guidance in documentation of Sadguru's work and experiences. That time also came and Dr. Katar Singh finally relinquished his office in August 2002. I reminded him of my long-standing demand on his time and he agreed to help. So the process of actualization of my dream to write a book got on the way and has culminated into this book.

The book is my modest attempt to document what now has come to be popularly known as the Sadguru Model of Rural Development. The Sadguru model has attracted the attention of several reputed scholars and national and International organizations engaged in rural development, including Indian Planning Commission, which

has shown interest in its replication in other tribal areas and backward districts in India. This is just an example to illustrate the relevance of the model and the interest in its replication coming from the highest planning body of India. Outside India, some features of the model are being implemented in Ethiopia under a Triangular Co-operation Project among India, Ethiopia and Norway.

The goal of Sadguru NGO is to promote sustainable, equitable and eco-friendly socio-economic development of poor tribals in its project area. Sadguru has pioneered a new approach to tribal development. The approach uses water as a catalyst for development and focuses on community-based water resources development and management projects. Sadguru's work over the last 30 years or so has led to substantial improvement in the socio-economic conditions of thousands of poor households. Besides, Sadguru has been instrumental in creating many NGOs and building their capacity

through training, and provision of technical and financial support. All those NGOs are also engaged in tribal development through judicious use and management of local land and water resources. Consequently, Sadguru directly through its own projects and indirectly through other NGOs has brought under the fold of micro watershed development nearly 300,000 hectares of the land. Sadguru itself has developed some 500 water resources development projects which are being managed by empowered village communities successfully.

Over the last 30 years or so, I have written large numbers of papers, notes and reports on various aspects of rural development and have attended several conferences and seminars on the subject in India and abroad as both a resource person as well as a participant. Whenever, I got some free time from my busy work schedule, I would write about my experiences, particularly, about the problems I encountered while doing my work and how those problems were resolved. Thus, over a time, I accumulated a lot of material pertaining to Sadguru's work and experience. I have drawn upon that material for writing this book.

The book has eight chapters, which together cover all important aspects of rural development, with the main focus on natural resource development and management. In this



**MY INITIATION AND INDUCTION IN RURAL
DEVELOPMENT**

1.1 Introduction

My interest in the regeneration and development of villages goes back to my childhood days, when I would visit my village for extended periods of time and stay with my grand parents and observe village life, and get the first hand knowledge of the problems, hopes and frustrations of my village folks. It was then that I made up my mind to do something to improve the lot of my village people, whenever I get an opportunity to do so. With the passage of time, this desire became a strong resolve on my part. My training in social work at M. S. University of Baroda further strengthened my resolve. This is how I got initiated in the field of rural development. In this chapter, I share some of my village experiences, and draw lessons from them that are useful for designing strategies for rural development. I begin with an overview of the current scenario of villages in India.

1.2 The Current Scenario of Villages in India

Since time immemorial, India has been, still continues to be, and will remain in foreseeable future, a land of villages. With more than 700 million of its people living in it's over 6,00,000 villages, no strategy of development can succeed in India that neglects rural areas and rural people (Singh, 1999:23).

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However, even after more than 50 years of development planning, India's villages continue to be poor and backward in terms of basic infrastructure, income levels, and employment opportunities. The incidence of both poverty and unemployment is higher in the rural sector than in the urban sector. For example, in 1999-2000, about 27 per cent of the rural population was below the Poverty Line as compared to about 24 per cent in urban areas (Table 1). In absolute terms, of the total population of about 268 million living below the Poverty Line in 2001 in the country, 205 million (74 %) were in the rural areas.

In Rural areas the incidence of poverty is the highest among agricultural and other labour, as high as 47 % and 29 % respectively in 1999-2000, followed by those self-employed in non-agriculture and self-employed in agriculture in that order. However, from the distribution of the total poor across different groups it is seen that the largest fraction of the poor in rural areas belongs to 'agricultural labour' followed by the 'self employed in agriculture' category. There has not been much change in the occupation-wise distribution of the poor in rural areas over the years. Similar is the case for urban areas (Parikh and Radhakrishna 2002: 74).

Table 1.1 - Population below the Poverty Line

(As per the Expert Group Methodology)

S. No.	Sector	73-74	77-78	1983	87-88	93-94	99-00
Population in Millions							
1.	Rural	261.3	264.3	252.0	231.9	244.0	193.2
2.	Urban	60.0	64.6	70.9	75.2	76.3	67.0
3.	Total	321.3	328.9	322.9	307.1	320.3	260.2
Poverty Ratio (%)							
1.	Rural	56.4	53.1	45.7	39.1	37.3	27.1
2.	Urban	49.0	45.2	40.8	38.2	32.4	23.6
3.	Total	54.9	51.3	44.5	38.9	36.0	26.1

Source: NIRD (2000), *Rural Development Statistics*, p. 101.

The incidence of poverty varies across household groups based on land ownership status and type of land owned. Around 50 % of the rural population belongs to the small farmer group and this group contributes the maximum to aggregate rural poverty-57.5 % of the total poor. Further, incidence of poverty is found to be the highest among small farmers and least among large farmers (Parikh and Radhakrishna 2002: 7).

In view of this, there is need for regeneration of rural life and economy if India is seriously interested in all-round sustainable and equitable development of its people. Duly recognizing this

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imperative of India's development, a clarion call was made by Mahatma Gandhi long back, urging people to go "back to the villages". This call needs to be revived, reinforced and translated into action voluntarily by people. This requires a fundamental change in the western paradigm of development which emphasizes urbanisation, industrialization, and globalisation. We need to adopt development strategy which may be based on our special situation at the same open for modern technology.

Barely 40-50 years back, the village was the centre of all economic and social activities for most of the Indians. Those who had to leave the village for jobs or any other activities would keep live contact with the village. Students would come back to the village to spend their full vacation and help their parents with farm chores and other activities. The marriages would be solemnized in the village. At the end of service life, virtually everyone would return to the village for the post-retirement period. Return of natives was the occasion which, entire village would relish.

Gradually but steadily everything changed in favour of urban life. Most of the educated villagers now leave their villages permanently to settle once for all in the urban centers. In the process, they would sell their agricultural land, and house in

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the village and buy a house in the city. All social events in such families are now celebrated in the urban centers and such people have hardly any live contact with their own villages, as villages have become unattractive and uncomfortable for them. Villages have to pay very heavy price for such permanent migration of best of their sons and daughters. It is a brain drain of serious nature in which the villages are deprived of the contribution of the best of their human resources. It is not that those who are left behind in the villages are not good. They are indeed very good people. But, an educated, versatile, articulate and enlightened leadership ceases to be available in the village due to the migration by its educated people. This loss is irreplaceable by any programme or money invested in the village by the Government. History of developed villages / communities is a history of right kind of leadership. If any village has the right kind of leadership available, it can progress well. One or two right kind of leaders can make a big difference.

1.3 Reminiscences of Some Major Events of my Village

My ancestral village Ekkalgarh is still a very small, rather tiny village. The total number of households are still less than 100. Situated on river Chambal, it is by all counts a beautiful village. But, sadly most of the villages in our country have lost their beauty and identity. They are no longer "beautiful" villages, as described in our novels and short stories of yester years.

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Ekkalgarh is among few villages, which has retained its typical rustic appearance, beauty and culture. It has all the elements that make a village beautiful. It has two rivers, Chambal and Kshipra. It has a great deal of tree cover. It is full of *nallas* (streams), which have water flowing for at least 8 months a year. A sizeable proportion of its land is grass land, which produces sufficient quantity of forage grasses for meeting the requirement of village animals fully. Though there is no forest land in the village, it is fully self-sufficient in its fuel wood and timber requirements due to sufficient tree cover.

This is a village which I love most among all the places on this earth. Two aspects of this village have always attracted me, River Chambal and the very loving people. Both have special place in my life. Till I reached the age of 35, I mainly stayed at Vadodara, where I got my education and also served for about 10 years as an Executive in the corporate sector company. While staying in Vadodara, which was a very beautiful city at that time, my attraction for my village was much more. In every summer and Diwali vacation, I would catch the first available train and go to my village. I used to spend about three months every year in the village. Most of my time during such vacation was spent swimming and playing in river Chambal with friends and cousins. We all youngsters used to swim in Chambal for about 5-6 hours every day. Entire village knew swimming and

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many of the people were very good swimmers. I became a good swimmer because of my time spent in the river Chambal due to which in my age group in Vadodara, I was considered one of the best swimmers, but, in my small village everyone else was better swimmer than me. Even the women in my village were good swimmers. I was first taught swimming by my grand mother, who threw me in river Chambal and took all the care that I was not drawn into the currents. I can say river Chambal is associated with the most pleasant memories of my childhood.

My river Chambal was among the cleanest rivers in India. One could use its water as a mirror and even comb one's hair looking at the reflection in the water. It was that clean. Sadly, part of Chambal is now polluted, particularly, after Kota, thanks to Indian type of industrial development. The portion of river near my village is still very clean, except, occasionally when its water gets polluted due to what local people describe as "Birla Water" (Birla ka pani). A plant owned by the Birla's Gwalior Rayon Company (GRASIM) situated at Nagda on the bank of river Chambal discharges a huge quantity of effluents water periodically in the river. The river remains polluted for a few days. During one of my visits to the village recently, I saw red water in the entire river. It shocked me. I asked the villagers as to why the colour of water had changed. They told me that

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it was due the “Birla water “discharged into the river. The Birlas being such a big industrial and influential house in India, who can punish them for polluting such a beautiful river? Certainly not the villagers. Perhaps no one. India is perhaps the only country in the world where people indulging in polluting air and water go scot-free, especially if they are big names or if they are big companies or if they are in the organized sector, like some trade or industry, which enjoys political patronage and clout. Such people have done a mockery of our pollution control laws and in the process played havoc with the environment in general and lives of people and animals in particular. It is a sad commentary that in India politically and financially powerful people are rarely punished for the crimes that they perpetrate. Occasionally, Supreme Court’s interventions create some ripples in the society, but, ultimately, everything settles down and things remain unchanged. In Western or Northern countries, the Government would win or lose the elections on pollution and environmental issues. In this country, perhaps polluting agencies are so powerful that they can think of destabilising the Government and in most cases afford to flout the environment laws. Every time any industry(s) is given notice for the closure on pollution ground, the industry(s) would defend on employment ground and our trade unions would also support the industry(s). Everyone tends to ignore that for every 1,000 people in employment in such industries, five times more people

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are affected by the polluting industry. But, who cares in our type of democracy? It is only when Supreme Court comes out heavily that the industry and the government wake up and do something, mostly as eyewash measure, rather than any permanent one. Our industries, metropolis, urban centres have been converting our rivers into gutter systems. The whole nation is observing this as spectators. When Draupadi was being stripped off in presence of a group of great people of that time, everyone was like mere spectators. We call our rivers our mother even now, and when they are being polluted, we as a nation remain helpless like spectators, not interested in defending / saving our mother.

Historically, my village has many events that make it distinct and proud. My ancestors belonged to Marward; a desert region of Rajasthan and came to the Malwa region with Rathors and fought in the famous battle of Fatiabad. It was a battle between Dara Shikoh and his brother Aurangzeb, the Muslim Emperor. Some of the Rajput kings supported Dara Shikoh. My ancestors were part of those Rajput armies which took side of Dara Shikoh against Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb won that crucial battle, though Rajput armies supporting Dara fought bravely. History has described this battle as very brave fight by Rajput armies. Rathors and my ancestors shed their blood together in that fierce battle. Some of the ancestors who survived settled in

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this village. Ekkalgarh, which was then under the princely state of Sitamau, ruled by the Rathors.

In 1965, when I had applied for a post of Personnel Manager in a big public sector Company in Bhopal, I got a letter of recommendation from a famous historian and a great personality in literature, Dr. Raghueersinhji of Sitamau. He wrote in his recommendation letter that "his ancestors and my ancestors had fought together and shed blood together in the famous battle of Fatiabad".

Though Rathors and my ancestors fought together at Fatiabad, my ancestors thereafter served in the court of Sitamau State. There is one memorable incidence of that time, reflecting the self respect and dignity of my real great grand father. My great grand father, Sheradanji, was very favourite of the Maharaja, Shardulsinhji of Sitamau. When Shardulsinhji's adopted son, Ramsinhji, succeeded him, things were not the same for my great grand father. Sheradanji grew old and was unable to attend the darbar (court) of Ramsinhji on regular basis, as it was difficult for him to walk up and down the steep hilly path to Sitamau Darbar Hall from his Haveli (house). Some disgruntled elements close to the Darbar Ramsinhji indulged in the act of backbiting against Sheradanji. Consequently, Darbar Ramsinhji got prejudiced against my great grand father and objected to

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his not attending the court on regular basis and expressed his displeasure publicly. Hurt with this humiliation, Sheradanji left Sitamau State, opting for self exile and settled in Jhalawar at the request of the sister of Ramsinhji. Sheradanji was so much hurt with the attitude of Ramsinhji that, while leaving the Sitamau State, he said he would never utter the name of God Ram and would rather remember Him by some other name. Whenever he used to talk about Ramsinhji, he would use the phrase "Sitapati Raja" rather than his name. Sheradanji never returned to his loving village Ekkalgarh and died in Jhalawar at a very old age. By sheer coincidence, as if to repay the debt of Jhalawar region for giving refuge to my great grand father, my organization took up development works in Jhalawar regions in recent years.

There are other episodes reflecting strong character of my ancestors. Sheradanji had two other brothers, one elder and another younger. On the issue of land division, three brothers filed a court case against each other. All the three brothers used to go together to the court. One day when the court was adjourned for a day, the judge saw that the youngest brother was helping his elder brother in putting on his shoes and the middle brother was similarly helping his elder brother. In those days, shoes had to be put off and kept outside the court room. On seeing this touching scene, the judge called all the three

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brothers and told them that after having seen such a high respect for each other, he would not like to conduct this case. All the three brothers had tears in their eyes and the dispute was settled once for all, each brother offering more land to other than what was earlier decided.

Bravery ran through the village across the caste lines. In every generation, there were villagers, who demonstrated their courage and strength fighting over successfully with tigers and panthers - 40 years back, tigers and panthers used to be seen very often in the deep ravines of Chambal in my village.

My village is situated in a region where *Kanjars*, a ferocious criminal community, posed a threat to the life and property of the villagers. Taking advantage of rivers, Chambal and Kshipra, and inter- state borders, the Kanjars would indulge into loot and burglaries in some village located on one side of the river and cross the river and borders to go to the other side safely. It was the biggest menace in the area. However, no Kanjar gang has ever dared to touch my village, knowing it fully that entering this village would be a losing proposition and they would be at the receiving end.

However, the beauty and bravery of my village has not helped in making it rich. It has been a poor village and it is still a poor

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village. Amidst this poverty, what is astonishing, however, is the relatively high education level in the village. Such a small and tiny village has produced some 40 graduates and post-graduates over the last 30 years. In general, the overall literacy rate is more than 75 percent as compared to the state average of about 27 percent (census 1991) for rural population. This is an exceptionally high level of education, particularly, when seen against the poverty, remoteness, and non-existence of even an elementary level primary school till 1975. My father was the first graduate in the entire rural area of the region followed by three other graduates from my village 60 years ago. To produce four graduates in the most remote and tiny village in those days was no mean an achievement. Thereafter, with a great deal of struggle, other villagers reached the matriculation and even graduation level. Two teachers from the village played the key motivating role in spreading education in my village. In those days, the nearest primary school was 6 kms away from my village. No motor transportation was available, not even a bicycle was available in my village. Going to the nearby school at Deepakheda was a difficult journey for five-six year old children; Parents were hesitant in sending their children to the school as it involved walking through the forests and hills full of thorns and wild animals. The two teachers promised the parents that they would see that their children did not have to walk all the distance on foot. To make this possible, both the teachers

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together would carry four children perched on their shoulders at a time in rotation. After attaining the age of seven years or so, children would walk through the distance on their own and new batch of toddlers would take their place on the shoulders of the teachers. The village owes to these teachers the credit for its educational achievements. Those were the days when teachers were ideal teachers and not the commercial entity as most of them are today.

So much was the poverty that the parents were not in a position to afford to send their children for higher education. Most of the graduates and post -graduates of my village were doing part time jobs and managing to earn while pursuing their higher education. Many of them did their graduation and post-graduation, while working full time, as they had to earn enough to defray their expenses as also to look after their parents. The higher (external) education system prevailed in that era made this possible.

The village has produced quite a few police officers and good teachers over the last 50 years or so. Few of them were exemplary policemen and teachers. My uncle, R. P. Singh, after his retirement as Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), came back to the village and spent his post-retirement period of nearly 25 years in the village. So simple and modest was

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this one time police officer that after his retirement, he used to bring head loads of fodder and fuel wood every day from a distance of more than two kilometers. He himself would tend his cows and buffaloes and would take them for grazing and bring water for both his family and the animals on his head every day. An outright honest police officer as he was, he used to tell me with pride that while many of his police officer colleagues died immediately after the retirement, without enjoying the wealth that they had accumulated through corrupt means, he enjoyed his pension for such a long period. This was his way of enjoying his honesty. I wonder, how many police officers after their retirement would return to a tiny village? We know, most of them would settle in a city of their choice, where they might have bought not one, but, perhaps 2-3 bungalows from the wealth accumulated by them. How many of them would bring fodder, fuel wood and drinking water on their head? R.P. Singh was not only in love with his village, but, he really loved and practiced the real rural life style. Leave aside cars and bungalows, this police officer did not buy even a motor cycle during his entire active service period and after retirement. In a contrast now-a-days, even a constable has a motor cycle of his own and many Sub Inspectors of Police have cars.

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This small tiny village has so many incidents and stories to share with the society and they all have good lessons. I would like to share with the readers one such story, depicting a strong social bond and exemplary responsibility displayed by brothers towards their sister. The incident took place in my village about 55 years ago, of which I am a witness. It relates to my grand aunt. My grand aunt became widow at a young age of about 25 years. Her husband, my grand uncle, who was a police officer in Jhalawar state, was killed in an encounter with the criminals near Gangdhar-Chaumahela. He single-handedly challenged a large number of criminals and lost his life, as he was out numbered by the criminals. In those days in Jhalawar state, police officers were neither provided with rifles nor revolvers. The only weapon they had was a sword. He left behind one young widow, two sons of 5 and 2 years age and the third one in the widow's womb. In a feudal and orthodox society, a young widow would face many ordeals, with other nearest relatives often staying outside the village. My grand aunt had three brothers, Ramkaranji, Shivji and Shaktidanji, staying at a place nearly 300 kilometers away from my village. In those days, when there were no transportation facilities, this was a distance difficult and time-consuming to travel. In order to support their widow sister in domestic and agriculture work, each brother fixed a rotation to stay with her continuously for six months and one brother would leave his sister only when

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he was relieved by the other. This relay race type arrangement continued uninterrupted for over 20 years, till all the three sons of the widow grew up fully. My grand aunt died a few years back. But, this story of three brothers' affection and concern for their widow sister is still fondly talked about in my village and nearby villages. Perhaps, such things can happen only in rural India. Certainly not in Delhi, Mumbai or Kolkata.

There is one more significant historical incident that is associated with my village. Thakur Jorawar Singh had a death warrant on him as one of the revolutionaries involved in a bomb attack on Lord Harding, the British Viceroy. Thakur Jorawar Singh could not be arrested by Britishers and was given asylum and full protection for 18 years in my village by the village community. Everyone knew his history, and yet, no one leaked out the information about his asylum in the village. A great unity combined with patriotism was displayed by the entire village community. In those days when Britishers were letting loose the hell on people giving asylum to the revolutionary freedom fighters, this was a courageous act on the part of the entire village community.

When Virendra Kumar Saklecha was Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, he laid the foundation stone for erecting a statue of Thakur Joravar Singh in my village. But thereafter, the

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government forgot that it had laid a foundation stone for the statue. This is but an example of a common phenomenon in our country, where foundation stones remain as foundation stones without installation of the intended structure. In a state like Madhya Pradesh, there are jokes on such foundation stones forgotten by the rulers.

An Unpleasant Incident

Though most of my memories associated with my village have been pleasant, there is one unpleasant, rather painful memory, which I have not forgotten over the last 30 years or so since it happened. My village has a sizeable Scheduled Caste (SC) population. These people have been very loyal, obedient, hard working and brave throughout. Many of them have displayed courage and bravery at par with any martial community. They are both likeable and lovable people among my village community. I have never seen or heard cases of prejudice or caste conflict in my village. Naniya Dada (in that region any elderly person is called Dada i.e. elder brother irrespective of caste hierarchy) was elderly SC person, who was highly respected by all and everyone in the village. Naniya Dada was a straight forward, God fearing, hard working person. He and his wife were the only persons in the village who used to attend both morning and evening prayers (Aarti) in the small

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village temple everyday without fail. Whenever I visited my village, I would attend the prayer (Arti) in the evening and would have very pleasant chat with the elderly couple, whom I also respected very much. In 1970, when I was staying in Vadodara, I received a sad news that Naniya Dada and his family had been mercilessly beaten up by two Thakur boys on some petty dispute. Being a self respecting person, Naniya Dada left the village along with his family after that incident forever and settled in a nearby village. I was terribly shocked after having heard that news and wrote to my village that it was the most shameful incident and that beating of such a pious person like Naniya Dada was something that I would never tolerate and that those who had beaten him would be punished by the Almighty God. It so happened that within a short period of time both the Thakur boys who had beaten up Naniya Dada died prematurely in their young age. One of these Thakur boys was my close cousin and another was a distant cousin. Every time thereafter when I visit my village, I remind the villagers that what was done to Naniya Dada was a kind of sin committed against the most pious Harijan couple. I have always held the view that no one should invite the curse of poor. Time and again, we have seen that those doing injustice to the poor and innocent are punished by the God in this life itself. God does not wait for court's decisions, nor does He rely on such worldly justice when it comes to the poor and innocent. This, of course, does not

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mean that everyone doing injustice to the poor is invariably punished by the God, though one would like the God to punish the culprit in each case. May be because He is overburdened these days with such cases, God allows some culprits to escape his wrath. One of the sons of Naniya Dada has returned to the village and one of his grandsons after doing his post-graduation, is a lecturer in a college in the district town, Mandsaur. Naniya Dada's family comprising the rest of his sons and grandsons, though staying in the other village, are still maintaining contacts with my village and my village people still respect that family very much even after the death of the old couple. I know, it would be difficult even for this second and third generation of Naniya Dada's family to forget that incident. When I have not forgotten it, how that family could forget it? Whenever I would visit my village, I would invariably attend the evening prayer in the temple and every time I offer my prayer in that temple, I would see the faces of Naniya Dada and his wife in the idols installed in the temple.

1.4 Lessons from my Village Experiences

I would like to draw the following two major lessons from my experience and observations in my village.

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1.4.1 Water as a Catalyst of Rural Development

The poverty of my village could be attributed to the non-utilization of its natural resources. This village has such a good river as Chambal, and yet, it was not having enough irrigation. Some 30 years back, in 1968, village people thought of putting up a lift irrigation scheme on river Chambal. A teacher from our village, Maniraj Singh, my cousin, took the lead in this direction. He approached the Madhya Pradesh (MP) Lift Irrigation Corporation, a body which was assigned the responsibility of expansion of lift irrigation in Madhya Pradesh. The officers of above corporation responded positively to the proposal for introducing a lift irrigation scheme in Ekkalgarh and got the lift irrigation cooperative for the village duly registered under the Cooperative Act in 1970. At this stage, village ran into bad luck. The M.P. Lift Irrigation Corporation, after having made a mess in its operations, went into liquidation. Consequently, the hope of a having a lift irrigation project in Ekkalgarh waned. Maniraj and few others in the village made a lot of efforts, but it was all in vain. Villagers waited for nearly 25 years in the hope of having lift irrigation scheme. During that long awaiting period extending over almost one full generation, lot of things happened. The leader, Maniraj died prematurely. The villagers lost hope in the scheme as well as in the Government.

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Incidentally, by that time, my own organization had developed expertise in lift irrigation and had also put up a few projects in Jhabua, MP. While working in Jhabua, I realized that my own village was also waiting for such a scheme for a long. Having built up acquaintances with some Collectors and some senior officers of Madhya Pradesh, I tried to use their good offices in getting the government clearance and support for putting up a lift irrigation scheme in my village. Though the officers were very sincere in their desire to help, nothing happened, as the Irrigation Department had objected to the proposal on some grounds. Also, local politics came in way as political leaders of a particular party were more interested in having a lift irrigation project in other villages on river Chambal. Having failed in obtaining the approval and financial support from the state, I approached CAPART, Government of India, with whom we had developed good relationship as a result of successfully implementing in Gujarat several projects with CAPART support. The CAPART favourably considered the project of setting up a L. I. Scheme in village Ekkalgarh, which was duly implemented in 1994-95. The scheme is being managed by the community ever since.

Though the village got a lift irrigation scheme, the sad part of the story is that Maniraj who had initiated the efforts for the lift irrigation scheme and my uncle, R. P. Singh, who ultimately

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motivated me to undertake the scheme, did not live long enough to see the scheme installed in the village. Every time I visit the village and see the L. I. Scheme, I remember them and wish they had been alive to see their dream materialized.

The morale of the story is that when such development project is delayed for 25 years, i.e. for one generation, what does it cost to people? The village communities have been deprived of additional earning of crores of Rupees in 25 years. The mental anguish that the community has undergone during 25 years in their struggle to have lift irrigation scheme and in the process of old people passed away, young became old and entire community lost hope in the development, are the painful reminders to the Government and the development machineries as to what happens when the development is denied for one whole generation.

But, Ekkalgarh is not an isolated example in the development process in this country. There are perhaps thousands of such villages who have the same story as that of Ekkalgarh. In a kind of situation that we find in our country, all such villages would be lucky if they get their development dreams materialized even after awaiting 25 years.

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Though ultimately after 25 years Ekkalgarh got the lift irrigation scheme, but, who will compensate the villagers for the lost that they had to bear over 25 years. Can the Government and other agencies prevent such deprivation in other villages of this country ?

1.4.2 Wasteland Development for Rural Development

I also realized that substantial potential for development existed in the wasteland lands in my village, Ekkalgarh. The village had more than 200 hectare of wasteland. The valley lands and ravine lands were very rich and fertile. Plantation of trees on such land could do wonders, I thought. In my opinion, if those wastelands, particularly those in the valley and ravines, were planted with suitable tree species, this village could generate additional income of at least Rs. one crore per year, enhancing the income of each of the 100 households in the village, on an average by Rs. 1,00,000 per year. I am happy that the villagers now have become aware of this potential and some of them have already started planting trees on their wasteland. The others will follow them soon, I hope. Planning is being done to cover entire wastelands with tree cover under the watershed approach.

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The development activities taken up in my village have influenced the nearby villages including the villages on the opposite bank of Chambal in Jhalawar district. A lot of demand has started coming to my organization for the similar development in those villages. The political leadership, cutting across the party lines, has shown keen interest in such development-oriented activities.

1.5 My Entry into Rural Development Field and Initial Experiences

With my village background, described earlier in this chapter and my intensive training and exposure in the Rural Development field during my post- graduation studies at the MS University of Baroda, gave me enough motivation to get into the field of Rural Development and do something good for rural people, particularly the poor, as soon as an opportunity comes my way. However, such an opportunity came very late because in those days, there were few, if any, opportunities for trained social workers to join Rural Development nor were there many NGOs engaged in Rural Development, who would offer jobs to trained social workers with post-graduate qualifications. There were few Gandhian NGOs, but most of them were not keen to employ qualified professionals.

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The first such opportunity to work in rural field came in 1972 with my appointment as a lecturer in a training Institute with the approval of Morarjibhai Desai, who was then Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister of India. I had made it very clear to everyone including to Morarjibhai Desai that it would be a stop -gap arrangement till I get an opportunity to work in the field of rural development.

To my surprise and my good luck, that opportunity came much earlier than expected. Shri Sadguru Seva Sangh Trust (SSST), a charity organization of Mafatlal group, organised a massive free eye camp for cataract operations in Dahod in January 1974. Both myself and my wife offered our voluntary services in that camp, lasting nearly three weeks. I was given an assignment of transportation of patients and their attendants. Nearly 20,000 people were to be brought from far away places including nearby districts of Rajasthan and M.P. and the same number of people were to be sent back to their homes. It was a massive operation. It seems to me in retrospect that Mr. Arvind Mafatlal, Chairman of Sadguru Seva Sangh and also few Directors of Mafatlal Group, who were present during the entire camp period, were happy with my work. On the concluding day of the camp, Mr. Arvind Mafatlal and a few of his close associates invited me and my wife to meet them. Without asking anything else, he said that they were looking for workers like us to join

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their organization for rural development projects. Sadguru Seva Sangh Trust (SSST) had several rural development projects at that time, spread over in states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. It was a God sent opportunity that I was waiting for long. Both sides put one major condition each. Mr. Arvind Mafatlal wanted an assurance from me that I would work lifetime, at least for 20 years in their rural development project. My condition was that I would like to work in the tribal regions around Dahod. This condition required them to start a new project around Dahod. Mr. Arvind Mafatlal agreed to my condition as he found the area deserving such a project. Thus, a deal was struck. I was appointed Chief Executive Officer of Dahod project of SSST and started working on honorary basis from January 1974 and on full time basis from 1975. My wife, who already had a job was working in the same region, joined SSST a little late in the year 1977. The rest of the history is unfolded in the subsequent chapters.

In between, in a curious turn of event, the Mafatlals group was divided in three separate sub-groups in 1978 and so were their rural development projects. Each company was assigned different rural development projects. Our project in Dahod was assigned to the Standard Mills, and therefore, it went to Mr. Rashesh Mafatlal, the youngest of three Mafatlal brothers.

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After the above division, we continued working under the banner of SSST, which actually went to Mr. Arvind Mafatlal. Due to legal and administrative problems, a separate organization in the name of Sadguru Water and Development Foundation was established and since early 1986 we have been working under this new name but with the same management at the project level. In the beginning for about four years, united Mafatlal Group supported our activities in Dahod and thereafter from 1978 the Standard Industries headed by Mr. Rashesh Mafatlal supported the project. The support continued till 1997-98. The level of financial support was not of a very high order, though. It ranged between Rs. 5-10 lakh per year for nearly 25 years. Though the money provided was a small amount relative to our budget, particularly in the last few years, it was crucial for the survival and growth of the organisation. The managerial expenses for several years were met from the contribution of support of the Mafatlals. This provided a great deal of security to the organization and paved a way for further progress through raising of funds from various other sources. Both myself and my wife were on the pay-roll of Mafatlals Company and this arrangement continued up to the year 2000. This arrangement gave me a feeling that whenever I was raising funds, I was not asking for my survival. I know, many of senior officers of BAIF were also supported by Mafatlals in this manner. This reminded me of our freedom struggle period when quite a few of India's

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prominent industrialists took upon themselves the responsibility of meeting the basic financial needs of our prominent leaders.

Working with the Mafatlals, Mr. Arvind Mafatlal and Mr. Rashesh Mafatlal was a real learning experience. Though both these brothers had different management styles, both were sincere and committed to promote the cause of the rural poor. Both allowed total freedom to me to manage the project. I don't remember a single incident when anyone of them had imposed their decision on me on any matter or at any time they rejected my suggestions on any matter. Most of my years with the Mafatlals were with Mr. Rashesh Mafatlal. Since 1978 till today we have been associated with Mr. Rashesh Mafatlal. Mr. Rashesh Mafatlal has his own style of management. He reads every word of every document that we send to him. For the Board meetings also, he would read each and every word of agenda papers and other documents before the meeting and come well prepared with his comments or questions, if any. At the outset of every Board meeting, he would make an opening remark that he presumed that the trustees must have read all the papers and then would invite them to make any comments or ask any questions. Due to this style, our Board meetings have been brief but effective. I learnt from people that this was his style in conducting the Board meetings of his corporate group also. Thorough preparation for meetings, quick and brief

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proceedings and immediate decision making are the hallmarks of his management style. These people do not believe in lengthy proposals and lengthy discussions. They understand the topic quickly and take instant decisions. Absolutely no delay in taking any decision. Many organizations in this country need to learn from this style of corporate governance and management.

In the last 12 years, Sadguru has expanded its activities manifold. Mr. Rashesh Mafatlal as Chairman of our Board never put any hurdles in our expansion programmes. Sometimes the expansion planned was on a large scale, at a scale not achieved in the past. Mr. Rashesh Mafatlal would never raise any question or doubt about the feasibility of such proposed expansions. He would simply caution me by telling, "Harnath, if you are confident, go ahead, but take care that you are not in difficulty". Occasionally his advice would be to be very careful on our integrity as he would always insist that the image of the organization should not be tarnished.

There have been occasions when Mr. Rashesh Mafatlal continued to support Sadguru despite very difficult financial position of his company. I would like to narrate one such instance here. In 1982 there was a prolonged strike by textile mills workers in Mumbai under the leadership of Dutta Samant. The textile plants were closed for a long period of time and

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there was no production. The companies were incurring heavy losses in the establishment and overhead costs without manufacturing anything in that situation. Under the circumstances, a few Board members of the company questioned as to why rural development project was being supported under that situation. But, Mr. Rashesh Mafatlal and a few others took a stand that when huge losses were to be absorbed, Rs. 5-10 lakhs of additional losses in a year would not make much of a difference. It is indeed a rare example of a business house thinking that way. One more instance. In 1984 under some difficult financial situation faced by the company, I was conveyed that the financial support from the company would be stopped and that the company would absorb me and my wife in the company on the closure of the project. I explained to them that I had left the corporate company once for all long back and that I was not going to join the company. I would continue this project irrespective of the assistance or no assistance from the Mafatlals. This stand of mine touched them so much that inspite of difficulties they continued their support for many more years.

I remember when our project was transferred to Mr. Rashesh Mafatlal, many people in Mafatlal House warned me that Mr. Rasheshbhai was not much interested in rural development and that I should be prepared for the withdrawal of his support.

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They have been proved wrong as Mr. Rasheshbhai has continuously supported this organization since 1978 onwards. Even when his company stopped giving financial assistance from 1998, Mr. Rasheshbhai has managed to get us handsome donations from his sources and contacts. Over a period of three years beginning 2000, he helped me in getting corpus funds of more than Rs. One crore from various sources.

What I learned from the Mafatlals is that once they have faith and confidence in a person, they support him / her fully without questioning, virtually on any issue. In my position as Chief Executive of Sadguru, I have tried to put the same faith and confidence in my colleagues and gave them full freedom to operate.

1.6 Concluding Remarks

I would conclude this chapter with a sentimental statement that despite all its discomforts, dirt and dust, my village is the best place for me on this earth and people of my village are very near and dear to me. Like any other village people, they may be quarrelling among them, they may have many serious problems, they may have many differences among themselves, but, they all unanimously love me and I also love them. In that

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most uncomfortable place with no amenities whatsoever, I feel most comfortable.

If all Indians who subscribe to my views and values, come together, pool their resources, talents, and energies, organise themselves in some formal manner and try through advocacy and lobbying, to reorient anti-rural development policies and programmes in favour of rural people, then there is some hope of realizing the dream of the Father of Nation, Mahatma Gandhi. Otherwise, our people will continue to live in two distinct nations - one large (80 %) traditional poor backward Bharat and one small (20 %) modern developed westernized India. There is an urgent need to integrate the two nations through a shift in our paradigm of development.

We now know if for no other reason but the Asian development bank's recent culture that social change requires champions. As Jagawat says "In 1981, the then Secretary, Rural Development, Gujarat, Mr. Anil Shah, visited a couple of lift irrigation schemes. I still vividly remember that when Mr. Anil Shah visited the district, I had to persuade him greatly to visit the lift irrigation schemes also, because, he thought he had seen many lift irrigation schemes, and therefore, there was no need for him to see more of such schemes. Ultimately, he agreed to visit the schemes and as usual, he interacted with the farmers very

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intensely. He found the schemes were very beneficial to the farmers. From that day onward, Mr. Anil Shah became one of Sadguru's great supporters. On his return to the state capital, Gandhinagar, he talked to the then Finance Minister, Mr. Sanat Mehta, about Sadguru's lift irrigations schemes and the need to expand the programme. The Finance Minister wrote a special letter to our organization to undertake 100 more such lift irrigation projects in the district, assuring the availability of necessary funds." He has many interesting vignettes in this book.

He makes the point that in this country when we face a problem, instead of solving it, we try to develop a new structure preferring over the earlier failure. "Is it because they do not want to own the responsibility for the failure of their schemes ? Or is it because by winding up the old schemes, the question of inquiring into the causes of the failure of past schemes is automatically eliminated? Or, is it because the ruling party finds it more convenient to replace the scheme than revamping the ongoing one and telling people: "look, old schemes of the previous Government were not good and that is why we instead of improving the ongoing programme are now giving you a new and better scheme".

There are many hours of glory for him and he describes them affectionately. Of Somabhai, "Whereas he earned a handsome amount from the nursery, other farmers in the village were

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suffering from the adverse effects of a drought, particularly, due to the acute fodder shortage. He decided to give water from his well to the nearby farmers and provided irrigation to ten acres of the land of twenty farmers almost free of cost by charging only the actual diesel cost", and of the farmers Hirjibhai and Nurjibhai he started with who still brings for him the first harvest of maize cobs. Jagawat makes light of some consultants who want their coffee are always complaining and have nothing to contribute and keep on blaming other people and sometimes institutions which behave in an odd way because of bureaucratic compulsions.

All in all, the delightful book to be read both for pleasure and profit. I consider it a great privilege to recommend it to the development community.

Yoginder Alagh